

Presentation

Democracies, Dictatorships, and Transitions: Brazil and Portugal in Comparative Perspectives

Apresentação

Democracias, ditaduras e transições:
Brasil e Portugal em perspectivas comparadas

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2024 marks the anniversary of three pivotal political and transitional processes in Brazil and Portugal. In 1964, Brazil witnessed a coup d'état that deposed President João Goulart and led to the establishment of a military dictatorship (FERREIRA, 2004; FERREIRA; GOMES, 2014).¹

1 In 2000, historian Daniel Aarão Reis presented a renewed interpretation of the 1964 dictatorship based on the concept of the “civil-military dictatorship”. Reis (2000) argued that the prevailing interpretations tended, for various reasons, to overlook the active civil participation in the coup and the development of the regime. The editors of this special issue do not assert that the designation “military dictatorship” inherently ignores active civil participation in

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Ten years later, with a coup led by middle-ranking officers in the Armed Forces, Portugal started a process of transition to democracy in Southern Europe, followed by Greece in July 1974 and Spain in November 1975 (PINTO, 2013; HUMLEBÆK, 2013; SOTIROPOULOS, 2013; O'DONNELL; SCHMITTER; WHITEHEAD, 1986). Finally, between 1984 and 1985, from the *Diretas Já* campaign to the election of Tancredo Neves in the Electoral College, Brazil took its final steps towards re-democratization (FREIRE, 2014; FREIRE; MARTINHO, 2012).

While much scholarly discourse has revolved around these transitional moments, there is a notable dearth of comparative analyses (PINTO; ARAÚJO, 2017; BRITO; GONZÁLEZ-ENRIQUEZ; AGUILAR-FERNÁNDEZ, 2005; RADCLIFF; KORNETIS; OLIVEIRA, 2023). This set of events decisively influenced the relations between Brazil and Portugal. While the proximity between both dictatorships in the second half of the 1960s was predictable, the same cannot be said of Brazil's choices following the crisis of the Portuguese dictatorship, which encompassed the Carnation Revolution and the almost simultaneous decolonization process (CARVALHO, 2014; MARTINHO, 2022; MENESES, 2020; PINTO, 2005). In the context of Brazilian democratization, Portugal was in an advanced process of integration into Europe and the redefinition of its political and economic priorities (PINTO; TEIXEIRA, 2005). Whether examined in isolation or through a comparative lens, these transitional processes have provided fertile ground for multifaceted perspectives and inquiries.

This special issue is structured around two main axes. The first revolves around the concept of political culture, understood as a “matrix of organization and understanding of political behavior”² (GEERTZ,

the coup d'état and the persistence of the dictatorship. At the same time, they have chosen to accept the individual preferences of each author, since the nature of the articles within this collection does not preclude divergent perspectives on this theme. For further insights on this matter, see Martins Filho (2014); Reis (2013).

2 Freely translated by the authors: “matriz de organização e compreensão dos comportamentos políticos”.

quoted by DUTRA, 2002, p. 17). Such matrices and patterns of behavior are intertwined “within a common vision of the world, in a shared reading of the past”³ (BERSTEIN, 1998, p. 362).⁴ This special issue, which is concerned with the analysis of processes that fluctuate between democratization and authoritarianism, emphasizes that political cultures are neither monolithic nor unchanging. Instead, they should be regarded as expressions of a global culture, even if they cannot be completely subsumed by it. It is crucial to underscore that political cultures are formed in conflict with other ideological realms, alternative fields of thought, and divergent value systems. After all, as Serge Berstein (1998, p. 355) stated, it was during the revolutionary crisis in France at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth that the political cultures of republicanism and traditionalism were formed in parallel to each other.

The second axis, highly pertinent in the field of political history, refers to the historical *fact*, to the *event*. Although we agree with Paul Ricoeur’s (2010, p. 159) assertion that “the past, understood as the sum of what actually occurred, lies beyond the historian’s grasp”,⁵ the challenge of interpreting the *fact* persists. We thus move away from perspectives that discard the notion of the event in favor of so-called stable categories like “conjuncture, structure, tendency, cycle, growth, crisis, etc.”⁶ (RICOEUR, 2010, p. 169-170). Far from constituting predictable repetitions and easily discernible sequences, devoid of surprises or unforeseen twists and turns, past phenomena or the traces they leave behind allow us to build narratives that, instead of fostering absolute certainties, open up possibilities for future inquiries (CHARTIER, 1994; GRIBAUDI, 1998). In the case of this special issue, our focus lies on

3 Freely translated by the authors: “numa visão comum do mundo, numa leitura partilhada do passado”.

4 About the concept of political culture, see also: Motta (2018).

5 Freely translated by the authors: “o passado, concebido como a soma do que efetivamente ocorreu, está fora do alcance do historiador”.

6 Freely translated by the authors: “conjuntura, estrutura, tendência, ciclo, crescimento, crise etc.”

the actions and facts stemming from men and women, institutions and societies, which at times allowed dictatorships to prevail, at times contributed to the construction of democracy.

The articles encompass a vast array of themes, addressing established discussions in historiography and the social sciences, as well as new, still insufficiently covered territories. Naturally, we do not disregard wide-ranging lines of interpretation, in keeping with the tradition initiated by Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead (1986), who pioneered comparative analyses of transitional processes in Southern Europe. This analytical model is present in Fernando Perlatto and Maria Inácia Rezola's study, albeit under a different methodological perspective. Their investigation revolves around the politics of memory connected to the Portuguese and Brazilian transitions, taking into account the specific nature of each of these processes, as well as the memories built around the dictatorships and the transition processes. They delve into the intricacies of a "dense conjuncture", the year 2014, scrutinizing the role of mainstream press in reporting on the authoritarian past and the democratic experience. Discussions about memory resurface in the following two articles. Maria Paula Araújo analyzes memories of female activists who fought against the Portuguese and Brazilian dictatorships. On top of establishing dialogues with gender studies, her work critically engages with two distinctive narratives: a memoir and a documentary film. Américo Freire delves into the realm of memorialist construction, through a study of two civilian organizations dedicated to crafting narratives about the lives and political trajectories of two crucial characters in the Portuguese and Brazilian transitions: the Mário Soares Foundation and the Lula Institute. Although Freire's primary focus is on these two institutions, he mentions similar organizations in other countries that both engaged with and moved away from the Portuguese and Brazilian experiences.

Another dimension explored within this special issue is the cultural question. Francisco Martinho scrutinizes the relations between fado and intervention song during the twilight of the Portuguese dictatorship and the revolutionary aftermath of the fall of the *Estado Novo*

regime. At the same time, he seeks to understand the relationship established between agents of the revolution and the most preeminent voice of fado, Amália Rodrigues. Tatyana Maia analyzes Brazilian political culture through the persistent legacy of military dictatorships within recent negationist movements, which have played a decisive role in the election of Jair Bolsonaro. Maia's work raises questions about the importance of the history of the present time for understanding the endurance of this "spectrum" that the "non-contemporary in the contemporary era" represents. The final article, by Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, grapples with what is certainly the great particularity of the Portuguese case: the colonial problem. Based on the perception that the conjuncture created by the end of the Second World War imposed a new reality for the colonizing nations, Jerónimo seeks to highlight how, in the last two decades of Portuguese colonialism, the dictatorship sought to implement what he terms "social welfare colonialism".

The themes explored here are wide-ranging and seek to shed new light on problems inherent to dictatorships and transitions to democracy. We are aware that they do not exhaust the mosaic of possibilities of analysis and interpretation. What we expect is that they will stimulate further inquiries and research on a subject that remains current in this century.

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