

Civil Resistance and Democracy in the Portuguese Revolution

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Abstract

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. A military-led government had trumpeted the transition to socialism and the Armed Forces Movement was discussing the dissolution of the recently elected constitutional convention. This article offers a new account of the significance and political impact of the anti-communist rallies, demonstrations and riots during 1975 and provides an interpretation of the mechanisms by which anticommunist mobilization empowered moderate leaders and reversed the balance of power within the military, playing a crucial role in the triumph of electoral democracy.

Keywords

anticommunism, demonstrations, Portugal, resistance, revolution, violence

The election will be ‘a popularity contest with no significance’ wrote Henry Kissinger one year after the Carnation Revolution that had put an end to 48 years of right wing dictatorship. In April 1975 the Portuguese were to elect the representatives for a constitutional convention, but the head of US foreign policy was convinced that the Armed Forces Movement (*Movimento das Forças Armadas* – MFA), in alliance with the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), would not cede its newly acquired power to civilian politicians.¹ John Vincent-Smith, a British scholar who reported from Lisbon, also trivialized the ballot. Against the backdrop of the social and political turmoil of previous months – rife with strikes, demonstrations and instability – Vincent-Smith wished the Portuguese a ‘long, hot

1 Kissinger quoted in B. Gomes and T.M. de Sá, *Carlucci versus Kissinger: The US and the Portuguese revolution* (Lanham, MD 2011), 123.

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and quiet summer' that would allow for economic reconstruction.² The middle months of 1975 are indeed remembered as the 'hot summer', but not because it was warm and drowsy, but because political polarization reached boiling point, spilling over into street politics and violence, leading Portugal to the edge of civil war.

Classic studies about transitions to democracy argue that a high level of mobilization may jeopardize the prospects of democratization.³ More recent scholarship, however, has stressed that the mobilization of civil society may have a positive role in creating opportunities for reform, making democratic gains irreversible and increasing the bargaining resources of pro-democracy elites.⁴ This text offers a framework for understanding the role that mass politics played in the Portuguese case.

The Portuguese transition defies formal models that pit dictatorial elites against democratic reformers. After the toppling of the dictatorship a radical coalition took power and electoral democracy had thus to triumph over both right-wing dictatorship and socialist revolution.⁵ In the summer of 1975 a peculiar form of military-led popular democracy became a possibility, triggering the mobilization of the Catholic Church, moderate political parties and far-right activists against what they feared was a communist takeover. They succeeded in stabilizing electoral democracy in Portugal, but their success cannot be understood without taking into account popular participation in mass meetings, demonstrations and violent riots.

The proliferation of memoirs and the opening of state archives have favoured interpretations that highlight the role played in the anti-communist resistance by leaders, parties, military officers, international organizations and secret services. These perspectives miss the key participation of hundreds of thousands of citizens, as they tend to take mass response for granted, without recognizing the strategic autonomy of popular mobilization and its ability to shape the choice of the elites.⁶ Catholic bishops and political parties called for, facilitated and oriented popular mobilization, while international organizations provided resources and diplomatic support which strengthened moderate parties and trade unions.⁷ Nonetheless,

2 J. Vincent-Smith, 'Long hot summer', *The Spectator* (24 May 1975).

3 S.P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT 1968), 197.

4 D. Della Porta and F.M. Rossi, 'Movements in Times of Democratic Transition', in B. Klandermans and C. van Stralen (eds), *Mobilizing for Democracy: Social Movements in Democratization Processes* (Philadelphia, PA 2015), 9–33. A critique of Huntington and good summaries of the debate in N. Bermeo, 'Myths of Moderation: Confrontation and conflict during democratic transitions', *Comparative Politics*, 29, 3 (1997), 305–22 and in P.R. Pinto, 'Urban Social Movements and the Transition to Democracy in Portugal, 1974–1976', *The Historical Journal*, 51 (2008), 1025–46.

5 On the analytical implication of the double nature of the Portuguese case, as a transition from a dictatorship and a revolutionary process, A.C. Pinto, 'Political Purges and State Crisis in Portugal's Transition to Democracy, 1975–76', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, 2 (2008), 305–32.

6 On the strategic choices at mass level: S. Tarrow, 'Mass mobilization and regime change: pacts, reforms and popular power in Italy (1918–1922) and Spain (1975–1978)', in R. Gunther et al., (eds), *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD [etc.] 1995), 205–30. J.K. Glenn, 'Contentious Politics and Democratization: Comparing the Impact of Social Movements on the Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe', *Political Studies*, 51, 1 (2003), 103.

7 For recent analysis of international involvement, A.M. Fonseca, 'The Federal Republic of Germany and the Portuguese Transition to Democracy (1974–1976)', *Journal of European Integration History*, 15,

the key ingredient of the triumph of electoral democracy was the participation itself of hundreds of thousands of anonymous citizens. First, they voted, and then, during the hot summer of 1975, they took part in rallies, demonstrations and violent rioting, upholding the value of their vote and making the electoral results count.

Popular movements caught the eye of political scientists that poured into Portugal after the Carnation Revolution, but they paid scarce attention to the anti-communist mobilization of 1975. In addition, most accounts focused on events taking place in Lisbon, Porto, the industrial city of Setúbal and the large estates of the south occupied by landless peasants, disregarding the rural and conservative regions of central and northern Portugal. What caught most scholars' eyes was the grassroots activism of landless peasants, slum dwellers and workers, teeming with examples of direct action and self-management throughout 1974 and 1975. Sharing the view of the Portuguese far left, which worked towards the articulation of grassroots struggles into a 'popular power' movement for radically democratic socialism, many analysts suggested that these popular movements held the promise of a more participatory democracy.⁸ The 25 November 1975 coup re-equilibrated the political situation and social struggles receded, but recent studies suggest that the revolution strengthened civil society, leaving a positive legacy in the quality of Portuguese democracy.⁹ These analyses focus on the democratic content of social struggles and associational life, but leave aside the agency and legacy of those citizens who, by mobilizing against the MFA and communism, made electoral democracy triumph.¹⁰

Recently, Pedro Ramos Pinto has challenged the 'popular power' narrative, stressing the fact that, at least in Lisbon, the rank and file of many popular organizations did not follow their leadership when it sided with the radical wing of the military, choosing electoral democracy instead.¹¹ This article offers a new account of the significance and political impact of the anti-communist rallies, demonstrations and riots during 1975. It also offers a geographically balanced account of popular protest and provides an interpretation of the mechanisms by which anti-communist mobilization empowered the moderate leaders and reversed the balance

1 (2009), 35–56. D. Castaño, "A practical test in the détente": International support for the Socialist Party in the Portuguese Revolution (1974–1975)", *Cold War History*, 15, 1 (2015), 1–26.

8 J.L. Hammond, *Building Popular Power: Workers' and Neighborhood Movements in the Portuguese Revolution* (New York, NY 1988), P. Mailer, *Portugal, The Impossible Revolution?* (London 1977), C. Downs, *Revolution at the Grassroots* (Albany, NY 1988), M. Rodrigues, *Pelo direito à cidade. O movimento de moradores na cidade do Porto durante a revolução* (Oporto 1999), N. Bermeo, *The Revolution Within the Revolution, Workers Control in Rural Portugal* (Princeton, NJ 1986), R. Varela, *Historia do Povo na Revolucao Portuguesa* (Lisbon 2014).

9 T. Fernandes, 'Rethinking pathways to democracy: civil society in Portugal and Spain, 1960s–2000s', *Democratization* (2014), 1–31.

10 One valuable exception in K. Maxwell, 'Portugal: 'The Revolution of the Carnations', 1974–75', in A. Roberts and T.G. Ash (eds), *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present* (Oxford 2009), 144–61.

11 P.R. Pinto, *Lisbon Rising: Urban Social Movements in the Portuguese Revolution, 1974–75* (Manchester 2013).

of power within the military, playing a crucial role in the triumph of electoral democracy.¹²

Observers of revolutions often refer to the acceleration of time. In the aftermath of the 25 April 1974 revolution, the hitherto all-powerful political police was criminalized, the higher ranks of the military were purged and all the heads of regional governments and local councils replaced. Then, in less than two years, Portugal had two presidents of the Republic, three prime ministers and six provisional governments. The country also witnessed three coup d'état attempts, the nationalization of all Portuguese banks and the greater part of the large industries, the launching of the land reform in favour of landless peasants and, to end a list that is far from exhaustive, the decolonization of the African empire. The street mobilization of varied social and political actors had a say in all of these events.¹³ Thousands of Portuguese took to the streets in support of disparate political and economic goals, overflowing the political space. Newspapers were filled with pictures of crowds gathering, marching or rioting. A revolutionary situation had emerged in which the reference points that coordinate expectations and frame experience could quickly shift, depending on the stream of actions and events.

In the wake of the coup, the political preferences of the Portuguese were unknown and open to redefinition. 'With no previous elections', the socialist Mário Soares recalled, 'the newly legalised political parties had to test their strength by taking part in the social struggles'.¹⁴ Both free speech and the right to organize political parties were new possibilities. A wave of enthusiastic political learning and experimentation ensued. Mobilization partook in both the dismantling of the 'fascist' regime and the struggle for better wages and living conditions. Throughout May and June 1974 most 'fascist' local and regional authorities were removed from office. On shop floors, workers organized and held owners and managers accountable for having based their negotiating power on the repressive legislation that prohibited strikes and independent unions. While society was in turmoil, the press reported the activity of 48 political parties, the more salient of which – PS (*Partido Socialista*), PCP (*Partido Comunista Português*), MDP (*Movimento Democrático Português*) and PPD (*Partido Popular Democrático*) – participated in the provisional government, side by side with the MFA.

12 The backbone of the interpretation is built upon a database of chronologies for each district built upon party press, key to follow their mobilization effort, and a selection of national, regional and local newspapers for 1974 and 1975: *O Militante* (PCP), *Portugal Socialista* (PS), *Povo Livre* (PPD), *Unidade* (MDP), *O Algarve*, *Aurora do Lima*, *Comércio do Porto*, *Correio do Ribatejo*, *Correio do Sul*, *Diário de Lisboa*, *Diário de Notícias*, *Notícias de Chaves*, *Jornal de Alcobça*, *Jornal da Marinha Grande*, *Jornal Novo*, *Mensagem de Bragança*, *Notícias de Ovar*, *Notícias de Viana*.

13 R. Noronha, "'The most revolutionary law ever approved'". Social conflict and State economic intervention during the Portuguese revolution (1974–1975)', in L. Trindade (ed.), *The Making of Modern Portugal* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2013), L. Trindade, 'Os excessos de abril', *Historia*, 65 (2004). General interpretations of the Portuguese revolution in K. Maxwell, *The Making Of Portuguese Democracy* (Cambridge 1995), R.H. Chilcote, *The Portuguese Revolution: State and Class in the Transition to Democracy* (Lanham, MD 2010).

14 M.J. Avillez and M. Soares, *Soares, ditadura e revolução* (Lisbon 1996).

Popular mobilization did not conceal the fact that it was the military who had carried out the revolution. MFA and non-MFA officers would be key political players during the two revolutionary years, but they were actors-in-progress, undergoing an identity redefinition.¹⁵ At the outset the MFA was a coalition of about 400 middle-rank officers, bound by the desire to put an end to the colonial war. The unintended hero-like reception they got from the civilian population, in turn, offered them a new identity and a source of legitimation at odds with hierarchy and discipline.

The institutional breakdown of the Portuguese state was formally disguised after the coup by the offer of key positions to the only two army generals not compulsorily retired: Spínola was appointed President of the Republic and Costa Gomes became the head of the armed forces.¹⁶ Nevertheless, they never became the centre of power. The MFA officers remained vigilant, to prevent counterrevolutionary moves and deviations from the spirit of their program, and kept the more powerful units under their command. In many units, MFA captains overruled the nominal command of the regimental colonels.

During the week that lapsed between 25 April and the May Day celebrations, the MFA and 'the people' signed a 'symbolic contract' all over Portugal.¹⁷ 'Huge demonstration supporting the liberating forces' was the most repeated headline in the regional newspapers. In the northern town of Chaves: 'the people made use of their freedom. Thousands gathered holding posters and flags, went to the municipal cemetery, and afterwards headed to Battalion number 10, where they complimented the commander, expressing the People's admiration and thankfulness'.¹⁸ Similar homages to the local military took place all over the country. In every district capital the regimental officers, especially if they belonged to the MFA, became a constant presence in social and political life, overseeing the substitution of local authority officials. The press also depicted the massive May Day demonstrations as a 'civic lesson'; a celebratory taking of the streets in which the common people, by their peaceful demeanour, showed that they were ready for democracy.¹⁹

Interaction with the popular movements also spurred the transformation of the military. Police forces were sidelined from social conflict because of their association with 'fascist repression', so the military stepped in. In any social conflict, while the police would be received with hostility, any army detachment was cheered by the protestors. Fraternalization ensued. 'We were sent to liberate an occupied factory', a junior officer recalls, 'but when we arrived and assessed the situation,

15 The classic account setting the military at centre stage remains J. Sánchez Cervelló, *A revolução portuguesa e a sua influência na transição espanhola* (Lisbon 1993). See also M.I. Rezola, *Os militares na Revolução de Abril: o Conselho da Revolução e a transição para a democracia em Portugal (1974–1976)* (Lisbon 2006).

16 A.C. Pinto, 'Political Purges and State Crisis in Portugal's Transition to Democracy', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, 2 (2008), 305–32.

17 J.M. Ferreira, *Portugal em transe (1974–1985)* (Lisbon 1992).

18 *Notícias de Chaves* (4 May 1975), 1.

19 *Correio do Ribatejo* (2 May 1975), 1.

we discovered that the workers were right'.²⁰ The usual trappings of military discipline began to fade and, as months went by and a new revolutionary identity developed, more and more officers grew conspicuous beards and wore unbuttoned uniforms, thus displaying their revolutionary commitment. This transformation did not move at the same pace in all military units. Lisbon's Military Police, which had the most contact with the popular movements, and the units with barracks in working class neighbourhoods or the highly symbolic rural south, became more porous to the surrounding political ambience. Units barracked in the northern conservative countryside, on the other hand, had fewer occasions to intervene in social conflicts. Last but not least, tacit agreements were reached within the units: some devoted officers volunteered to deal with social conflict and were the visible face of the army, while the rest remained aloof and uncommitted.²¹

Squares all over Portugal became forums for political discussion. The dictatorship's elite was pushed aside from public life, which in turn witnessed the hegemony of the vocabulary, the symbols and the organizations of the left and the far left.²² President Spínola wanted to avoid handing the African colonies to the guerrilla movements and feared both the disorganization of the army and the growing communist influence. Neither the MFA nor the government followed his lead, and in the meantime a radical platform was coalescing around the Prime Minister, Colonel Vasco Gonçalves. After a tour visiting military units and addressing large crowds in public squares, Spínola's supporters called for a large-scale demonstration in Lisbon on 28 September 1974. It would give voice, they claimed, to the 'silent majority'.²³

Order-loving Portuguese were called on to rally in Lisbon from all over the country. This move worried left-wing groups. Spínola explored the possibility of re-illegalizing the PCP and rumours spread that he would use the meeting as a platform for a coup d'état.²⁴ Posters all over Lisbon depicted the 'silent majority' demonstration as a fascist plot. Trade unionists and political activists barricaded the roads to Lisbon. Civilian pickets stopped cars suspected of being headed to Lisbon, searched for weapons and forced many to return home. Spínola called on the army to clear the roads, but the MFA forces sided with 'the people' and overwhelmed the few among the police who followed the president's orders.²⁵

20 H. Domingos, J.S. Gago and L.S. de Matos, *A Revolução num regimento: a polícia militar em 1975* (Lisbon 1977).

21 Domingos and Matos, *A Revolução*, M. Branco, *Os "Comandos" no eixo da revolução* (Lisbon 1977), G. Mota, *A Resistência. Subsídios para a compreensão do Verão quente de 1975* (Lisbon 1976), 38–9. F.B. Carvalho, 'Governo Civil de Beja', in J.S. Martins et al. (eds), *A Geração do Fim. Infantaria 1954–2004* (Lisbon 2007), 279–81.

22 Many forms of mobilization and symbols had been forged in the wave of protest that preceded the revolution, G. Accornero, 'Contentious politics and student dissent in the twilight of the Portuguese dictatorship: analysis of a protest cycle', *Democratization*, 20, 6 (2013), 1036–55.

23 F. Ruivo, *Spínola e a Revolução* (Lisbon 2015).

24 D.F. do Amaral, *O Antigo Regime e a Revolução* (Lisbon 1995).

25 First hand accounts of the mobilization in Setúbal, in V. Martins, 'Assalto á sede do Partido Liberal', in P. Brinca and E. Baia (eds), *Memórias da Revolução no distrito de Setúbal, Vol I* (Setúbal 2000), 119–26, F. Rodrigues, 'Barricadas no distrito contra o golpe de 28 de Setembro', in Brinca and

The general was forced to resign; his supporters were removed from office and General Costa Gomes, closer to the left, became the new President of the Republic.²⁶

The next key confrontation came in January 1975, when the government discussed a decree mandating a unitary federation of trade unions. The communists cheered ‘the unity of the working class’, but the socialists feared that it would compromise freedom of association. For the first time, the PS openly opposed a decision by the provisional government – of which they were also part. The leading trade unions, by now mostly aligned with the communists, took to the streets of Lisbon in a huge demonstration to display ‘the great and calm expression of the popular will’, supporting the decree.²⁷

The socialists replied with public meetings in support of ‘freedom of association’. To mark the high point of the campaign, they ventured to call for a rally in Lisbon’s sports pavilion, one of the largest venues in the capital. Mário Soares thought this was risky and, fearing that his party would be unable to fill the house, opposed the choice of venue. To his amazement, more than 10,000 citizens turned up, packing the pavilion and leaving a sizeable crowd outside, unable to enter the premises. ‘We are a great party of the working masses’, the socialists were now in a position to claim.²⁸ The Minister for Work was unimpressed by the socialists’ display and maintained that the demonstrations in favour of the decree had been more widely attended. This showdown was a ‘consultation of the working classes’, and according to Prime Minister Colonel Vasco Gonçalves, ‘... not approving the law would be a breach in the alliance between the people and the MFA’.²⁹ The socialists lost the day, but they had discovered their ability to rally mass support.

In April 1974 the MFA had promised elections in the space of a year, but by the end of January 1975 the political future of Portugal was still hanging in the balance. The radicals were increasing their resources, the date of the poll had not yet been announced and the communists made their doubts regarding the vote public. Álvaro Cunhal, PCP’s leader, explained that after more than 40 years of dictatorship many citizens were not ready for an informed and free choice. At the same time, while the barring of the dictatorship’s elite from taking part in the election was uncontested, the red line separating ‘fascists’ from the new conservative parties was not easy to draw. That same month, in Porto, a handful of ‘antifascist’ protesters violently attacked the founding convention of the most prominent centre-right party, the CDS (*Centro Democrático e Social*). The passivity of the police and the military allowed the demonstrators to disrupt the meeting, making several

Baia *Memórias da Revolução no distrito de Setúbal*, 109–14. For Viseu, J. Gralheiro, *Os dois PREC no distrito de Viseu* (Viseu 2014).

26 J. Sánchez Cervelló, ‘O 28 de setembro’, in J. Medina, (ed.), *História de Portugal* (Lisbon 1996).

27 *Diário de Lisboa* (17 January 1975), 1.

28 D. Castaño, *Mário Soares e a Revolução* (Lisbon 2013). Kindle edn. location 6590.

29 Cited in Castaño, *Mário Soares*.

conservative European leaders flee in panic. The right-wing international press began to talk about the risks of an imminent communist takeover.³⁰

As the political situation evolved, the socialists began to use their recently discovered ability to mobilize crowds to push for the early scheduling of the election. The PS supported the MFA, but urged the military to be true to their initial promise of handing the power over to civilians. The next big show of force came on 14 February, when the PS raised the stakes and succeeded in packing Lisbon's bullfighting ring – a feat that hitherto only the PCP had achieved. The firmness of its position and its repeated ability to rally the support of committed masses highlighted the pivotal role the PS could play. As this preponderance surfaced, the church hierarchy chose the PS as its main political interlocutor, an ally within the left camp that could represent its interests, and the same applies to Frank Carlucci, recently named US ambassador to Lisbon.³¹

As the radicalization of the MFA began to frighten some, on 11 March 1975 the conservative military attempted a new coup, but it was foiled. Large-scale demonstrations celebrated the MFA's victory, the radicals increased their share in the provisional government and the nationalization of the banking industry was decreed. As banks owned most of the big industry and national newspapers, the state now controlled enormous chunks of the economy and most of the media. The failed coup encouraged voices within the MFA to propose the postponement of the ballot, but a conciliatory measure won the day: the MFA would guarantee the poll, but the parties, in turn, were asked to sign an agreement guaranteeing the tutelary role of the military: a new MFA-appointed Council of the Revolution would steer the political process, the parties waived their claim to a share of power according to the vote – deputies were elected for drafting a constitution – and, finally, all agreed that the constitution would enshrine the goal of building socialism.

Contrary to Kissinger's view, quoted in the introduction, most Portuguese citizens did not discount the meaning of the election. A record-high 91 per cent of the electorate turned out. In addition, the voters gave a clear majority to the PS, 37.8 per cent, and also voted for other parties that supported a European-style pluralistic democracy: PPD came second with 26.4 per cent of the vote, and the 'Christian' CDS came fourth with 7.6 per cent. Nonetheless, the US Secretary of State was not totally wrong in his assumptions: while the communists and other radical parties close to the MFA did not claim more than 20 per cent of the vote between them, Colonel Vasco Gonçalves, head of the radical faction of the MFA, clung to power.

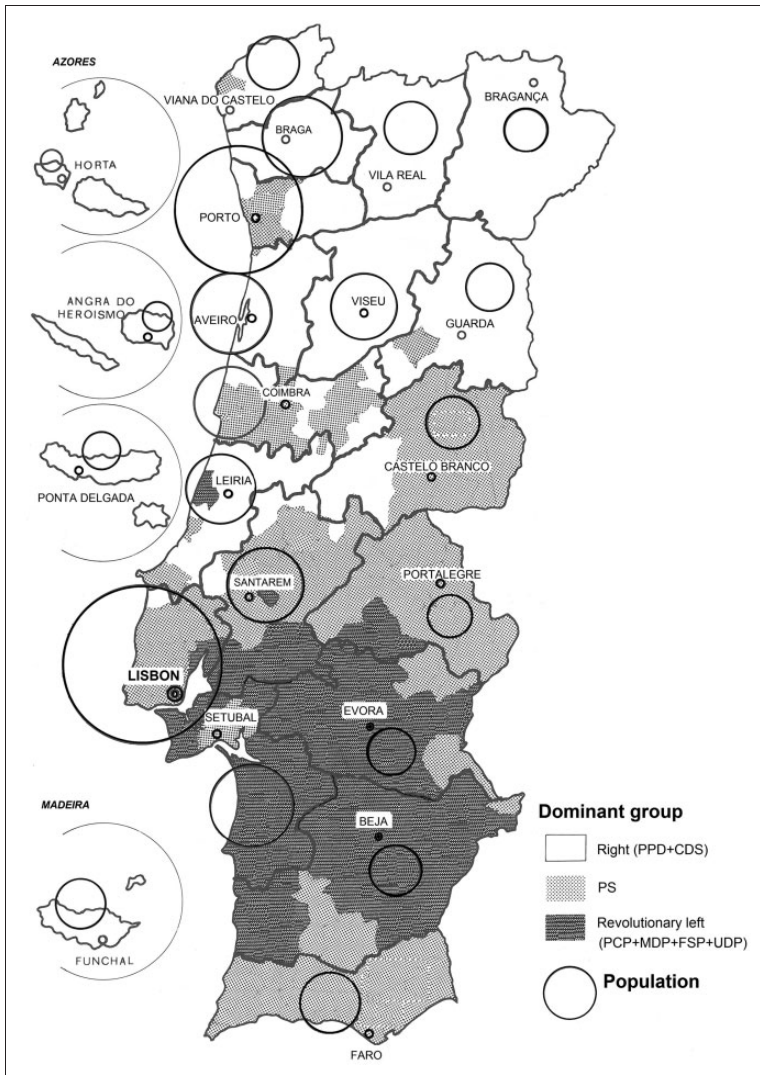
The regional distribution of the vote followed the pattern of the agrarian structures, which divides the more populous smallholder north, which voted for the centre-right (PPD and CDS), and the rural proletarian south, which opted for the radical left (PCP and its allies). In urban settings the PS got the majority of

30 'Portugal's plight', in *The Spectator*, (1 February 1975), 'Portugal Faces Soviet Takeover', in *Human Events* (29 March 1975).

31 Avillez and Soares, *Soares*, Maxwell, 'Portugal', Gomes and Sá, *Carlucci versus Kissinger*.

the votes, despite the PCP fairing very well in most of the industrial districts around Lisbon and Porto. The regional distribution of political preferences would underpin subsequent dynamics of mobilization and counter-mobilization (Map 1).

The pre-election *MFA-Political Parties Agreement* circumscribed the powers of the elected constituent assembly, but the more far reaching implications of the results could not be easily discarded. Framing the meaning of the political moment became a central issue. The victory of the socialists had to be downplayed



Map 1. Regional distribution of results in 1975 elections.
Source: SIPC, *Portugal, um guia para o processo*, (Lisbon, 1976).

for the MFA radicals to consolidate their positions. 'The main political force did not take part in the election' communist leader Álvaro Cunhal argued, 'The MFA itself would have won, had it gone to the polls'.³² The radical entourage of the MFA underlined that 'the voters had supported socialism, but a socialist program can only be carried out by a revolutionary government'. In addition, would not socialist voters follow the true socialist MFA, rather than the dubious Mário Soares, if they had the choice?³³ The regional pattern of the vote (see Map 1) also offered some opportunities for interpretation. As the MFA head of propaganda explained, 'the vote of the illiterate and church-controlled peasants of the north does not have the same value as the class conscious vote of the workers'.³⁴ The regional Catholic press, in turn, reacted against those who diminished the value of the northerners' votes or called them 'fascists and reactionaries', defending their right to have their own political preferences. In May, the gathering of thousands of pilgrims in the Virgin of Fatima sanctuary revealed the Catholic Church's ability to mobilize the population.³⁵ Meanwhile, in some northern localities where the PPD had won, demonstrations were held against communists and fellow travellers, deemed to have 'taken by assault' the local councils after the revolution. 'Let the People rule', thousands claimed in Montalegre's town council.³⁶

Vasco Gonçalves and the MFA radicals clung to power. According to them, and to modernization theory, for an underdeveloped country like Portugal, a western style political democracy was not a viable possibility. The only two real options were either the revolutionary transformation of the country or a fascist reaction, Pinochet-style.³⁷ 'Portugal will not be the Chile of Europe!' became a preferred slogan in radical manifestos, posters and demonstrations. Nonetheless, within the MFA things seemed increasingly out of joint. The movement broadly agreed over decolonization, strong intervention in the economy and resistance to right wing coup attempts, but an alignment with the Communist Party and the marginalisation of the most voted parties divided them. Four groups began to emerge within the MFA. In addition to the radical supporters of Vasco Gonçalves, an independent socialist group coalesced around Melo Antunes, while the charismatic Otelo de Carvalho, head of Lisbon's military division, favoured a far-left 'popular power' alternative that mistrusted the PCP and 'state socialism'. Finally, a less openly programmatic group, 'the operationals', was more preoccupied with maintaining the internal cohesion of the armed forces, a rather difficult task at the time.³⁸

32 *Acta do Conselho da Revolução*, 5 May 1975, Arquivo do Conselho da Revolução-Arquivos Nacionais da Torre do Tombo ACR-ANTT.

33 Castaño, *Mário Soares*.

34 R. Correia, *MFA e luta de classes* (Lisbon 1976), 137-8.

35 *Mensagem de Bragança* (30 May 1975), 2.

36 *Notícias de Chaves* (24 May 1975).

37 O. Neves, *Textos históricos da revolução* (Lisbon 1975-6), R.d. Fonseca, *A questão do Estado na Revolução Portuguesa: do 25 de abril de 1974 ao golpe de Tancos* (Lisbon 1983).

38 Mota, *A Resistência*, P.C. Manuel, *Uncertain Outcome, the Politics of the Portuguese Transition to Democracy* (Lanham, MD 1995).

The MFA assembly became the hub of political struggles. The different groups still had a very fluid composition and the voting patterns reflected a general wish to achieve consensus and maintain the movement's unity, and the absence of a substantial majority ideologically committed to the alternative positions. This led to pronounced shifts in the resolutions made by the assemblies in a matter of weeks. At the same time, all the different positions within the MFA were courted by the civilian parties and social organizations. The courting was made in the press through political declarations, but also by means of rallies and demonstrations expressing rejection or support.

On 19 June the MFA assembly voted for a moderate *Political action plan (Plano de acção política)* that recognised the centrality of the political parties. The PS, welcoming it, organized street demonstrations in Lisbon and Porto. But the radicals, in the words of Captain Duran Clemente, 'felt that they were still endorsed by the momentum of the revolution' and thus laboured for an alternative. Three weeks later, on 8 July, the radicals joined forces with the proponents of popular power and succeeded in making the assembly approve a very different blueprint for the future, the *People-MFA Alliance*.³⁹ This program marginalized the constituent assembly 'as we did not want to be trapped by parliamentary democracy and institutions' and called for the direct leadership of the MFA, in close connection with the workings of popular organizations and local assemblies.⁴⁰ The approval was celebrated by big demonstrations organized by the PCP, some popular organizations and the far left.

The *People-MFA Alliance* document implied a break with electoral democracy. At the same time, the Catholic radio station (*Rádio Renascença*) and a socialist-leaning newspaper (*República*) had been taken over by their radical workers. These threats to electoral legitimacy and to the freedom of the press redefined the political moment. The PS withdrew from the provisional government, accusing Vasco Gonçalves of foreshadowing a new dictatorship, and the PPD followed suit. They called on their supporters to take to the streets.

'Portugal belongs to the people, not to Moscow' chanted the crowds in anti-government demonstrations.⁴¹ The victors in the elections were now in the opposition camp and they put forward their own interpretation of the situation. According to them, the true program of the MFA had been perverted, as it promised to hand power over to civilian politicians. In addition, there was only one way of understanding democracy: the people had spoken in the election and every vote counted the same. The PS led the mobilization and was supported by the PPD, the CDS and the smaller right-wing parties. At the same time, small groups of extreme-right activists, side by side with militant anti-communists with some

39 Captain Duran Clemente in P. Brinca and E. Baia, *Memórias da Revolução no distrito de Setúbal. Vol II* (Setúbal 2002), 85.

40 Duran Clemente in Brinca and Baia, *Memórias II*, 85. A recent analysis of the documents in I. Rezola, *25 de Abril. Mitos de uma revolução* (Lisbon 2007).

41 *Correio do Ribatejo* (02 August 1975), 1.

democratic credentials, began to engage in political violence and stir anti-communist riots.⁴²

Anger was palpable in the whole north of the country. ‘The immensely heartening thing about what is going on in Portugal now’, the conservative British journalist Robert Moss reported from Braga, ‘is that so many ordinary people seem prepared to fight, if necessary, to prevent their country being turned into the Cuba of Western Europe’.⁴³ Political demonstrations and rallies were held all over Portugal. Those attending displayed their support for the Catholic hierarchy, their dislike of the bearded revolutionary military and their opposition to communism. The PS and the PPD organized demonstrations in all of the district capitals and in scores of smaller towns in the northern half of the country, while bishops called for rallies in Aveiro, Braga, Bragança, Coimbra, Guarda, Leiria, Vila Real and Viseu. In addition, landowners organized in opposition to land reform and showed their capacity to rally great numbers. The latter were especially militant and successful in the central districts of the country, Leiria, Santarém and Castelo Branco, where the proprietors of middle sized plots observed in fear the advances of land reform in the neighbouring area of large landed estates.

Mass rallies had a powerful impact on the strategic interaction between political actors. First, massive attendance to the demonstrations was used as testimony to the falsehood of the radicals’ interpretation of electoral results. PS voters displayed their support to their leaders, often using their Trade Union flags to emphasize the workers’ commitment to democratic liberties. Second, demonstrations helped to make visible the meaning of otherwise cold electoral figures – countering the bias of Lisbon’s media, mostly controlled by the radicals’ allies. Furthermore, the combination of electoral figures with demonstrations broke the spiral of silence that had favoured the hegemony of radical positions in the public arena. Finally, the demonstrations forced political actors to take into account the local electoral results, which dictated the replacement of radical local authorities by officials closer to local preferences.

The Catholic church, which had remained mostly silent about the virtues of democracy during the dictatorship, now mobilized in its defence and offered logistic support. The church-led rallies and demonstrations were attended by both men and women. Anti-communist prayers were frequent in mass, and some nocturnal processions against communism were organized, but in the main demonstrations called by the church participants mostly abstained from using religious images, such as virgins and saints, and instead, carried banners, sang secular songs and chanted slogans supporting freedom of expression and democracy. In Braga, the participants chanted ‘the Christian people are not reactionary’. In Viseu, the multitude sang *Canta amigo canta* – a protest song from the 1960s that said ‘Alone you are nothing, together we have the world in our hands’– and chanted ‘Bishop,

42 On the far right organizations, J. Sánchez Cervelló, *Cronologia das organizações de direita* (Coimbra 1994). E. Dâmaso, *A Invasão Spínolista* (Lisbon 1999). T.M. José, *A Contra-Revolução no 25 de Abril* (Lisbon 2014).

43 ‘Power to the people’, in *The Spectator* (16 August 1975), 210.

friend, the people are with you', 'Radio Renascença is ours' and 'The popular will has to be respected'.⁴⁴

Anti-communist violence erupted in at least 45 municipalities and more than 80 communist party and trade union offices were damaged. Most of the rioting took place in the northern half of the country, in the aftermath of anti-communist demonstrations that started peacefully. In Aveiro, for example, the church called for a silent march, but militant groups handed out propaganda leaflets calling for violence, sounded the tocsin, removed Communist posters from the streets and stirred the crowd into taking action. Most of the violence followed the same script. While chanting 'We are the people' and denouncing the communists and Moscow, some demonstrators converged on and surrounded local PCP offices, while those who were quicker to action began throwing stones and assaulting the buildings. Militant anti-communists who fostered the attacks were shocked by the eager participation of a mass of anonymous citizens.⁴⁵ Sttau Monteiro, a Lisbon journalist, was surprised to discover that most of the rioters were not supporting a return to 'fascism'; instead, they used slogans linked to the Carnation Revolution itself, such as 'The people rule' and 'Yes to democracy, no to dictatorship'.⁴⁶ In each region the anti-communists draw on local democratic traditions. In Viana do Castelo, for example, anti-communist leaflets appealed to the memory of Norton de Matos, the anti-salazarist leader of the 1940s.⁴⁷ Cries of 'Down with the communists', 'Burn them', and insults like 'thieves', 'assassins' and 'liars' were heard as well.⁴⁸

On several occasions, anti-communist crowds were on the streets for two and even three full days. In these cases, the people organized pickets and went to attack the offices of other left-wing parties, trade unions, and politically-committed lawyers and doctors. When identified as belonging to communist militants or sympathizers, cars were burned and the windows of cafes and businesses were stoned. Some groups simply wandered in excitement around town – shouting, exchanging news and running to wherever something seemed to be going on. In Famalicão, two communists were forced to flee their home when it was invaded by an angry crowd. 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 its contents burned.⁴⁹ 'Violence?' asked the church-owned regional press, 'To speak in the name of the people without representing the popular will, this is violence as well'.⁵⁰

44 *Jornal Novo* (21 July 1975), 2.

45 P.d. Abreu, *Do 25 de Abril ao 25 de Novembro. Memória do tempo perdido* (Lisbon 1984), 142–7.

46 *Diário de Lisboa*, (26 August 1975), 1, 20.

47 'O povo é que mais ordena', anonymous leaflet, Arquivo do Governo Civil de Viana do Castelo, 1975.

48 C.C.e.P.d.L. MDP, *Breve relato da Reacção em Fontão - Ponte de Lima* (s.l. 1975), 5. Gralheiro, *Os dois PREC*, 166–9.

49 *Jornal Novo* (21 July 1975); J.A. Burguete, *O caso Rio Maior* (Lisbon 1978), *Avante!*, *Dossier Terrorismo* (Lisbon 1978).

50 *Mensageiro de Bragança*, (27 July 1975), 2.

This mobilization caused the MFA to splinter. During the first days of the anti-communist campaign, the PCP sought to frame that mobilization as a reactionary and fascist operation against the Revolution. The attacks against PCP headquarters were easily presented as fascist terrorism, but when the PS called for mass demonstrations in Porto on 18 July and Lisbon the following day, the PCP stretched its reality-defining capabilities to the limit by announcing that those meetings were part of a new reactionary coup. The PCP and the MDP called on their partisans to barricade Lisbon, mirroring the strategy against Spínola and the 'silent majority' 10 months before.⁵¹ But now, after the election results and in the face of the anti-communists' show of force, only hard-core militants answered the call. The roadblocks in the provinces were poorly manned and 'powerless', so most of the traffic could cut through the pickets.⁵² Moreover, the labelling of Mário Soares and the PS as fascist reactionaries struck a dissonant chord with large sectors of the MFA. The head of military operations, Otelo de Carvalho, ordered the army to disband the roadblocks around Lisbon, so demonstrators could arrive unmolested.⁵³ In Porto, the multitude gathered in the football stadium, while in Lisbon it packed Alameda, a huge open square. The church also called on its faithful to attend the socialists' demonstrations and the turnout was impressive. The PS claimed that it was 'the biggest political demonstration ever'.⁵⁴

The setback forced the PCP to change tactics. The PS had won the day and the socialists' mass defiance had forced the military to take sides, creating a split in the MFA and greatly diminishing the communists' ability to make the most of the situation. From then on, the communists would try to restore the unity of the MFA, but their main allies, Vasco Gonçalves' radical military, were immersed in the military internecine struggle and trying to maintain the pace of revolutionary radicalization.⁵⁵ A propaganda campaign was launched, aimed at reinforcing Vasco Gonçalves' revolutionary leadership. It included a song that said 'Comrade Vasco, we will be your rampart of steel' and scores of plebiscitary demonstrations, widely attended in the industrial areas and the south.

Regarding the anti-communist riots in the north, MFA's military intelligence called on the army 'to repress the actions against the democratic order and cut the head of counterrevolution'.⁵⁶ The violence against the PCP showed that Lisbon had lost control of parts of the country. The radical cabinet faced a serious challenge: in order to govern, it needed to mobilize the coercive resources of the state. Developments in Vila Real district show that the combination of a committed local garrison and an equally committed police could make a control system work and prevent violence, despite the massive anti-communist leanings of the population.

51 'Povo e militares nas barricadas em defesa da revolução, *Diário de Notícias* (18 July 1975), 1. An account from Viseu, in Gralheiro, *Os dois PREC*.

52 Gralheiro, *Os dois PREC*, 164-5.

53 F. Soares Feio, 'Comício do PS na Fonte Luminosa' in Brinca and Baia, *Memórias II*, 73.

54 Cited in Castaño, *Mário Soares*.

55 R. Varela, *História do PCP na revolução dos cravos* (Lisbon 2011).

56 'SDCI report 5 August 1975', ACR-ANTT, vol. 12.

The local PPD lamented ‘the excessive presence of armed soldiers, making it seem like the people were an enemy that needed to be watched’ but this control meant that, in Vila Real, three large-scale anti-communist demonstrations took place that summer without major outbursts of violence.⁵⁷

Vila Real, however, was the exception. In most of the northern provinces the military officers were not politically committed and the police was still demoralized, waiting for reorganization. At the beginning of August, passivity in the face of ‘reactionary’ activities led to the dismissal of the police commanders of Aveiro, Coimbra, Chaves and Santarém.⁵⁸ After the first violent assaults on the PCP, the military commander of the Northern Military Region, brigadier Corvacho, had asked his men for a more committed defence of public order, but once deployed in the streets most of the units would not fire, which made their deterrence efforts flounder. The different garrisons scattered all over the country, some of which had hitherto only watched the Revolution from afar, were now forced to take part in it. Most of them, by their passive non-commitment, disobeyed orders and sided against the radicals. As the military intelligence complained, the units sent to protect the PCP offices ‘were inactive and sometimes even collaborated with the ransackings’.⁵⁹

As the local military refused to intervene, the naval infantry was sent to the north. They were deployed in Braga, but when their ‘warning shots’, supposedly fired into the air, killed two anti-communist demonstrators, a new uproar broke out. Would the liberating military become repressors? Would they be ‘a colonising force’, as the CDS labelled the naval infantry?⁶⁰

One of the victim’s funerals took place in Famalicão, near Porto, and according to the police, ‘the entire population attended’. After the burial, ‘the PCP’s office was assaulted and sacked and the cars of two communist militants were burned down’.⁶¹ Two streets were named after the victims, while in the recently inaugurated constituent assembly one PPD member of parliament demanded that ‘Portugal should never again hear the lugubrious sound of automatic rifles fired against the people’.⁶² The ready-made discursive framework that linked repression and fascism, one that had been consistently used against the dictatorship by the democratic opposition, could now be directed against Vasco Gonçalves’ government and the radical MFA. The outcry sent the naval infantry back to their base.⁶³

The disunity in the MFA ranks became public on 6 August 1975, when nine councillors of the revolution, out of a total of 20, issued a manifesto rejecting ‘Eastern European style socialism’. This *Melo Antunes document*, as it became

57 *Noticias de Chaves* (2 August 1975); *Noticias de Chaves* (6 September 1975).

58 *Comercio do Porto* (3 August 1975), D. Palacios Cerezales, ‘Fascist lackeys? Dealing with the police’s past during Portugal’s transition to democracy (1974–1980)’, *Portuguese Journal of Social Science*, 6, 3 (2007), 155–69.

59 SDCI report, 14 August 1975, ACR-ANTT, vol 12.

60 *Comercio do Porto* (28 August 1975).

61 GNR-CG, *Resumo dos factos*, 6 August 1975, AMI, ANTT, cx471.

62 *Diario da Assembleia Constituinte*, 6 August 1975, 668.

63 *Comercio do Porto* (28 August 1975).

known, supported a socialist economy, but rejected 'Leninist vanguards' and fully endorsed pluralist democracy. The signing of the manifesto was made public, thus sealing the signatories' strong commitment, while copies were sent to military units for the officers to sign. President Costa Gomes suspended the original subscribers from the Council of the Revolution, but they had already launched an open revolt within the MFA.⁶⁴

The political struggle, meanwhile, had become a competition for the ability to mobilize supporters and fill streets, squares and sporting pavilions with crowds showing unity and commitment. In the northern town of Viseu, '30,000 demonstrators congratulated Infantry 8 for having signed the Melo Antunes document'.⁶⁵ Violent crowds took the town the following day and destroyed the offices of nine left-wing parties, associations and trade unions, while the police and the military were mere passive spectators of the riots.⁶⁶ 'The true people-Armed Forces alliance is being forged between the popular masses of the north and the soldiers that reject repressing the people', the socialist Pedro Coelho claimed in a rally held in Évora. Pizarat Correia, head of the Southern Military Region, had also signed the document and some thousands of demonstrators answered the PS call to convene and hail him. On the other hand, Évora being a communist stronghold, the military had to protect the demonstrators in the face of a more numerous crowd that shouted against fascism and reactionary forces.⁶⁷

While in April 1974 the demonstrators that marched to the barracks all over the country wanted to congratulate the military, from August to November 1975 the parties that mobilized their supporters in front of the local garrison were courting them, asking them to take sides. 'Parties without a popular mandate and unable to win the vote want you to become an army of occupation' said a manifesto read in Castelo Branco: 'the people believe that... the military forces and the police will accept democratic authority and that they will take a stand against the establishment of any kind of dictatorship'.⁶⁸ All over the country the local garrison became the object of a sustained courtship campaign. Region by region, barracks by barracks, demonstrators called on the military for political definition, thus rendering visible the territorial expression of political polarization.

In southern Portugal, where the left was strongest, the demonstrators paraded in front of the barracks hailing land reform and the *People-MFA alliance*. In some places the same unit had different political suitors. In Santarém district, where the Tagus River separates the social and political north from the social and political south, tensions were running particularly high. The locally-based Armored Cavalry (EPC) had been the one to take Lisbon during the Carnation Revolution and had a great symbolic weight. On 8 August a demonstration paraded in front of the garrison greeting the land reform and the 'people-MFA alliance'. Although

64 V. Lourenço, 'Declaração de guerra', in Mota, *A Resistência*, 240–8.

65 *Correio do Porto* (12 August 1975).

66 *Correio do Porto* (13 August 1975).

67 *Jornal Novo*, (13 August 1975), 9. T. Almada, *Diário da Reforma Agrária* (Lisbon n.d.).

68 *Povo Livre*, (23 October 1975), 4.

the demonstrators were saluted by some officers, the unit would later vote to adhere to the Melo Antunes manifesto and became one of the key forces in the moderate military camp.⁶⁹

As more units sided with the Melo Antunes document, the PCP was left unguarded. The mobilization escalated on 16 August, when a PCP public meeting in Alcobaça (Leiria), where Álvaro Cunhal was going to make an appearance, was also attacked by a large crowd. The small town was filled with anti-communist demonstrators and the violent clashes forced the meeting to come to an end. Another communist rally scheduled in Porto for the following week was cancelled due to the threat of violence.⁷⁰ The commander of the Central Military Region, Charais, had signed the Melo Antunes document and had publicly declined to make his units fire at anti-communist rioters. In Porto, the commander of the Northern Military Region, Corvacho, was a committed radical, but he could not make his men obey. Trying to manage the now widespread indiscipline, the MFA moderates raised the tone of their defiance and organized the withdrawal of most of the units of the Northern Military Region from the radical chain of command: for as long as a radical remained in charge, they would rather deal with the Central Military Region.⁷¹ Dislodging Corvacho became the goal for the anti-communist coalition in the north. Thousands of demonstrators marched in the streets of Porto, Braga and Viana do Castelo protesting against the radical brigadier. A numbers competition ensued, with the radical left also organizing demonstrations of support. 'The small attendance to the demonstrations in favour of Corvacho shows that he has lost the support of the people', the CDS proclaimed.⁷² The popular mobilization and the signposting of the military allegiances territorialized the confrontation. In Lisbon and its industrial belt, as in the southern large landed estates provinces, the radicals dominated the streets and found support among the military stationed in local barracks. In the rest of the country, the anti-communist coalition was clearly stronger.

While the mass demonstrations could claim to embody the popular will, violence also played a peculiar role in the political process. The passive response to the sacking of PCP offices, in itself a public refusal to obey orders, made clear that the MFA moderates could now count on the mass of hitherto politically undefined officers to counter the radicals. In addition, a share of the MFA officers who until then had sided with the radicals became aware that the permanence of Vasco Gonçalves in office would mean a steadfast repressive policy. Events had shifted the meanings of the political moment: as this was not the peaceful transition to socialism that many MFA men had envisaged, many withdrew their support from the radicals. The following, distinctly bitter, MFA Assembly took place in

69 The demonstration in *Correio do Ribatejo* (9 August 1975). Adhesions to the Melo Antunes manifesto in *Jornal Novo* (13 August 1975); Mota, *A Resistência*, 130–3.

70 *Jornal Novo*, (18 August 1975), 10; *Jornal Novo*, (20 August 1975), 4.

71 Mota, *A Resistência*. C. Gordalina, 'Do 25 de Abril ao 25 de Novembro', in J.S. Martins et al. (eds), *A Geração do Fim. Infantaria 1954–2004*, (Lisbon 2007), 272–9.

72 *Comércio do Porto* (28 August 1975).

September. While the officers were discussing the political situation, big demonstrations were booing Corvacho in Porto and Viana do Castelo and cheering Charais in Aveiro and Coimbra.⁷³ The Assembly dismissed Vasco Gonçalves and Corvacho, and reshuffled the Council of the Revolution in favour of the moderates. A new cabinet was formed, tailored to the moderates' will. It was headed by Admiral Pinheiro de Azevedo, the PS and the PPD once again entered government and, in a delicate balancing act, the PCP accepted one seat.⁷⁴

As the sixth provisional government came into power, there was an abrupt halt in anti-communist popular violence. Social turmoil persisted nonetheless. In the north, the new military commander dismantled the radical units – not without popular resistance – and empowered the police. In Lisbon – where the popular power proponent Otelo de Carvalho was the military commander – and the south, in contrast, radicalized troops fraternized with the trade unions and other popular organizations, thus weakening government control.⁷⁵ As the occupation of large estates by landless peasants peaked, left-wing soldiers who disagreed with the moderate turn radicalized their indiscipline and newly-formed committees began to coordinate popular organizations towards the formation of a radical front.⁷⁶

A new mobilization campaign tried to revive the radicals' momentum and renew the alliance between the 'people' and the armed forces. In Évora, Setúbal, Lisbon, in the naval base of Almada and in the Montijo airfield, large crowds assembled to demonstrate that 'the workers' supported the revolution.⁷⁷ In response, the supporters of the new government once again took to the streets. 'The sixth provisional government represents the popular will', read an article published in the PS newspaper, full of pictures of demonstrators; 'The people of Coimbra showed its enthusiastic support for the government and to brigadier Charais', claimed the local press; 'Discipline! Discipline! Discipline!' chanted the crowds in Porto and Faro.⁷⁸ The PPD and the PS organized a new round of demonstrations in most district capitals. 'Military men', hailed a manifesto handed to Aveiro's Infantry Regiment, 'our presence here is the natural manifestation of our support to the true military, those that will not forget that they belong to the people and that they shall defend that same people'.⁷⁹ A similar wording had the opposite political meaning in the oath taken by the new recruits of Lisbon's artillery regiment, the radical

73 *Comércio do Porto*, (4 September 1975).

74 For the military manoeuvres, Sánchez Cervelló, *A revolução*, I. Rezola, 'As forças armadas, os capitães e a crise final do regime', in F. Rosas and P.A. Oliveira (eds), *A Transição falhada* (Lisbon 2004). For the composition of the different military and political organs, Manuel, *Uncertain Outcome*.

75 L.P. Gil, *Novembro 25, anatomia dum golpe* (Lisbon 1976). A first-hand account of the lack of police support in J.M. Parente, 'O incendio e saque das instalações diplomáticas de Espanha' in J.S. Martins et al. (eds), *A Geração do Fim. Infantaria 1954–2004*, (Lisbon 2007), 313–19.

76 J.L. Hammond, 'Popular Power and the Portuguese Far Left', *European Journal of Political Research*, 13 (1985), 207–25, Hammond, *Building Popular Power*.

77 J.S. Graca, 'Manifestacao...' in Brinca and Baia, *Memórias II*, 143–5.

78 *Portugal Socialista* (1 October 1975) *Correio do Sul* (13 November 1975).

79 *Povo Livre* (23 November 1975).

RALIS. There the soldiers, as they gave the clenched-fist salute, promised 'to be always on the side of the people'.⁸⁰

The spectre of civil war was looming. Already in May, when it became apparent that the communists were training some militias 'for the defence of the revolution', the PS had made clear that they would not remain passive: 'we outnumber the communists . . . if the organisation of militias is accepted, we will have our own.'⁸¹ In September, PPD's frontman Emídio Guerreiro had announced that they could easily count on 50,000 armed men, while Freitas do Amaral, the CDS leader, warned the people attending his meetings that they should 'remain vigilant in case we have to defend on the streets what they want to take away from us on the streets'. Several local Catholic journals reprinted an 'assessment of the prospect of armed struggle':

in the North, combative, patriotic, religious and anti-imperialist populations are close to its military men . . . In the South, rootless proletarians, obedient to Moscow and loosely linked to the anarchistic military. . . . May God help the best, may God help us.⁸²

Isolated from their context, these words could just be taken as empty angry menaces, but the consistent anti-communist mobilization for five long months made the civil war scenario a realistic possibility.

In November, Portugal was again the theatre of daily demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, some defending popular power and revolution and others supporting the government. Amidst rumours of a radical coup d'état, military intelligence collected reports on the different demonstrations, trying to measure the support for each of the players. In one week they registered 15 demonstrations and, according to them, almost 50,000 demonstrated in Porto against 'the rightist turn of the revolution', while the same number had shown their support for the government in Lisbon.⁸³ On 13 November a well-attended construction workers' demonstration arrived at the constituent assembly. They asked for government-backed higher wages, but the demonstration became a revolutionary statement when the multitude besieged the building, not letting the MPs either enter or exit. Lisbon's military units and the police refused to intervene. The workers held the assembly hostage for more than 30 hours, until the government fully accepted their demands. Finally on 20 November the cabinet announced that it had no conditions to govern and they went 'on strike', moving to Porto 'until the Armed Forces re-established the conditions for effective government'.

The moderate faction of the MFA prepared to outwit the radicals. On 25 November 1975 a move by the parachutists against their chain of command was

80 *Poder Popular*, November 1975, D.de Almeida, *Ascensão, apogeu e queda do Movimento das Forças Armadas*. (Lisbon 1978).

81 M. Soares and S. Zenha, *Actas do Conselho da Revolucao*, vol 1, 23 May 1975, ACR-ANTT.

82 *Mensagem de Braganca* (20 October 1975); *Mensagem de Braganca* (21 November 1975).

83 *Mapa de manifestações e comícios relativo ao período de 03NOV a 10NOV75*, ACR-ANTT, vol 12.

over-interpreted as a would-be far-left coup d'état; the pro-government military took advantage and mobilized the Commandos regiment to take control of Lisbon. Some radical military asked for a bold response, confident in the strength of the naval infantry, while trade unionists gathered in front of friendly military units and asked for weapons. However, in the northern districts the anti-communist crowds were also in the streets, barricading the roads, and they had more than proved their determination to fight. The radicals were once again faced with a choice: would they take control of Lisbon, at the risk of provoking a civil war? After some hesitations they conceded defeat: the naval infantry was not mobilized and the moderates won the day. Colonel Ramalho Eanes appeared now as the strong man of the moderate faction of the MFA and he led the political exploitation of this victory. He purged radical and populist officers and disbanded the undisciplined units. Traditional hierarchy was re-established within the armed forces and the police was revamped, putting an end to the crisis of authority. The revolution was over. Electoral democracy could proceed.⁸⁴

The MFA Assembly of September 1975 that dismissed Vasco Gonçalves, first, and then the military showdown of 25 November 1975, changed the track of the revolution and enhanced the prospects of electoral democracy. Neither of these events would have been possible without the anti-communist mobilization of the previous months. The decision to attend those demonstrations made by thousands of citizens undermined the interpretation of the electoral results put forward by the radical military, enabled the shifting of loyalties within the MFA and activated the hitherto passive sectors of the armed forces. If public meetings, rallies, and marches had been a significant thermometer of public preferences before the April 1975 vote, after the polls civil resistance became crucial for the translation of the electoral results into political power.

Leading accounts of the impact of social movements argue that democratization requires the demobilization of civil society. In the 1990s this view was challenged by authors that emphasized the positive role of the so-called 'mass publics', 'non-elites', 'social movements' and 'collective actors'. Bermeo proposed that the elites need to have a specific relationship with non-elites to be able to bargain in their name and represent them.⁸⁵ Glenn added that, as popular will becomes the yardstick of legitimacy and the elites have to compete for the conditional support of the masses, the elites are constrained in their options.⁸⁶ Finally, while some accounts of social mobilization presented it as external to the political process and amenable to political manipulation, Tarrow stressed that mass publics also have the ability to make strategic choices.⁸⁷ By analysing how the anti-communist mobilization of the summer and fall of 1975 affected the political process, this text has argued that far from endangering democratization, militant mobilization was crucial for imposing

84 D. Palacios Cerezales, *O poder caiu na rua. Crise de Estado e ações colectivas na revolução portuguesa, 1974-1975* (Lisbon 2003), 176-89.

85 N. Bermeo, *The Power of the People* (Madrid 1997).

86 J.K. Glenn, 'Contentious Politics and Democratization', *Political Studies*, 51, 1 (2003), 103.

87 Tarrow, 'Mass mobilization and regime change'.

the value of free competitive elections over alternative sources of legitimacy, namely 'revolution'.

The Portuguese men and women who took to the streets, answering calls for rallies, demonstrations, the boycott of political acts or the popular control of roadways, were active participants in their political future. By attending, or by remaining at home, they turned those calls into relevant political facts, albeit open to the discursive elaboration of its meaning in the political arena. They were strategic actors. Formal and informal networks supported the mobilizations: Church, political parties, trade unions and associations played their part in the events, but it would be an error to ignore the active discussion, the face to face interactions and the decisions of the common people who turned up. As we have seen, the socialists were surprised by their ability to fill a pavilion in January 1975. Anti-communist militants were shocked by the combativeness of thousands of anonymous demonstrators during the hot summer. In addition, organization and resources were not enough to mobilize a putative constituency. When progressive Catholics sided with the radicals, nobody attended their demonstrations.⁸⁸ Even the Communists discovered to their peril that, in July 1975, they were no longer able to mobilize the anti-fascist masses of September 1974.

Civil resistance assured that the voting became meaningful. While the substantial attendance to demonstrations flagged a widespread backing of electoral democracy, popular violence against PCP also played a strategic role, reframing the political situation. First this violence forced the radical government to resort to coercion, debilitating its claim to popular support and thus shifting the preferences of many MFA officers. Then it compelled the non-committed military, scattered all over the country, to take sides, breaking the radical's chain of command, thus reinforcing the moderates' position. Finally, popular violence played an important symbolic role, signalling a commitment to conflict escalation. Violence made credible the often announced threat to go for a civil war in case electoral results were disregarded. In short, mass mobilization and political violence backing clear electoral results isolated the most radical MFA officers and forced the majority of the military to accept electoral democracy, a scenario they preferred over civil war. In 1974, the Carnation Revolution was followed by a first wave of social mobilization, which put social issues into the political agenda and empowered a radical coalition. In the summer of 1975, a new wave of political protest dislodged the radicals. Only a small minority of the demonstrators had fought against dictatorship before the revolution, but the revolution had made democracy possible and, when they saw it in danger, they took to the streets chanting '*O povo é que mais ordena*' [The people rule].

88 '*Cristãos progressistas brincam às manifestações*', *Comércio do Porto* (1 September 1975).

Biographical Note

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