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Persistent repertoires of contention in Portugal: from tax riots to anti-communist violence (1840-1975)

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During the summer of 1975, a year after the Carnation Revolution, thousands of Portuguese men and women took to the streets in order to prevent what they feared could be a communist takeover. The revolution had put an end to 48 years of right-wing dictatorship, but now the military officers who headed the provisional government were clearly lurching to the left, proposing a Portuguese path to socialism. All over Portugal there were anti-communist demonstrations and rallies. Those who attended displayed their support for democracy and the Catholic hierarchy, their opposition to land reform and their dislike for the bearded military officers who symbolized the revolution. In more than forty locations, while church bells rang, angry crowds ransacked the local offices of the Portuguese Communist Party and other left-wing organizations. Most of the violent episodes took place in small towns in the northern half of the country; the pre dominant agricultural unit here was the smallholding, the population voted for right-wing candidates, and church attendance was high (Coelho, 1980).

Both the regional distribution of anti-communist violence and some of its features bore a strong resemblance to those of the tax riots in the nineteenth century. Among the many popular movements that had resisted the construction of the liberal state, the most iconic was the Maria da Fonte revolt of 1846, named after a woman of near-legendary status who had initiated the insurrection. In 1846, the government was defeated in what oral tradition and literature would later enshrine as the only truly popular revolution in Portuguese history. In 1975, some anti-communist activists evoked Maria da Fonte in order to frame the meaning of the anti-communist movement. Others, having witnessed the violence, thought that Portugal was going through its own version of France's Vendée revolt of 1793 (Abreu, 1984; Rorick, 1984, p. 2).

The aim of this chapter is to explore, by comparing the anti-communist violence of 1975 with the tax riots of the nineteenth century, the persistence in modern Portugal of forms of action such as siege, attack, ransacking premises and burning property from them. To do this I will be looking at long-term social cleavages underpinning political behaviour, and analysing the influence of political opportunity structures on the choice of tactics by protesters in both periods. In the final part of the chapter I will explore the strategic and symbolic functions of these repertoires during the nineteenth-century tax riots and the 1975 anti-communist mobilization, which is crucial to an understanding of their widespread use in nineteenth- and twentieth-century protest politics.

Interest in popular protest cultures and practices became central to Portuguese historiography in the late 1980s. By then, the research agenda influenced by French historiography, mainly the *Annales* School and the works of Labrousse, Lefebvre and Vilar had almost been worked through. Building on works such as Eric Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels* (1959), George Rudé's *The Crowd in History* (1964) and E. P. Thompson's 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' (1971), scholars of nineteenth-century Portugal, began to shift their attention to forms of popular resistance to liberalism. They were also influenced by events such as the counter-revolutionary mobilization of 1975 (Ferreira, 1982; Palacios Cerezales et al., 2013).

Some recurrent protest actions, such as anti-cemetery riots (the resistance to the public health decrees which determined that people had to be buried in cemeteries rather than parish church ground, which dragged on from the 1820s to the 1910s), had often been used to depict rural populations as backward and superstitious, but Ferreira (1996) analyses these riots using an approach attentive to the processes by which the state clashed with forms of communal sociability and popular religiosity. She also carried out a comprehensive study of popular protest between 1834 and 1844, the period after the civil war between the forces of liberalism and absolutism, bringing to light the actions of absolutist guerrilla bands which prolonged the civil war, cases of popular resistance to 'liberal' priests and officials, and recurrent tax and subsistence riots. Ferreira argues that in the rural north, while allegiance to the absolutist King Miguel receded as time passed, communal resistance to state-building remained strong (Ferreira, 2002). The analysis of community dynamics and acts of collective resistance is also central to Miranda's research on the 1869 tax riots in the Azores (1996), which is particularly innovative in its analysis of the role played by women in the riots. Furthermore, her work provides interesting insights into the charivari-like noise-making rituals of denunciation and shaming that rioters directed at officials whilst besieging their homes. Finally, Carvalho's study (2011) of the resistance to policies of secularization between 1910 and 1917, after the 1910 republican revolution, shows that at the beginning of the twentieth century many northern rural communities still rejected cemeteries and other state interference. Carvalho uses the term '*repertório tradicional*' ('traditional repertoire'), but in using these words he stresses the issue at stake – resistance to state-sponsored modernity – rather than the form popular action took. There therefore remains much work to be done on the symbolic and ritual aspects of these protests.

Research on the history of popular protest in Portugal has been on the increase. This can be seen in the very productive conferences on social movements and working class history organized by the New University of Lisbon in 2011, 2013 and 2015. However, a number of key aspects regarding the relationship between popular culture and protest, such as the persistence and adaptation of charivari and carnival rituals in Portuguese nineteenth- and twentieth-century politics, are still significantly under-researched (Palacios Cerezales et al., 2013). This particularly applies to the study of protest and dissent during the dictatorship years and the period after 1974. Portuguese historians, anthropologists and political scientists have drawn heavily on social movement scholarship, including Charles Tilly's theoretical framework and reflections on repertoires of contention (1986; 2008), but they have mainly focused on how protest adapted to repressive conditions during the Salazar years (Godinho, 2001)

and on the adoption during the last two centuries of a modern repertoire that has included public meetings, petition drives, demonstrations and letter-writing (Palacios Cerezales, 2014; P. G. Silva, 2013). As regards the wave of mobilization that followed the 1974 Carnation Revolution, workers' strikes and the occupation of land, factories and housing have been thoroughly investigated (Chilcote, 1987; Hammond, 1988), but hardly any research has been done on the 1975 anti-communist protest and, in particular, on the forms of protest action and its origins, functions, symbolism and meanings.

The 'hot summer' of 1975

On the morning of 25 April 1974 the *Movimento das Forças Armadas* (MFA – Armed Forces Movement) overthrew a 48-year-old right-wing dictatorship in what became known as the Carnation Revolution. The MFA, a loose-knit league of middle-ranking military officers, sought to bring an end to the colonial wars the Portuguese army had been fighting for 13 years in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. In their initial manifesto the rebel officers promised decolonization, democratization, and economic and social development.

During the month after the revolution, the coup was celebrated in both urban and rural Portugal as a liberation. Thousands of Portuguese took to the streets and fraternized with the military. The formerly clandestine opposition to the dictatorship, most visibly the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), the Socialist Party (PS) and the militant student-led far left, began to operate in the open, while new centre and centre-right parties began to form. Across the country there was a wave of mobilization: workers struck for better wages and occupied factories; the newly-legalized political parties called for open council meetings all over the country which carried out purges of the 'fascist' local authorities; students rejected 'fascist' teachers in schools and universities; slum dwellers organized and occupied empty housing; and left-wing organizations demonstrated against colonial war. Countless men and women took advantage of the political opportunities presented by the breakdown of the dictatorship in order to foster their own economic interests and political preferences (Downs, 1988; Hammond, 1988; Bermeo, 1986; Pinto, 2008). To use Zolberg's conceptualization of the spurts of creativity during revolutionary situations, Portugal experienced a 'moment of madness' (Zolberg, 1971; Abril em Maio, 2001).

The MFA had promised elections, and these were held in April 1975, one year after the coup. By then, however, the political situation had changed. After a series of political crises and manoeuvres within the military, the radical faction of the MFA, led by Colonel Vasco Gonçalves and supported mainly by the PCP, had increased its share of power. The political balance swung to the left: military stewardship of the political process became institutionalized through the Council of the Revolution, trade unions were forcibly federated within a single national structure, all Portuguese banks were nationalized, and land reform was introduced. In March 1975 the MFA announced that 'socialism' was a goal to be enshrined in the future constitution, and political parties were made to agree with this in order to take part in the 1975 election (Maxwell, 1995). Worried about the turn of events, the network of local Catholic newspapers began publishing warnings about the sufferings of the Church in communist Europe. The situation became so charged that in the small northern town of Ovar, for example, the popular carnival, which drew on international models of urban carnivals and was

famous for the freedom of expression it had achieved during the dictatorship, was suspended in order to avoid the potential explosion of tension into violence (*Notícias de Ovar*, 9 January 1975: 1).

The April 1975 election for the Constituent Assembly made it clear that a Western-style pluralist democracy was the preferred choice of most Portuguese. The PCP and the far left together were unable to capture 20 per cent of the national ballot. Despite this result, the MFA's radical faction retained its hold on power and pushed on with its programme: swift decolonization, agrarian reform and further nationalization.

On 10 July 1975 the PS, led by Mario Soares and the recipient of the greatest number of votes, claimed that the chances of a true democratization were being jeopardized by the government of Vasco Gonçalves and by the PCP, and declared that they were now in opposition to the MFA. Democracy had to be defended, they said, and they appealed to the people to mobilize. During the weeks that followed, massive anti-communist demonstrations were held in Lisbon and across the country. These were organized by the Catholic Church, landowner associations and a wide range of political parties, from the PS to the far right, all of which agreed on the need to fight the government. The PCP called for vigilance against 'reactionaries'. Some progressive Catholics sided with the 'revolution' against 'reaction', but they were unable to mobilize much support on the streets (Rezola, 1992). The anti-communist demonstrations in Lisbon, Porto and the rural north, the regions where the electorate had displayed moderate and conservative preferences, were huge. By contrast, in industrial areas and the rural south, where a large proportion of the landless peasants had voted for the PCP, the radical military and the 'revolution' were supported by their own large rallies and demonstrations (Palacios Cerezales, 2003).

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Table 1. Votes for the main parties (% of total votes cast) by region, Constituent Assembly elections, April 1975

Region	CDS+PPD (centre-right)	PS (centre-left)	PCP+MDP (radical left)
Rural north	49.2	30.1	7.5
Urban north	37.2	41.6	11.0
Rural south	11.0	41.5	34.9
Urban south	16.9	45.1	27.0
Continental Portugal	32.4	38.6	17.3

Key: CDS, Centro Democratico e Social; MDP, Movimento Democratico Portugues; PCP, Partido Comunista Portugues; PS, Partido Socialista; PPD, Partido Popular Democratico. Urban councils are those containing a district capital or city with a population greater than 10,000. The south comprises the Algarve, the Alentejo, urban councils of the Lisbon district and councils of the Lisbon, Castelo Branco and Santarem districts affected by land reform. The islands are not included. Based on Hammond (1984, p. 263)

The church-led rallies and demonstrations were attended by both men and women. Many participants waved banners and carried placards, some indicating the parish where they came from, some expressing their rejection of communism, and many others supporting the Church's right to resume control of *Radio Renascença*. This was the main church-owned radio station, which leftist workers had occupied in May and turned into the mouthpiece of the far left (Santos, 2005). On some demonstrations the

presence of nuns was conspicuous, and the traditional sound of tolling church bells was used in some places to call the populations of rural parishes to gather in local towns and take part in the demonstrations (Santo, 1980). However, protesters gave their demonstrations a modern and secular feel, possibly to attract support and sympathy from the non-religious anti-communist segments of society. Participants abstained from using explicitly religious images, such as virgins and saints, and there is no evidence of them singing hymns. Instead, marchers carried banners, sang secular songs and chanted slogans, appealing to secular values such as freedom of expression and democracy. In Braga, the participants chanted 'Christian people are not reactionary'. In Viseu, they sang *Canta amigo canta*, a protest song from the 1960s that said 'alone you are nothing, together we hold the world in our hands', and chanted 'bishop, our frind, the people are with you', 'Radio Renascença is ours', and 'the will of the people must be respected' (*Jornal Novo*, 21 July 1975: 2).

During July and August, violence erupted in 45 municipalities and more than 80 offices belonging to the PCP and other left-wing organizations were damaged. Most of the rioting took place in the later stages of anti-communist demonstrations that were initially peaceful. For example, in Aveiro, a town of 20,700 inhabitants that was the centre of a mainly rural district, the Church called for a silent march, but clandestine anti-communist groups distributed leaflets calling for violence, rang the church bells as an alarm, removed communist posters from the streets and encouraged the crowd to take action.

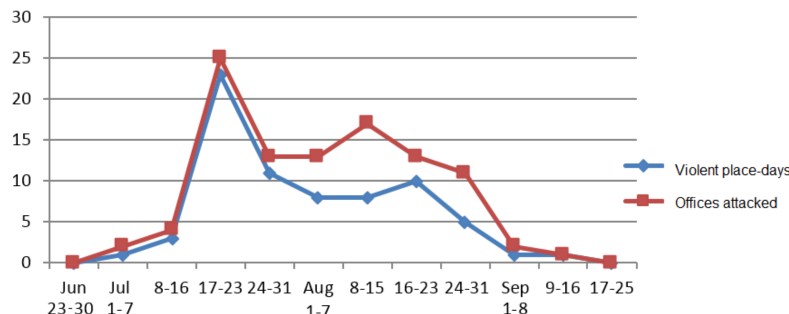
Most violence followed a similar script. Chanting 'we are the people' and denouncing the communists and Moscow, some of the demonstrators converged on and surrounded local PCP offices, and the bolder among them began throwing stones and attacking the buildings. Pictures show some rioters wielding farm tools (*Paris Match*, 23 August 1975: 48); others armed themselves with heavy sticks. One left-leaning journalist was surprised to discover that most rioters did not support a return to 'fascism', but instead used slogans associated with the Carnation Revolution, such as 'the people rule' and 'yes to democracy, no to dictatorship' (*Diário de Lisboa*, 26 August 1975: 1, 20). Cries of 'down with the communists' and 'burn them', and insults like 'thieves', 'assassins' and 'liars' were also heard (MDP, 1975, p. 5).

In most cases the PCP militants had already fled before the protesters arrived. When rioters entered the building they pulled down communist flags and placards with the party name, threw furniture and paperwork out of the windows, and burned everything on bonfires in the street. On several occasions the anti-communist crowds were on the streets for two or even three full days. In these cases of sustained protest, some people organized pickets and attacked the offices of other left-wing parties, trade unions, and politically-committed lawyers and doctors. When identified as belonging to communist militants or sympathisers, cars were set alight and front windows of cafés and businesses were stoned. Some groups simply wandered excitedly around town, shouting, exchanging news, and running to wherever something seemed to be happening (*Jornal Novo*, 21 July 1975: 2). In Famalicão, two communists were forced to flee their home when it was invaded by an angry crowd; the same happened to leftist lawyers in Leiria, Sever do Vouga and elsewhere. During the night, vans carrying left-leaning newspapers from Lisbon, which condemned the anti-communist demonstrations and violence as 'reactionary' and 'fascist', were stopped and their contents burned (Burguete, 1978).

Militant groups also invaded some town council buildings chanting 'let the people rule'. They demanded the removal of the MFA-appointed local councillors, who were left-wingers and not at all representative of local preferences. Clerks in local banks were another favourite target. Even before the nationalization of the banks, the unions in the banking sector had frozen accounts to prevent capital leaving the country, and emigrants had stopped sending their remittances, which represented essential income for many families in the north (Noronha, 2013). Now, the rioters shouted 'sack the communists' and picketed the banks to ensure that trade unionists could not return to work (*Jornal Novo*, 21 July 1975: 10; 7 August 1975: 2). Pickets guarded roads, council buildings and bank branches, sleeping at night around campfires. As for most of the violence, those involved in these night watches were exclusively men. According to one journalist, they spent the night talking about targets for the following day (*Diário de Lisboa*, 26 August 1975: 20).

During these episodes, dozens of presumed communists experienced harassment, had their cars vandalized, or were beaten up, but their lives were usually spared. Communists were expected to resign from their posts and to flee the area in fear. Most of them fled; there were only beatings when they defended their rights and resisted. The four men who actually died during this period of violence were either participants in the rioting or onlookers, caught by gunfire from either the troops or the PCP militants who were trying to contain the attacks. Clandestine far-right groups only made direct attempts on the lives of their opponents in 1976, when pluralist democracy seemed safe and popular mobilization had died down (Palacios Cerezales, forthcoming).

Figure 1. Anti-communist group violence, per week, June–September 1975



Sources: Avante! (1978) and the newspaper collections of *Jornal Novo*, 1975, *Diário de Lisboa*, 1975, and *Comércio do Porto*, 1975. Key: 'violent place-days' indicates the number of council districts that witnessed violence in any one day; 'offices' are those of the PCP, other radical left-wing parties and trade unions'

2. The long-term perspective

Besieging, attacking and ransacking a rival's office share traits with actions commonly ascribed in social movement scholarship to the 'traditional repertoire' (Tilly, 1986). As Tarrow notes, 'in the 1780s, people certainly knew how to seize shipments of grain, attack tax gatherers, burn tax registers, and take revenge on wrongdoers and people who had violated community norms' (2011, p. 38). Rallies and demonstrations, however, which were also part of the anti-communist campaign, were what Tarrow would call 'cosmopolitan' and 'modular' forms of action: actions directed at a non-locally based power holder, which could be used for a variety of purposes and by different combinations of social actors (Tarrow, 2011; Tilly, 2008). Taken as a whole,

the anti-communist demonstrations of 1975 displayed the traits of modern modular politics. Nevertheless, the form of the violent attacks, which became the most iconic and distinctive aspect of the anti-communist movement, bore a strong resemblance to previous violent revolts, particularly the nineteenth-century tax riots.

Resistance to the penetration of the state and the market has been highlighted as a recurrent situation in which traditional repertoires had to adapt to new conditions and react to national developments during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Food riots took place not only when food was expensive or scarce, but when the connection with national markets undermined local supply traditions. The imposition of new taxes and new ways of assessing taxable wealth was a further traditional trigger of rebellion (Tilly, 1975; Tarrow, 2011).

In Portugal, where taxes on rural wealth had been comparatively light before 1800, direct action against taxation was used to resist the state throughout the nineteenth century. In 1846, 1861–62 and 1867–70 there were major waves of anti–tax riots. As late as 1900, the assessment of rural wealth for taxation was halted to prevent a much-feared outbreak of rioting (Sousa, 2007). As was the case with the anti-communist mobilization in 1975, churchmen played an important role in the nineteenth-century riots. After 1850, when the Church reached an agreement with the liberal state, it no longer openly campaigned against taxation. However, when there were waves of tax riots liberal politicians denounced sermons by ultramontane priests, who preached that taxes should not be paid to the 'irreligious government' (Palacios Cerezales, 2008, p. 192). In the typical tax riot, when church bells rang people gathered in rural parishes and marched *en masse* to town. If no troops stopped them, they attacked tax offices and burned the records of taxation owing. Furniture was also frequently burned, and the crowd then turned its attention elsewhere. The home of government officials was often besieged, and even attacked, and people marched to the town hall to destroy the records pertaining to military service; during the 1860s and 1870s they also destroyed the official weights and measures standards. Sometimes rioters also tried to control communications, including cutting the telegraph wire in places where this had already arrived. The crowd often shouted death threats at officials, but as these had generally already fled, or been granted personal protection by local bosses, actual killings were rare. These riots often happened in waves on a regional basis; the authorities noted that news of successful tax riots in one location was an important trigger for new riots everywhere else (Miranda, 1996; Ferreira, 2002; Palacios Cerezales, 2014).

Interestingly, a map of anti-communist violence in the summer of 1975 roughly coincides with that of the nineteenth-century tax riots: in both cases violence was mostly concentrated in the centre and the north of the country, and the mountains of the Algarve (Map 1). This reflects the long-term persistence of political cleavages in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Portugal. A first cleavage separates urban from rural Portugal, in a country where most of the population was rural until the 1970s. A second and even more significant social division follows the distribution of property. This separates the political and religious allegiances of the more populated, religious and conservative smallholding regions north of the river Tagus and in the mountains of Algarve from the regions of the Alentejo, where landless peasants worked on big estates (Cabral, 1974; Rutledge, 1977; Coelho, 1980; Martins, 1998). Rights attached to property were crucial both in the nineteenth century and in 1975. The land tax was the

issue at stake during the nineteenth century, while the main polarizing issue mobilizing smallholders during the summer of 1975 was the land reform taking place in the south of the country, which flagged the revolutionary's disregard for property rights.

During the nineteenth century, officials generally described those who rebelled as '*os povos*' (the people), which indicated that they saw the crowds as consisting of an undifferentiated rural community (Ferreira, 2007). Tax officials were wont to blame the riots on the rural rich, who allegedly manipulated the poorer smallholders (Palacios Cerezales, 2008, p. 193). For 1975, the ethnologist Espírito Santo studied the poor peasants in the hinterland of Batalha who took part in the anti-communist demonstrations and violence. Church bells rallied the people, while leadership was assumed by middlemen of poor origins who rented machinery and 'successful peasants' in whom the rest had confidence (Santo, 1980). John Hammond suggests that the majority of participants were also peasants in 1975; several violent episodes 'occurred on market days when the towns were filled with people from the surrounding farm villages' (1984, p. 279). Market days were also propitious for tax rioting during the nineteenth century.

Actions such as besieging, ransacking premises and burning paperwork and furniture were thus deeply embedded in the protest culture and practices of rural North Portugal. Anti-communist militants in 1975 explicitly related to this past in their actions and how these were framed. As noted above, they named their network 'Maria da Fonte' after the folk heroine who in 1846 initiated the rural revolt against the taxes and administrative measures of the new liberal state (Dâmaso, 1999; Abreu, 1984). In contrast with other waves of protest, mostly forgotten, the memory of Maria da Fonte had been perpetuated in popular poem and song (Braga, 1911, vol. 2, p. 442). As the romantic writer and folklorist Almeida Garrett argued in the aftermath of the events, the participation of women in the revolt was a sign of its 'authenticity', enshrining it in history books with the particular status of the only 'truly popular revolution' in Portuguese history (quoted by Rorick, 1984, p. 2). For the intellectual right wing, this mark of 'authenticity' assisted the dismissal of the rest of the many revolutionary episodes in Portuguese history, which were depicted as conspiracies led by urban intellectuals (Trindade, 2013). Interestingly, in 1975 some voices on the Maoist far left also used Maria da Fonte as an icon of peasant revolt and welcomed the anti-communist demonstrations as a form of popular resistance to the 'social-fascism' of the pro-Moscow PCP (J. P. Silva, 1978).

Possibly because of the iconic status the nineteenth-century tax riots acquired in the public imagination, in the latter half of the twentieth century the action of attacking and ransacking rivals' premises started to be practised in urban contexts too. Radical republicans and anarchists in fact extolled the 1909 tax riots in the northern district of Vila Real as models for popular action (Pereira, 1982). During the Republic (1910-26), republican crowds repeatedly ransacked the offices of conservative and Catholic newspapers in Lisbon, Oporto and Coimbra (Valente, 1992). Throughout the right-wing dictatorship (1926-74) the opposition had few opportunities to organize, but when it did, far-right militants often ransacked its offices untouched by the police. In May 1965 the Writers Association was ransacked by a crowd of 50 people after it awarded a literary prize to the anti-colonialist African writer, Luandino Vieira. There were similar events in 1969 when the phoney elections the dictatorship organized allowed the opposition to open some offices (Madeira, 2007).

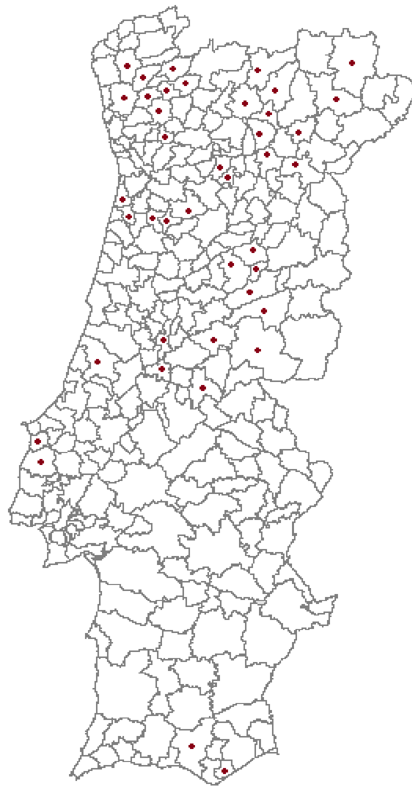
In the immediate aftermath of the Carnation Revolution, much of the popular participation in events across the country took the form of attacks on the premises of the political police (PIDE) and the regime's political organizations. Crowds laying siege to the PIDE headquarters in Lisbon, from which PIDE agents fired, killing two demonstrators, was one of the iconic images in the transformation of the military coup into a popular revolution. Over the following days, invasions by the people of local PIDE, party and militia offices across Portugal, with military approval and no significant resistance, symbolized the arrival of the revolution. Later, when right-wing coups were foiled on 28 September 1974 and 11 March 1975, left-wing militants ransacked the offices of the newly-organized right-wing parties in the Lisbon and Porto areas (Brinca and Baia, 2000; Rodrigues, 1999).

Thus in July 1975 the occupation and ransacking of political opponents' offices was a well-known and well-rehearsed form of collective action. The fact that a repertoire was available, however, is not sufficient to explain why people used it. In the sections that follow I will be exploring the factors that encouraged and facilitated the use of direct action and, in particular, of actions such as ransacking premises and burning property.

Map 1. Geographical distribution of rioting

Anti-communist attacks, 1975

Riots against direct taxes, 1861–1870



Sources: Avante! (1978); Dâmaso (1999); Arquivo do Ministério do Reino (1860–70).[1] *Diário de Lisboa*, 1975; *Jornal Novo*, 1975; *Comercio do Porto*, 1975. Council boundaries are those of 1975. Dots indicate locations with one or more episodes of collective violence.

Popular violence and the state

One way to make sense of the different repertoires is to relate them to the general organization of political and administrative institutions and to changes in opportunity structures. When violent collective action is at issue, an important factor to examine is the ability and disposition of the state to suppress private violence (Della Porta, 1996). Durán Muñoz (2000), in his work on Portuguese workers in the years after the 1974 Carnation Revolution, has convincingly argued that the reason they used forms of action that were far more radical than those used by their Spanish counterparts during the transition to democracy lies in the specific political context in which they operated and the opportunities open to them. His insights and explanatory framework are crucial to an explanation of the anti-communist riots of the summer of 1975 (Palacios Cerezales, 2003).

The Portuguese nineteenth-century liberal state was comparatively weak. The kind of tax riots common in Portugal during the second half of the nineteenth century had almost disappeared in the major European states by the 1840s. Unequal taxation was a common focus for complaint in Southern Europe, but in Spain, while riots against excise duties were commonplace (Vallejo Pousada, 1996), the state was stronger and levies on agrarian wealth did not provoke the waves of rioting seen in Portugal. In Italy the early state-building efforts in the 1860s had to overcome fierce resistance, but the consolidation of the new state came hand in hand with the imposition of a viable taxation system (Davis, 1988, pp. 187–90). In Portugal, rioting was successful in keeping taxation lower than elsewhere (see Table 2).

Table 2. Fiscal burden in Europe (1851–1913): fiscal revenue as share of GDP (%)

	Portugal	Spain	Italy	France	Britain
1851–59	3.5	7.8	n.a.	8.4	9.4
1860–69	3.6	10.6	7.9	8.4	7.5
1870–79	4.0	9.5	10.6	9.8	6.3
1880–89	4.4	8.6	13.3	13.1	7.0
1890–99	4.9	8.9	13.7	11.8	7.3
1900–13	5.5	9.3	11.8	10.8	8.2

Source: Esteves, 2005, p. 325

Some reformers believed the problem to be the particular weakness of the Portuguese state. This may well have been true: while other European countries policed the countryside with a national constabulary, Portugal did not have one. Gendarmeries were a common feature of nineteenth-century rural Europe, but the Portuguese police system was purely urban. Direct action was a more appealing option in rural Portugal, with a state deterrent absent, than in places with stronger governments. The army was used for crowd control, but its network of barracks was unsuited to internal policing. While most European gendarmeries were created between 1812 and 1848, the first truly national constabulary in Portugal, the National Republican Guard (GNR), was only formed after 1911 (Emsley, 1999; Palacios Cerezales, 2013).

State weakness may explain direct action during the nineteenth century, but after 1900 the Portuguese police system developed fully. The GNR was gradually deployed between 1911 and 1919, projecting the power of the state throughout the country. It patrolled the countryside and brought the state to even the most remote mountain parishes at least once a fortnight. From the 1930s, in addition, the political police (PIDE) were a central tool for social control. In contrast to the liberal state, the dictatorship of Salazar and Caetano (1926–1974) was a strong government supported by fully developed police forces.

The Carnation Revolution shattered the policing system. To explain the repertoire of contention of 1974 and 1975, it is important to stress that the police were paralysed after being blamed for the repressive policies of the dictatorship. The PIDE and the riot brigade were dissolved, while the urban police and the rural constabulary were partially disarmed and removed from duties involving social conflict (Palacios Cerezales, 2007).

The army took responsibility for policing protest. However, it faced a new challenge in playing this role: the high political costs of repression. How could the 'liberators', who had brought 'freedom', shoot 'the people'? Moreover, there were numerous cases of breakdowns in discipline and fraternization of the troops with protesters. For the popular movements that occupied factories and empty housing in urban Portugal, or the large estates in the south, the absence of repressive policing created a wonderful opportunity for direct action (Durán Muñoz, 2000). During 1974, this also meant that far-left groups often disrupted right-wing meetings. In the summer of 1975, it was the turn of the anti-communists to take advantage of the weakness of the state and use direct action against their rivals.

A line of soldiers would sometimes attempt to defend the PCP offices but, as everybody knew they would not shoot, this deterrent was ineffective. As the situation escalated, the commanding officer evacuated the offices to protect PCP militants, while allowing the demonstrators to ransack the property. MFA hardliners sent marines to the north in early August 1975 to try a more forceful approach. After their killing of two demonstrators, the government realized that repression had an unacceptably high cost and withdrew the marines, permitting anti-communist violence to proceed unhindered (Palacios Cerezales, 2003, pp. 165–9).

It can therefore be argued that the weakness of the state facilitated the use of violent repertoires in both the nineteenth century and 1975: in the former because of the weak state infrastructure, and in the latter because of the political conjuncture that impeded the legitimate use of force. If we put aside the periodization issue of determining what is 'traditional' and what is 'modern', and we relate the repertoires of action to the choices made available by the configuration of the political situation, as Charles Tilly did, we may find that the option of direct action and collective violence did not depend on the degree of modernity of those who rebelled, but on conjunctures in which the state was not able to monopolize violence.

4. Functions and symbolism of siege, ransacking and burning

While state weakness may explain the protesters' widespread use of violence during the 1975 anti-communist mobilization, it does not account for the specific form that violence took. Why did protesters ransack offices and burn furniture and documentation? Why was there comparatively little blood? What symbolic and

strategic functions did actions such as siege, ransacking and burning have in the 1975 anti-communist mobilization? Were they the same as those underpinning the mid-nineteenth-century tax riot violence?

As was the case with the nineteenth-century tax riots, whose key goal was the destruction of government fiscal records, the violence against property and acts of intimidation by anti-communist protesters had a clear strategic and operational function inasmuch as their actions were designed to undermine the PCP's organizational structure and power, and eventually succeeded in this. By June 1975 the party had opened 481 local offices across the country; after the attacks, it almost disappeared from public life in some districts. As the civil governor of Braganza said, 'the PCP has been driven back into clandestine activity' (*Mensageiro de Bragança*, 21 November 1975: 3). In December 1975, the communists acknowledged that they had fewer than 200 offices, most of them in the larger cities and the south of the country (Lisi, 2007).

However, weakening the PCP's organizational structure and national outreach was not the sole aim of the protesters' choice of tactics. A number of other issues have to be considered to explain their actions. As argued earlier, the practice of besieging, attacking and ransacking a rival's office was by the 1970s a well-known form of collective action. The use of familiar scripts made it easier to mobilize big crowds quickly and effectively. While it is true that the anti-communist demonstrations of 1975 did not lack co-ordination, as evidenced by the clandestine propaganda inciting violence distributed by rightist groups and the presence of a handful of activists in several attacks (Avante!, 1978), these militants were surprised by the enthusiastic participation of hundreds of ordinary citizens. As one leading activist of the Maria da Fonte anti-communist network recalled, 'the ordinary people were a gunpowder barrel, ready to explode as soon as we lit a matchstick' (Abreu, 1984, p. 146). The raids on opposing party offices often served as a rallying point for anti-communist protesters. The utilization of heavily ritualized scripts was also crucial in containing people's anger within the limits of acceptability.

We know that public support and a sense of legitimacy are key factors in successful mobilization. As noted earlier when discussing the iconization of figures such as Maria da Fonte, these repertoires could rely on a high degree of social acceptance among the population. Moreover, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries these forms of action had been used by both the Right and the Left: this undermined the Government's attempt to frame and delegitimize the violence of 1975 anti-communist protesters as 'fascist'. It is revealing that a number of ransacked PCP offices were adorned with placards that symbolically turned them into 'homes for the Angolan refugees', referring to the men and women expelled during the fast-paced and chaotic decolonization of Portuguese Africa after the revolution (*Jornal Novo*, 21 August 1975). This mimicked the actions, and their underlying subversive intent, of the left-wing groups that in the aftermath of the Carnation Revolution had occupied the former dictatorship's party offices to transform them into nurseries, medical centres or social clubs.

The occupation and ransacking of political opponents' offices was widely perceived as an 'act of popular justice' and was intentionally framed and enacted by the protesters as legitimate community resistance. A leaflet produced in the summer of 1975 by the clandestine right-wing Democratic Movement for the Liberation of

Portugal (MDLP) called for ‘self defence’ and for ‘a local council representative of of local preferences’; ‘as soon as you hear your church bell sounding the alarm, come onto the streets with any weapons you may have – hunting gun, spade, scythe […] to fight for a government that respects the popular will’ (MDLP Leaflet, 1975).

The street bonfires of PCP documents and furniture staged by the anti-communist crowd, in turn, were highly symbolic and indeed self-legitimizing mock executions of their political enemies. As we know, rituals of mock execution featured strongly in pre-modern traditions of community justice and were still widely used in nineteenth-century Portugal. They had also long been central to the Carnival theatre of inversion. Two particular rituals had often been adopted and appropriated to symbolically try and execute political rivals: the *Queima de Judas*, the Easter Saturday burning of the effigy of Judas (Dias, 1948), and the ‘burial of the sardine’, the mock execution of a sardine, by burying or burning, which has traditionally signalled the end of Carnival celebrations in Portugal and Spain. The figures of Judas and the sardine were now replaced by effigies representing enemies or contentious issues. Straw dolls personifying *Dona Constituição* [‘Mrs Constitution’] were buried in Lisbon and elsewhere during the pro-absolutist mobilizations of 1826 and 1828 (Cardoso, 2007, p. 161). In 1867 the press lamented the widespread and common use of the burning in effigy of ministers and other notables during the Easter Saturday processions in Lisbon and Oporto (*O Nacional*, 21 April 1867: 1). Burnings in effigy and mock funerals are in fact still practised in contemporary Portuguese protest.

Mock executions of the effigies of political opponents are highly empowering, identity-forging and bonding rituals. The expulsion of PCP staff from their offices and the occupation of this enemy space had similarly empowering effects and implications.

Finally, the attacks had a significant effect on the political process. They were bold acts of aggression that indicated a strong commitment to persevere in the struggle, which is a very powerful signal in any strategic interaction. Mass attendance at anti-communist demonstrations in tandem with the use of violence made it clear to the radicals in the MFA that, in order to govern, they would have to resort to repression. This made many military officers step back from their previous revolutionary commitment, strengthening the moderate faction of the MFA which wanted to respect the election results. In mid-September the moderates ousted Vasco Gonçalves and began managing the end of the revolution.

5. Conclusions

Collective attacks on PCP offices across northern Portugal in 1975 bear a strong resemblance to nineteenth-century tax riots. The forms of action of the traditional repertoire are commonly depicted as local and rigid, but, as this case study shows, throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century Portugal forms of popular direct action such as ransacking, siege and burning property were continually turned to different political needs and widely used in combination with modern tools of action in a diverse range of contexts, both rural and urban. From the beginning of the twentieth century, attacks and ransacking became integral components of political struggle in urban contexts. For protesters in both the 1974 Carnation Revolution and the 1975 anti-communist mobilization, ransacking the offices of political rivals was an obvious option.

As we have seen, the regional distributions of anti-communist attacks and tax riots reflected the long-standing persistence of cleavages in agrarian structures, church attendance and political attitudes that divided Portugal, and still divide it. However, social divisions explain political preferences and not repertoires of action. The resort to popular violence was possible due to the weakness of the state: a structural weakness in the nineteenth century but evident again in 1975 due to the revolutionary crisis. As regards the forms of violence that protesters used during the riots, this study demonstrates that they followed well-known scripts and had key material, expressive and symbolic functions in both periods of protest. The use of siege, ransacking and burning property reflected strategic political considerations, but also the identity needs of protesters and their quest for legitimacy. Memories of the 1846 Maria da Fonte revolt enhanced the symbolic power of the 1975 anti-communist rioting, making the participation of northern peasants in the anti-communist mobilization appear to re-enact history: a history central to the popular imaginary and dear to large sections of the general public.

Many studies of the 1974–1975 wave of popular mobilization in Portugal stress the surprise generated by the sudden eruption of social and political protest. This explosion in participation was striking, as the Portuguese citizenry had generally been depicted as passive and demobilized. The Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado, who had visited Lisbon in 1970, returned after the Revolution to find that Portugal seemed ‘another country’ (*Portugal, outro país*, 1999). While there was something new in the air, tradition provided an important framework for the forms much of the collective action took. Confronted with acute political conflict and state weakness, the Portuguese discovered new possibilities, and many citizens experienced their collective power for the first time. However, they also resorted to a repertoire embedded in history. They followed a script of well-known gestures and rituals that enabled the rapid mobilization of unconnected groups and aided the legitimation of their actions. An inherited knowledge on how to mobilize determined the path taken, both providing meaning and setting limits to the violence employed. The revolution brought numerous innovations to Portuguese popular protest, but in order to take action together individuals needed meaningful reference points: many of these were provided by a well-rehearsed repertoire that had been adapted to different contexts since the nineteenth century.

Notes

[1] The information, for the 1860–70 period, is drawn from Arquivo do Ministerio do Reino, Arquivos Nacioanis da Torre do Tombo, documents L13 149, L13 1092, L13 1093, L13 1095, L 13 1096, L18 n54, L19 1195, L20 258, L20 457, and L20 449.

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