

Historein

Vol 15, No 1 (2015)

Revisiting Democratic Transitions in Times of Crisis



Back to the revolution: The 1974 Portuguese spring and its "austere anniversary"

Guya Accornero

doi: [10.12681/historein.275](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.275)

Copyright © 2015, Guya Accornero



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Accornero, G. (2015). Back to the revolution: The 1974 Portuguese spring and its "austere anniversary". *Historein*, 15(1), 32–48. <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.275>

*Back to the
revolution: the 1974
Portuguese spring
and its ‘austere
anniversary’*

Guya Accornero

University Institute of Lisbon

On 25 April 1974 the Portuguese New State was overthrown in a peaceful military coup led by permanent military officers. These officers had previously set up the Movement of the Captains, initially for professional reasons; thereafter, they established the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), which was clearly politicised and espoused the belief that the colonial war would only end with the demise of the existing regime. On the night of 24–25 April, various military units took over strategic positions in Lisbon and, hours later, in Oporto and other cities. The regime fell after a day of mobilisation, negotiations and some incidents. The prime minister, Marcelo Caetano, handed over power to General António de Spínola at the Carmo headquarters of the National Republican Guard.¹ On 26 April the creation of the National Salvation Junta (JSN) was announced, chaired by Spínola. A decree law was promulgated that dismissed the former government, dissolved the national assembly, the political police PIDE/DGS,² the Portuguese Legion³ and the Portuguese Youth, the organs of censorship and the single party, National Popular Action, and removed President Américo Tomás. At the same time, an amnesty for all political crimes was approved, and approximately 130 political prisoners who were held in Peniche and Caxias were released.

The impact of the coup transcended national borders in a world divided by the Cold War and deeply shaken by the recent oil crisis. Those who rushed to establish a parallel between events in Portugal and Chile a year earlier were quickly proved wrong. Against all predictions and models of military interventions in processes of transition and political change, the April Captains presented a democratising programme that included the establishment of a civilian government and free

elections. After more than a decade of war on various fronts in Africa, the military unexpectedly initiated a process of decolonisation that quickly culminated in the granting of independence to the former colonial peoples. This singular event took the scholarly community by surprise, who then faced the difficult task of integrating the Portuguese case into the analysis of transitional politics frameworks.⁴

The MFA stated that its aim was not to take power but rather to guarantee that elections would be held within a reasonable timeframe. For various reasons, however, this did not happen. Spínola had his own political project, as laid out in his book *Portugal e o Futuro* (Portugal and the future) and in his stance during the discussion of the MFA's programme. His project became clear during his first public speeches: he wanted the establishment of a presidential regime, a gradual transition undertaken in a climate of social order and discipline, and a federative referendum-style solution to the colonial issue. These proposals clearly contradicted the MFA programme, which called for elections to a constituent assembly within a year and, above all, "the right of peoples to self-determination". Thus, the Captains abandoned their initial aim of handing over power after the toppling of the regime. The first clashes between the MFA and Spínola became fertile ground for the gradual transformation of the MFA into a political actor in the new political order.⁵

The first provisional government (May–July 1974) still reflected the strong influence of Spínola and his project to rapidly extinguish the MFA. But in the second provisional government the military was predominant over civilian elements, and reflected the MFA's growing influence. The JSN itself was strongly influenced by the MFA, particularly through Colonel Vasco Gonçalves, who was close to the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and who was prime minister between the second and the fifth provisional governments (from 12 July 1974 to 19 September 1975). Gonçalves was responsible for the adoption of key social measures in this transition period, including agrarian reform, the nationalisation of key private enterprises (banks, insurance companies, public transport and steelworks, among others); the introduction of a minimum wage for civil servants and, through decree law 169-D/75 of 31 March, the introduction of unemployment benefit. The tutelage of the MFA was also developed through other institutions: first, the Commission for Programme Coordination established before the coup; then, the Council of the Twenty; next, the MFA assemblies; and finally, the Revolution Council. The latter was only dissolved in 1982, which is why some scholars argued that the end of the transition and democratic consolidation was only achieved that year.⁶

The MFA was not internally united and uniform: there were strong divergent currents from the outset because of the influence of different parties and political groups. The current that surrounded Gonçalves was close to the PCP and had the greatest institutional influence, since the colonel was the prime minister in most of the provisional governments between July 1974 and September 1975.

Despite these conflicts within the MFA and between the movements and outside forces, the JSN managed to guide the country through the constituent assembly elections on 25 April 1975, as promised. These were the first free elections on the basis of universal suffrage ever held in Portugal and were won, with 37.87% of the votes, by the Socialist Party (PS), followed by the Popular Democratic Party (PPD),⁷ with 26.39% and the PCP, which obtained 12.46%. Ana Mónica Fonseca states that, despite the diversity represented in the parties involved in the development of the constitution, "there was a common element, which was the revolutionary spirit, reflected in resorting to left-wing lan-

guage appealing to Socialism ... that was transversal to all proposals" and also that "the inevitable branding of the constitutional projects resided precisely in the resort to symbols and elements of the political agenda that had become property of the most unexpected parties, such as the PPD or the CDS".⁸ After these elections and the formation of the constituent assembly on 2 June 1975, the most convulsive period of the Portuguese transition began, the so-called "hot summer". The Gonçalvist current played a leading role during these turbulent months, while attempting to marginalise and institutionalise the social conflicts and the open clashes between the extreme left and right political wings. However, Gonçalves was criticised by moderate forces, such as the PS and the PPD, which accused him of wanting to institute a socialist regime; and by radical forces, which accused him of not being revolutionary "enough". Another faction of the MFA was closer to the PS, and a third faction identified primarily with Colonel Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, who was connected with the extreme leftwing, mainly radical third-worldist, scene and committed to defending the "popular power".

The Gonçalvist programme succumbed to the extreme left and the moderate opposition within the MFA. In September 1975, the fifth provisional government fell and the rather more moderate sixth provisional government was formed, without Gonçalves and the Gonçalvistas. On 25 November, an attempted military coup by officers close to the extreme left created a pretext for a countercoup by moderates, which put an end to social agitation and to the Gonçalvist period.⁹ Finally, on 25 April 1976, Portugal held its first ever general elections with universal suffrage, in which the PS gained the majority of the votes, followed by the centre-right (PPD and CDS) and, in fourth place, the PCP.

A coup d'état which became a revolution

As is well known, the 25 April 1974 coup was immediately followed by broad political and popular mobilisation, in which all political and social forces expressed the various positions that had been evolving in the final years of the New State regime. This turbulent period in contemporary Portuguese history, which was referred to as the Revolutionary Process Underway (PREC), was marked by intense conflict between opposing political forces (mainly the extreme left, the extreme right and the conservatives), attempted coups and countercoups, massive social mobilisation and the occupation of land and factories.¹⁰

Some authors have stressed that the political crisis after the fall of regime was the fundamental cause of this exceptional mobilisation.¹¹ Other studies consider that the prerevolutionary cycle of protest, which began in 1969, and the increasing division of the elites, also explain the particular characteristics of the Portuguese transition.¹² In any case, different social scientists agree that the PREC was one of the periods that witnessed the most intense mobilisation in postwar Europe.¹³ Moreover, as various analysis have underlined, this social unrest was a key factor in corroborating the rupture dimension of the Portuguese transition, by pressing institutional forces – such as the MFA or the provisional governments – to adopt more radical measures.¹⁴

Considering this reality, the strong social mobilisation played a crucial role in contributing as much to a major break with the authoritarian past – the rapid dissolution of authoritarian institutions, purges and

political trials – as to the implementation of important social reforms. Thus, as stressed by political scientist António Costa Pinto, “it is the nature (collapse) of the authoritarian regime’s downfall and the character of the ‘anti-authoritarian’ coalition during the first provisional governments that provoked a symbolic break with the past”¹⁵ and “the state crisis constituted an important ‘window of opportunity’ for the Portuguese type of transitional justice ... In the Portuguese case, specifically in public and private companies, the purges were transformed into a facet of the social movements’ radicalisation.”¹⁶

In this light, “the ‘revolutionary period’ of 1974–75 was the most complex phase of the transition” in which “it is still unclear what kind of regime is to be established”.¹⁷ This perspective of the transition processes as periods in which the political results are uncertain is shared by Leonardo Morlino, who considers that transitions are “a fluid and uncertain period in which democratic structures are emerging”.¹⁸ From a rather less deterministic perspective, Michel Dobry prefers the concept of “political crisis”¹⁹ instead of “transition”, which is an interpretative instrument brilliantly applied by Diego Palacios Cereales in his analysis of the Portuguese revolutionary period.²⁰ All these studies help us understand the very specific case of regime change which was the Portuguese transition: a coup d’état which became a revolution.

The ‘austere anniversary’ of the Portuguese spring

The revolutionary experience introduced a set of social reforms which have proved an invaluable heritage for Portuguese democracy in terms of social and political rights. Fundamental social measures, such as the minimum wage for civil servants and the introduction of unemployment benefit, were adopted during the so-called “hot summer” of 1975, while the 1976 constitution continued to develop a strong role in defending basic principles of equality.

Approved on 2 April 1976, the constitution of the Portuguese Republic was the legitimating base for the 25 April 1976 elections, in which the first parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, was elected. Fonseca sustains that the constitution “became the bigger symbol of the instalment of a democratic pluralist and parliamentary regime”.²¹ Meanwhile, as Jorge Miranda states, these components, which aimed at the instalment of a liberal democracy, coexisted, until the first constitutional review in 1982, with different elements, such as the recognition of the sovereignty of a military organ, the Revolution Council.

There were other aspects of discontinuity in respect to liberal constitutions such as the articles pointing towards a “transition to socialism” (art. 2) through the “collective appropriation of the main means of production, lands and natural resources, and the exercise of the democratic power by the working class” (art. 80). Moreover, the nationalisations that occurred in 1974 were confirmed, the implementation of the agrarian reform was prescribed, with the expropriation of estates, and great importance was attributed to the “democratic planning of the economy”. During a phase when social mobilisation had decreased and the political forces in charge were already in line with the liberal-democratic models present in other European countries – in the 1976 elections the PCP was reduced to the fourth party, behind the PS, PPD and CDS – the Portuguese constitution did in

fact inherit, in its substance, the demands of the PREC and continued the projects that had sprung up in the most radical period of transition. Guaranteeing the demands of the social movements unleashed by the coup hence became the greatest source of legitimacy for institutional power in democratic Portugal. As shall be shown, this role has become once again more relevant in recent times through the Constitutional Court.

The first constitutional reviews²² in 1982 and 1989 partly modified these principles, reducing the ascendancy of the state over the economy, mainly after Portugal joined the European Economic Community in 1986. Successive reviews in 1992 (following the Maastricht treaty), 1997 and 2001, along with the growth of liberal rights – more representation, less centralisation, increased regional autonomy, more individual rights and guarantees – also conferred more weight to private initiative in the country's economy. On the other hand, the 2003 review insisted mainly on aspects related to European integration, as did successive reviews in 2004 and 2005. In a more or less incisive manner, all these reforms aimed at limiting the state's role in certain matters and the "de-ideologisation" of the constitution.

However, according to Miranda, "the constitution is still, after seven constitutional reviews and without rupture, after Portugal joined the European Community ... the same constitution that the Constituent Assembly approved in 1976".²³ It continues to play a fundamental role in defending the Portuguese people's social and political rights. This role revealed itself as being even more important in later years, when Portugal experienced one of the harshest economic crises in its recent history.

The 40th anniversary of the Portuguese revolution took place in 2014, in a context of profound social and financial crisis. Regarding the foreign assistance framework from the so-called troika representing the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Union, Portuguese citizens have suffered, in recent years, from drastic measures that were imposed to contain public spending. Social inequality, represented by the Gini index, which had started to decrease from 2005, began to increase once again in 2011, in what is traditionally one of Europe's most unequal countries.²⁴ According to the United Nations Development Programme, Portugal has fallen in the human development indexes, from 29th place in 2007 to 43rd in 2013, moving further from countries with a "very high" index rating to those with a "high" index rating. According to Eurostat, the average salary measured by purchasing power in 2012 was 25% below the European average, demonstrating a drastic reduction that started in 2010. Emigration levels have started to grow again, returning to 1970s levels, while a dangerous increase in material deprivation (from 21.9% in 2012 to 25.5% in 2013) and in severe material deprivation (from 8.6% in 2012 to 10.9% in 2012) have been registered.²⁵ In addition, there has been a significant decline in GDP, while the unemployment rate has increased from 7.6% in 2008 to 16.2% in 2013, reaching 38.1% in the case of under-25 year olds.²⁶

Actually, this is not the first time that Portugal has received foreign assistance, since it resorted to IMF help twice before, in 1978 and again in 1983. Similarly to what is happening nowadays, as it will become clearer below, the country also reacted with growing protests, especially those associated with the working class. According to Ron Francisco's protest events and coercion database,²⁷ the greatest number of protest events between 1980 and 1995 (170) were recorded in 1982,

which was also the second year in terms of the number of strikes (101). That was also the year in which the greatest number of citizens took part in protest events (3,091,355), most of them in strikes (2,911,845).²⁸ Far more significant is the fact that, in that same year, there were two general strikes, the first since 1934.²⁹ After the IMF intervened, conflictual activity decreased constantly until the end of the decade, and started growing again in 1988 and 1989, coinciding with the second government led by Cavaco Silva, the leader of the centre-right Social Democratic Party (PSD). He was appointed prime minister in 1985, and for a second term in 1987, when his party became the first in Portugal's history to win an absolute majority in elections. His government implemented strong structural reforms to liberalise the Portuguese economy, including fiscal reform, the liberalisation of public enterprises and state media, and the reform of labour and agricultural legislation. Cavaco Silva governed Portugal until 1995, after his re-election in 1991.

So, Portugal has been through prior periods of austerity, marked by strong attacks on the so-called "April victories". Nevertheless, if the 1976 constitution had come under attack in other periods, as Miranda stresses, until recent years it seemed like the intrinsic values established in it – related to work, access to healthcare and education – were preserved. Moreover, if the criticism of the constitution, seen as "blocking necessary reforms", is not new in centre and rightwing circles, it seems that now this attack is occurring in a rather new way. In fact, it has found a new "legitimation" in a vision expressed by several influential foreign observers. For instance, in a report JP Morgan expressed the following opinion:

In the early days of the crisis, it was thought that these national legacy problems were largely economic: over-levered sovereigns, banks and households, internal real exchange rate misalignments, and structural rigidities. But, over time it has become clear that there are also national legacy problems of a political nature. The constitutions and political settlements in the southern periphery, put in place in the aftermath of the fall of fascism, have a number of features which appear to be unsuited to further integration in the region. When German politicians and policymakers talk of a decade-long process of adjustment, they likely have in mind the need for both economic and political reform.³⁰

And moreover:

The political systems in the periphery were established in the aftermath of dictatorship, and were defined by that experience. Constitutions tend to show a strong socialist influence, reflecting the political strength that leftwing parties gained after the defeat of fascism ... Political systems around the periphery typically display several of the following features: weak executives; weak central states relative to regions; constitutional protection of labour rights; consensus building systems which foster political clientelism; and the right to protest if unwelcome changes are made to the political status quo. The shortcomings of this political legacy have been revealed by the crisis. Countries around the periphery have only been partially successful in producing fiscal and economic reform agendas, with governments constrained by constitutions (Portugal), powerful regions (Spain), and the rise of populist parties (Italy and Greece).³¹

The boundaries that separate the political and financial levels are becoming more frailer, and this made an economical crisis turn into a political crisis in several countries. As Donatella Della Porta writes:

The contemporary crisis is in fact a crisis of democracy even more and before than a financial crisis. Neo-liberalism was and, in fact, is, a political doctrine that brings with it a deteriorated vision of the public and democracy. It implied not only the less political interventions to balance social inequalities produced by the market (with policies of liberalisation, privatisation and de-regulation), but also a very elitist (mainly electoral) conception of citizen participation, as well as an increased level of influence for lobbies and strong interests.³²

Consequently, foreign intervention, as observed in the JP Morgan report above, is not limited to the assessment of a country's economic performance and the imposition of a path to achieve objectives in terms of its deficit, but it has also raised questions regarding internal politics, especially the instruments and mechanisms coded in national political systems considered opposite to market logic. Hence, the reaction to austerity measures has obviously become, in many cases, a real reaction in the defence of constitutional rights established in each country.

Therefore, the difference to previous moments of crisis and austerity in Portugal seems to be that the current situation is marked by a greater determination, by the political elite in power, to change the assumptions on which democratic Portugal rests, mostly the acquired rights related to labour and social protection, a will that can gain more legitimacy thanks to the international context and to Portugal's current dependency on foreign assistance.

Protest and austerity in Portugal since 2010

Apart from a few exceptions,³³ many scientist traditionally consider Portuguese society as a scarcely participant one, whether through institutional channels,³⁴ such as elections, parties, associations, or nonconventional channels, such as demonstrations, petitions, strikes. If we look at some forms of participation, such as elections, this assumption holds true. Meanwhile, if we consider the general framework of the political and social engagement of Portuguese citizens, the situation appears to be more complex. As mentioned before, Portuguese civil society has shown significant capacity to react in different situations. If on the one hand the PREC mobilisations developed a central role in "pushing" for a more radical break with the past, institutionalising social rights and speeding up the decolonisation process, it has been noted in successive moments that when these social victories are put up for discussion, Portuguese society has acted decisively.

This fact is also evident in the context of the current crisis. According to the European Social Survey in 2013, the proportion of respondents who said they had participated in a public demonstration in the previous year more than doubled, from 2.4% in 2010 to 6.8% in 2012. Indeed, Portugal was one of the European countries that saw the biggest increase in this indicator, along with Spain and Ireland. A study developed by Portuguese police confirmed this data. It shows that in Lisbon alone,

the number of demonstrations increased from 244 in 2010 to 298 in 2011 and to 579 (an average of one every 15 hours) in 2012.³⁵

A study recently developed on the basis of the protest event analysis method also points in this direction.³⁶ This study is based on a database of protest events in Portugal between 2010 and 2013, compiled by sampling three weekly issues of the *Diário de Notícias* news site, in the period from 1 January 2010 to 31 July 2013. Included are all forms of contentious politics (for example, demonstrations, occupations, petitions or strikes), coded according to its main player, target, demand, type of action, number of participants, place, time span and the existence of violence or not.

All data indicates the evolution of a protest cycle starting in 2010, which coincided with the arrival, in Portugal, of the international economical crisis and the adoption of the first measures to contain public spending. Since early that year, the socialist minority government had to undertake a series of public spending cuts, in an attempt to accomplish the deficit limits required by the eurozone. These measures were publically contested by numerous players, with the most significant episode being the 4 March general strike, which was followed by various demonstrations organised by the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP) in early July. Another general strike was organised in November and from that moment on social agitation grew significantly, reaching its peak in the great demonstration organised by the *Geração à Rasca* (Desperate Generation) group on 12 March 2011.

This demonstration was also linked to the crisis in the government and the decadence of socialist Prime Minister José Sócrates. In fact, a few days later, on 22 March 2011, Sócrates resigned after parliament voted down the so-called fourth stability and growth programme (PEC IV), which introduced new austerity measures in order to contain the economic recession. The rejection of the PEC IV opened the way for external intervention, obliging Portugal to receive an international loan worth €78m, €52m of which came from the ECB and €26m from the IMF. After the elections of 5 June 2011, a centre-right government, headed by the PSD leader, was established. Although some spending restrictions had already been adopted by the socialist government, it was from that moment on that the harshest austerity measures were applied, involving bigger cuts to public salaries, pensions, social benefits and services (mostly those associated with health and transport). Along with tax raises (mainly in VAT), these measures had a drastic effect on consumption and unemployment levels (as noted above), creating a vicious cycle.³⁷

After the 2011 election, there were another two peaks in the protest flux. Firstly, in the second half of 2012; and secondly between March and June 2013. Both periods were marked by huge demonstrations, coinciding with critical moments in the process of applying austerity measures. The first one took place on 15 September 2012 and was marked by much anger over the government's announcement to increase the unique social tax, a contributive social security tax applied on salaries. The second and greatest demonstration of that period, which took place on 2 March 2013, raised more general concerns against the government and the troika memorandum, at a time when its harsh consequences on Portuguese social and economic life had become more and more evident.

Both the demonstrations were organised by the *Que se Lixe a Troika: Queremos as Nossas Vidas de Volta* (To hell with the troika: we want our lives back, QSLT) movement. Just like the aforementioned *Geração à Rasca*, the QSLT movement also represents, from a certain perspective, a new conflictual player, with some analysts referring to it as the “new new social movements”.³⁸ Therefore it may be worth following its activity closer and at a deeper level. Sharing some similar aspects with the Spanish *Indignados* group, the *Geração à Rasca* movement emerged in Portugal sometime before. The 12 March 2011 demonstration was summoned through social networks by four friends (Paula Gil, Alexandre Carvalho, João Labrincha and António Frazão), who were inspired by Portuguese band Deolinda’s song “Parva que sou” (How dumb I am), which became the demonstration’s slogan. This song expresses the anxiety of a generation directly experiencing the difficulties of unemployment and precariousness.³⁹

As many authors have pointed out that, despite some transnational references – mostly to the Arab Spring – this movement’s identity, purpose and target, as in those that preceded them, are clearly national.⁴⁰ This is clearly patent in its name, a direct reference to a prior juvenile movement from the early 1990s, *Geração Rasca* (Trashy Generation), which contested the education reforms and the tuition increases implemented by the PSD government.⁴¹ Explicitly nonparty, *Geração à Rasca* was able to summon the first of a cycle of huge demonstrations, the largest since the revolutionary period.⁴² From March 2011, some new organisations appeared. After the organisation of the 12 March demonstration, *Geração à Rasca* organisers created the *Movimento 12 de Março* (12 March Movement, M12M) platform, which placed constant emphasis on refusing any type of party positioning, or a left–right axis, while adhering to José Saramago’s appeal of “turning every citizen into a politician”. During the summer of 2011, several other groups emerged from the M12M or connected to it – among them *Indignados Lisboa*, *Acampada Lisboa–Democracia Veradeira*, *Já, Portugal Uncut* and *Atac Portugal* – aimed at the creation of the 15 October (15O) platform, which, in connection with other similar groups around the world, would end up organising the international demonstration on 15 October 2011.

From this moment on, several alliances were built between the new new social movements and the traditional actors – such as trade unions or radical leftwing parties – though they were eventually marked by internal conflict and mutual distrust. There was an evident tendency towards a greater cooperation especially after October 2012, when the M12M leaders joined parts of the CGTP and the Left Bloc in order to create the Democratic Congress for Alternatives (CDA). The CDA managed to gather 1,500 people seeking to develop a shared platform for the various movements and groups that were battling austerity.⁴³

On one hand, the CDA supported the demonstration organised by the QSLT. Just like the M12M and the 15O,⁴⁴ the QSLT avoided explicit connection to parties (although many members were Left Bloc or PCP militants). Meanwhile, although terms like left and right were never mentioned, its leftwing position was clear, if not for the important presence of Left Bloc militants, of organisations such as the *Precários Inflexíveis* (Inflexible Precarious) and by the occasional alliance with the CGTP. On the other hand, despite the initial suspicion of the PCP towards the CDA and the new new social movements, the party was more willing to cooperate from 2012 onwards.

All the subsequent demonstrations, on 15 September (QSLT), 29 September 2012 (CGTP), and 2 March 2013 (QSLT), drew reciprocal support from several organisations. On the other hand, the increasing of references to historical symbols of protest and democracy in Portugal was significant. One example was the choice of “Grândola, Vila Morena”, a song used to signal the 1974 Carnation revolution, as the anthem of the large demonstration organised by the QSLT on 2 March 2013, in which 800,000 people took part in Lisbon alone, according to some observers.

Throughout these four decades of democracy, there have been several attempts to mitigate the revolutionary significance of 25 April, for example, during the so-called “Cavaquismo”⁴⁵ – and also in the celebrations organised to mark the 30th anniversary of that event in 2004. In this last case, the official slogan of the celebrations was “April is evolution”, a definition that deliberately hid any revolutionary reference to 25 April. Despite these attempts, the importance of the revolution seemed to remain untouched in several broad sectors of society and was ready to be activated in moments of greater difficulty. The commemorative demonstrations are still very well attended, including by the youth. On the other hand, according to a survey conducted by the Institute for Social Sciences of Lisbon University and the *Expresso* newspaper, 25 April is considered to be the most important event in Portuguese history by 59% of the Portuguese, with higher rates recorded among less educated citizens.⁴⁶

As we’ve seen before, the activation of symbols related to 25 April was also an important element for sustaining the mobilisations in this protest cycle against austerity. Before 2 March 2013, “Grândola, Vila Morena” had already been sung by a group of militants attending a parliamentary debate on 15 February, interrupting the prime minister’s speech. Besides, the symbols and references to the coup, the MFA and the PREC were a common sight at demonstrations, where it was easy to spot posters asking for the “return of the military”. The memory of the Portuguese transition is still very strong in Portuguese society and is one of the foundations for social mobilisation, despite the revisionist attempts of the political elites.

This situation is radically different, if not the opposite, to that described by Kostis Kornetis in the Spanish case. In fact, if the predominant memory of the collective Spanish ideal is that of an “agreed transition”, of democratisation as a moment of social appeasement, with which most Spaniards seem to identify, the social movements that emerged in the context of the crisis in Spain – the *Indignados* – “also involved, in some way, a radical reconceptualisation of the past”.⁴⁷ They criticise this memory of a “model” regime change, without conflict, but also the regime change in itself, for not having led to a real disruption with the past. That would have had consequences in implementing a real democracy in Spain.

In Portugal, the revolutionary nature of the transition itself, mentioned in the 1976 constitution, naturally represents an important resource for mobilisation. Meanwhile, there are reasons for this continuity over the years. Robert Fishman considers that the social revolution post-25 April caused a cultural renewal and the dissolution of the social hierarchy.⁴⁸ That would have favoured the rooting of democratic practices, making Portuguese society more inclusive and open.

According to Tiago Fernandes, on the other hand, the social revolution that occurred after the coup was reflected in associations and Portuguese institutions and this explains the continuity that 25

April still has in the country.⁴⁹ Hence, this does not mean a shared memory or a cultural reference exists, but something rather more structural and profound. This more "structuralist" explanation partly differs from that given by Fishman, who states that the legacy of 25 April in the country's political and social processes is due to its cultural heritage. Both explanations are indeed complementary, although I think that without a strong structural continuity in institutions and civil society associations, this cultural heritage would have had fewer chances to persist.

As regards the new alliances between traditional and new actors, they have also been identified by several authors in many other countries. Maria Kousis and Christina Karakioulafi adopt the definition of meganetworks to explain them: "The recent economic contention against neo-liberal reforms and austerity policies in Southern European national, and less often transnational spaces ... demonstrates the importance of 'Meganetworks' comprised of very broad cross class coalitions".⁵⁰ On the other hand, Maria da Paz Campos Lima and Antonio Martin Artiles state that "it is important to underline that the escalation in mobilisations also delineated new relations between new social movements and trade union protests, which contributed to enforce both the mobilisations of each one and those organised in conjunction".⁵¹

In the Portuguese case, the reasons behind this growing collaboration are obvious. In fact, if on the one hand the new new social movements have proved a great capability for mobilising people, many of whom are usually oblivious to protest, on the other hand they have shown serious difficulty in continuously sustaining conflict. In his study on opposition networks, mainly focusing on the Russian case, Mark Beissinger stresses that movements strongly based on "virtual civil society" – that is "not face-to-face associations, but digitally mediated social networks"⁵² – show high degrees of volatility. Yet, traditional players and mostly trade unions, although they receive less attention from the media, have shown a greater capability of maintaining a high conflict level, especially thanks to a more solid organisational structure. Yet, these have, on their own, a greater need to attract new forces and create roots in social areas from which they are usually absent – the precarious youth, students and unemployed.

On the other hand, if one can detect the increasing use of social networks, which would predominantly suggest the participation of certain sectors of society, such as the youth and the more educated people, other elements suggest that people mobilised in this cycle of protest are more varied. In this sense, the large geographical dispersion in demonstrations should be stressed. For instance, on 2 March 2013, demonstrations with a strong participation of citizens took place in about 30 Portuguese cities. The participation of 600–700 citizens in demonstrations taking place in cities traditionally quite conservative, such as Viseu, Castelo Branco or Leiria, has been a significant innovation in this cycle of protest. Moreover, the participation of actors such as the Association of Retirees and Pensioners (APRE) questions the vision of the new new social movements as a mainly youth phenomenon.

On the other hand, an analysis of protest events that took place in Portugal between 2010 and 2013 shows the predominance of protest related with labour issues. Despite public opinion's insistence on protest approaches that have greater media impact, the traditional trade union players are still at the frontline of the struggle against austerity. During this period, 78 protest events (47.9% of the total) were organised by several public service trade unions, while 11 were called by one or both of the

trade union federations (CGTP or UGT) and 19 by private sector trade unions. Overall, about two-thirds of protest (66.3%) emerged from the labour area. In comparison, the new players, such as the QSLT, *Geração à Rasca* or M12M, fronted 19 events (11.7%), only a few more than those organised by public and private sector consumers and clients (11.7%).⁵³ Official data on strikes confirms this trend: the number of lost working days grew constantly from 2010 to 2013, and so has the participation in strikes.

In recent years, the number of strikes organised by several joint trade unions has grown, showing signs of increasing coordination.⁵⁴ Such increasing strike coordination is mostly confirmed by a huge growth in resorting to a classical struggle instrument: the general strike. In the first 35 years of democracy (1974–2009), trade unions organised only five general strikes; the same number was held in the three years from 2010. As stressed by several authors, an increase in general strikes is a phenomenon that can be detected in many European countries since 2008.⁵⁵ As Kousis and Karakioulafi state: “General strikes are different from economic strikes in that they are not directed against employees but government policies, while they also involve nationally focused mobilisations.”⁵⁶

In Portugal’s case, this also meant a growing collaboration between the trade union federations, the CGTP and UGT, which previously had been viewed as being in opposition to one another. Moreover, the importance of trade unions and resorting to strikes as a means of struggle in recent mobilisations in Portugal are also related to the role that these organisations have assumed as a result of the revolutionary process. As Fernandes states: “In Portugal, state transformations during the transition allowed for a higher control of the state apparatus by unions, especially the CGTP.”⁵⁷ The role that union organisations play would, hence, be a consequence of the revolution, which revealed itself as being important in the current protest cycle. In fact, Fernandes suggests that the revolution not only rendered more power to unions, but also turned them into central institutions in Portuguese political life, which they remain to this day. He also claims that, for this reason, labour protection is stronger than in Spain, as is the connection between unions and some political parties.

So, if social movement studies usually consider unions to be actors in contentious politics, hence primarily defiant of the government, the scenery is quite different in the Portuguese case. These organisations are structures that find themselves on the verge of “conventional politics”, when they act as government interlocutors, and “unconventional politics”, especially when they organise highly conflictual actions such as general strikes.

Conclusions

The protest cycle that started in 2011 can be said to have concluded after the great demonstration of 2 March 2013. From this moment, mobilisation decreased radically, as can be verified by the scarce participation in demonstrations called by the QSLT platform on 1 June and 26 October 2013 and 24 April 2014. Its platform appears rather unstructured, clearly evident in the lack of updates to its social media accounts and, mainly, of its Facebook page. Still, the CGTP-organised demonstration on 19 October 2013, which enjoyed no support from the UGT, has shown the different perspectives of antiausterity actors, such as the Left Bloc or CDA.

On the other hand, the government seemed to maintain a certain level of stability, although some internal crises partly blocked the implementation of many of the planned austerity measures. In the 2014 European elections, in contrast to what happened in Greece or Spain, the so-called "radical leftwing" parties did not perform well,⁵⁸ while support for the central bloc (PS and PSD) remained fairly stable. The bankruptcy in the summer of 2014 of Banco Espírito Santo (BES), the largest Portuguese private bank, following many cases of corruption and mismanagement, which would further aggravate the already critical Portuguese economical situation, was met with no protests whatsoever.

Amid this general context of demobilisation, the Constitutional Court entered the picture and was seen by the leftwing as the guardian of the conquests of April. This organ has systematically invalidated some austerity measures introduced by the government. In July 2012, it ruled that the cuts to holiday and Christmas bonuses were unconstitutional as they contradicted the principle of equality, given that they applied only to public servants. On 26 September, the court annulled the reform of the labour code, and in May 2014 all cuts made to public service wages from 2011 were deemed to be unconstitutional, forcing the government to abolish them.

Just as was the case after the 1974–1975 protest cycle, the Constitutional Court in Portugal is once again an institutional actor – and a particularly important one as a guardian of the rule of law – and has stepped forward to deal with protest demands. If, as was seen after the PREC mobilisations, in a phase of reflux and moderate governments, the constitution reflected the requests, even the more radical ones, of the revolutionary process, something similar can now be witnessed. After two years of intense political struggle and at a time when mobilisation started to decrease almost to the point of ceasing altogether, the court emerged as the main actor in the defence of social rights in Portugal. The legacy is almost obvious, from the 1974–1975 protest cycles – which influenced the nature of the constitution – to the present, when it almost seems that the court has crossed sides to meet the protest demands. One might just surmise – although it may be difficult to ascertain with certainty – that the court would not have been as active were there not so much social pressure. In that case, the protest cycle would have, once again, had the ability to influence institutional politics, although in a different way to what would have been expected.

In any case, it is certain that, 40 years later, Portugal has relived a cycle of protest comparable only to that of the PREC, even though it is still too early to assess its results.

NOTES

- 1 A security force dependant on the ministries of defence and the interior, similar to the French Gendarmerie or the Italian Carabinieri.
- 2 The PIDE (International and State Defence Police) was renamed the DGS (General Security Directorate) in 1969.
- 3 This was a voluntary militia with the duty to "defend the spiritual heritage of the nation and combat the communist and anarchist threat" (Decree-law 27058 of 30 Sept. 1936). Although the inspiration for this

militia was the Italian Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale (Voluntary Militia for National Security, MVSN, commonly called the *camice nere* or Blackshirts), and in part the German Stormtroopers (Sturmabteilung or SA, Assault Divisions), the Portuguese Legion was not a party militia like the MVSN or SA, but a state body, directly under the interior ministry and, in the event of a crisis, the war ministry. This difference was also justified by the reason that, in contrast to Italy and Germany, in Portugal the militia was not a weapon used to set up the regime and was only created afterwards. See Luís Nuno Rodrigues, *A Legião Portuguesa: a milícia do Estado Novo, 1936–1944* (Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1996).

- 4 Inácia Rezola, "Il Movimento delle forze armate e la transizione verso la democrazia," in *Il Portogallo e la transizione alla democrazia*, eds. Guya Accornero and Alfonso Botti, 55–73 (Bologna: CLUEB, 2010).
- 5 Inácia Rezola, "António de Spínola," in *Fotobiografias Século XX*, ed. Joaquim Vieira (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2002).
- 6 Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
- 7 The Popular Democratic Party (PPD), a rightwing party created on 6 May 1974, was legalised on 25 Jan. 1975, and in 1976 changed its name to Social Democratic Party (PSD). To the right of the PSD is the nationalist, conservative and liberal Social Democratic Centre–Popular Party (CDS–PP), founded on 19 Jul. 1974.
- 8 Ana Mónica Fonseca, "A Constituição de 1976. O contexto político," in *As Constituições republicanas portuguesas. Direitos fundamentais e representação política (1911–2011)*, ed. Ana Maria Belchior (Lisbon: Mundos Sociais, 2013), 111.
- 9 The dynamics of this historical event have been extremely complex and the interpretation of what really happened is still controversial. The event's reconstruction here adopted is that of Rezola, "Il Movimento."
- 10 See Rafael Durán Muñoz, "Oportunidad para la transgresión. Portugal, 1974–1975," *Ler História* 32 (1997): 83–116; Rafael Durán Muñoz, *Contención y transgresión. Las movilizaciones sociales y el Estado en las transiciones española y portuguesa* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2000); Philippe Schmitter, *Portugal do Autoritarismo à Democracia* (Lisbon: ICS, 1999); Diego Palacios Cerezales, *O Poder Caiu na rua. Crise de Estado e Acções Colectivas na Revolução Portuguesa, 1974–1975* (Lisbon: ICS, 2003); Pedro Ramos Pinto, *Lisbon Rising: Urban Social Movements in the Portuguese Revolution, 1974–75* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).
- 11 See Durán Muñoz, "Oportunidad para la transgresión" and *Contención y transgresión*; Schmitter, *Portugal do Autoritarismo à Democracia*, and Palacios Cerezales, *O Poder Caiu na rua*.
- 12 See Manuel Villaverde Cabral, "A segunda república portuguesa numa perspectiva histórica," *Análise Social* 19/75 (1983): 127–142; Guya Accornero, "Contentious Politics and Student Dissent in the Twilight of the Portuguese Dictatorship: Analysis of a Protest Cycle," *Democratization* 20/6 (2013): 1036–1055; Ramos Pinto, *Lisbon Rising*.
- 13 It has been defined as "the broadest, deepest people's social movement in post-war European history" (Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *O Estado e a Sociedade em Portugal* (Porto: Afrontamento, 1990), 27); as the "last left-wing revolution in twentieth-century Europe" (Fernando Rosas, *Portugal Século XX. Pensamento e Acção Política* (Lisbon: Notícias, 2004, 15) and as "some of the widest popular mobilisations of post-war Europe" (Pedro Ramos Pinto, "Urban Protest and Grassroots Organisations in Lisbon, 1974–1976" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2007), iii.

- 14 See Schmitter, *Portugal do Autoritarismo à Democracia*; Palacios Cerezales, *O Poder Caiu na rua*; António Costa Pinto, "Authoritarian Legacies, Transitional Justice and State Crisis in Portugal's Democratization," *Democratization* 13/2 (2006): 173–204.
- 15 Costa Pinto, "Authoritarian Legacies," 198.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 199.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 198.
- 18 Leonardo Morlino, *Democracy between Consolidation and Crisis: Parties, Groups and Citizens in Southern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 19.
- 19 Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP, 1986).
- 20 Palacios Cerezales, *O Poder Caiu na rua*.
- 21 Fonseca, "A Constituição de 1976," 111.
- 22 The Constitution of the Portuguese Republic foresees, in articles 284 to 289, the procedure for its revision. The initiative for a revision must come from members of parliament, who are responsible for preparing the constitutional review process (art. 285). Any modifications to the constitution must be approved by a two-thirds majority of sitting MPs (art. 286).
- 23 Jorge Miranda, "A Constituição de 1976," in *As Constituições republicanas portuguesas. Direitos fundamentais e representação política (1911–2011)*, ed. Ana Maria Belchior, 83–103 (Lisbon: Mundos Sociais, 2013), 100.
- 24 "Gini index in Portugal," Pordata, 26 Jun. 2015, accessed 1 Aug. 2015, <http://www.pordata.pt/en/Portugal/Gini+index-2166>.
- 25 "The risk of poverty kept increasing in 2013," Statistics Portugal, 30 Jan. 2015, accessed 1 Aug. 2015, https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_destaques&DESTAQUESdest_boui=223346238&DESTAQUESmodo=2&xlang=en, and "Severe material deprivation rate in Portugal," Pordata, 26 Jun. 2015, accessed 1 Aug. 2015, www.pordata.pt/en/Portugal/Taxa+de+privação+material+severa-2358.
- 26 "Unemployment rate: total and by age group (%) – Portugal," Pordata, 22 Jul. 2015, accessed 1 Aug. 2015, <http://www.pordata.pt/en/Portugal/Taxa+de+desemprego+total+e+por+grupo+et%C3%A1rio+%28percentagem%29-553>.
- 27 "European Protest and Coercion Data," Ron Francisco, accessed 22 Apr. 2015, <http://web.ku.edu/~ron-frand/data/>.
- 28 Guya Accornero, "A mild-mannered country? Crises and cycle of protest in democratic Portugal" (paper presented at the 23rd conference of the International Political Science Association, Madrid, 8–12 Jul. 2012) and Guya Accornero and Pedro Ramos Pinto, "Mild Mannered"? Protest and Mobilisation in Portugal under austerity, 2010–2013," *West European Politics* 38/3 (2015): 491–515.
- 29 From 1933 to 1974 strikes were forbidden under the Estado Novo's laws. That of the 18 Jan. 1934 actually was a revolutionary strike, called to overthrow the rising fascism. In fact, on 23 Sept. 1933, decree-law 23050 was published which abolished the main labour rights, such as the right to strike and to free elections for union leaders.
- 30 JP Morgan, "The Euro Area Adjustment: About Halfway There," 28 May 2013, last accessed 22 Apr. 2015, <https://culturaliberta.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/jpm-the-euro-area-adjustment-about-halfway-there.pdf>, 2.

- 31 Ibid., 12–13.
- 32 Donatella Della Porta, “Mobilizing against the Crisis, Mobilizing for ‘Another Democracy’: Comparing Two Global Waves of Protest,” *Interface* 4/1 (2013): 275.
- 33 See Robert M. Fishman, “Democratic Practice after the Revolution: The Case of Portugal and Beyond,” *Politics & Society* 39/2 (2011): 233–267; Tiago Fernandes, “Civil Society After Dictatorship: A Comparison of Portugal and Spain, 1970s–1990s,” *Kellogg Institute Working Paper Series* 384 (2012); Tiago Fernandes, “Rethinking Pathways to Democracy: Civil Society in Portugal and Spain, 1960s–2000s,” *Democratization* 22/6 (2015): 1074–1104; Accornero and Ramos Pinto. “Mild Mannered?” among others.
- 34 See André Freire, “Participação e abstenção nas eleições legislativas portuguesas, 1975–1995,” *Análise Social* 35/154–155 (2000): 115–145; André Freire, “Pós materialismo e comportamentos políticos: o caso português em perspectiva comparada,” in *Valores sociais: Mudanças e Contrastes em Portugal e na Europa*, eds. Jorge Vala, Manuel Villaverde Cabral and Alice Ramos, 295–362 (Lisbon, ICS, 2003); and Pedro Magalhães, “Disaffected Democrats: Political Attitudes and Political Action in Portugal,” *West European Politics* 28/5 (2005): 973–991.
- 35 Luís Elias and Pedro Pinho, “Reuniões e manifestações: Os desafios das novas formas de contestação social,” *Polícia Portuguesa* 4/3 (2012): 43.
- 36 Accornero and Ramos Pinto, “Mild Mannered?”
- 37 Castro Caldas, “The Consequences of Austerity Policies in Portugal”. International Policy Analysis, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012.
- 38 See Carles Feixa, Inês Pereira and Juris Jeffrey, “Global Citizenship and the ‘New New’ Social Movements: Iberian Connections,” *Young* 17/4 (2009): 421–442. I consider that this definition is particularly useful for identifying the social movements emerging from the context of the crisis and austerity in Portugal, as in other countries, even if it is necessary to use it with some caution. In fact, as it will be explained in this article, the links these movements share with historical conflictual actors were always strong. As was already the case with the new social movements, the idea of newness is highly questionable, and in this sense the recent addition of a “new” could also be seen as an ironical redundancy. On the other hand, these movements present some undeniable elements of newness, mainly linked to their use of social networks and to the participation of people that traditionally were not mobilised. These elements, however, also imply a higher degree of “volatility” in respect to actors that are more rooted in the structures of civil society.
- 39 Andreia Sanches, “Um desempregado, um bolseiro e uma estagiária inventaram o Protesto da Geração à Rasca,” *Público*, 26 Feb. 2011, accessed 22 Apr. 2015, <http://www.publico.pt/sociedade/noticia/um-desempregado-um-bolseiro-e-uma-estagiaria-inventaram-o-protesto-da-geracao-a-rasca-1482270>.
- 40 Britta Baumgarten, “Geração à Rasca and Beyond: Mobilizations in Portugal after 12 March 2011,” *Current Sociology* 61/4 (2013): 457–473; Accornero and Ramos Pinto, “Mild Mannered?”
- 41 Ana Maria Seixas, “Aprender a democracia: jovens e protesto no ensino secundário em Portugal,” *Revista Crítica das Ciências Sociais* 72 (2005): 187–209.
- 42 Ramos Pinto, *Lisbon Rising*; Baumgarten, “Geração à Rasca.”
- 43 See its website at <http://www.congressoalternativas.org/> (last accessed 22 Apr. 2015).
- 44 M12M and 150 continued to exist during 2012–2013, but their participants were reduced to a few activists.

- 45 Luciana de Castro Soutelo, "A memória do 25 de Abril nos anos do cavaquismo: o esenvolvimento do revisionismo histórico através da imprensa (1985–1995)" (MA thesis, University of Porto, 2009).
- 46 Luísa Meireles, "25 de Abril é símbolo consensual da democracia," *Expresso*, 14 Apr. 2014, accessed 22 Apr. 2015, <http://expresso.sapo.pt/25-de-abril-e-simbolo-consensual-da-democracia=f865511>.
- 47 Kostis Kornetis, "'Is There a Future in this Past?' Analyzing 15M's Intricate Relation to the *Transición*," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 15/1–2 (2014): 6.
- 48 Fishman, "Democratic Practice."
- 49 Fernandes, "Rethinking Pathways."
- 50 Maria Kousis and Christina Karakioulafi, "Labour Unions confronting Unprecedented Austerity in Greece, 2010–2013" (paper presented at the 7th general conference of the European Consortium for Political Research, Bordeaux, 4–7 Sept. 2013).
- 51 Maria da Paz Campos Lima and Antonio Martin Artiles, "Descontentamento na Europa em tempos de austeridade: Da ação coletiva à participação individual no protesto social," *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 103 (2014): 142, accessed 20 Jun. 2014, <http://rccs.revues.org/5569>.
- 52 Mark R. Beissinger, "Conventional' and 'Virtual' Civil Societies in Autocratic Regimes" (paper presented at the 20th International Conference of Europeanists, Amsterdam, 25–27 Jun. 2013), 2.
- 53 Accornero and Ramos Pinto, "Mild Mannered'?"
- 54 See Hermes Augusto Costa, Hugo Dias and José Soeiro, "As greves e a austeridade em Portugal: Olhares, expressões e recomposições," *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 103 (2014): 103–202.
- 55 See Maria da Paz Campos Lima and Antonio Martin Artiles, "Crisis and Trade Union Challenges in Portugal and Spain: Between General Strikes and Social Pacts," *Transfer* 17/3 (2011): 387–402; Gregor Gall, "Quiescence Continued? Recent Strike Activity in Nine Western European Countries," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 34/4 (2013): 667–691; Kerstin Hamann, Alison Johnston and John Kelly, "Unions against Governments: General Strikes in Western Europe, 1980–2006," *Comparative Political Studies* 46/9 (2013): 1030–1057; Kousis and Karakioulafi, "Labour Unions."
- 56 Kousis and Karakioulafi, "Labour Unions."
- 57 Fernandes, "Civil Society After Dictatorship," 19.
- 58 This is especially related to the fall of the Left Bloc, whose vote went from 10.72% in the previous European elections in 2009 to 4.56% in 2014. It is also related to the failure of a new party, Livre, which obtained only 2.18%. On the other hand, as it had already succeeded in municipal elections, the PCP-dominated United Democratic Coalition increased its vote share, going from 10.7% in 2009 to 12.68% in 2014. This success may be related, on one hand, to the anti-European and anti-Euro instances of the PCP. On the other hand, it may also be due to the fact that the PCP is, most certainly, the party that best incarnates the so-called April values.