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Populism in the “mild-mannered” country – a history of Portuguese twentieth-century populist moments (1917--1976). This paper analyses Portuguese twentieth-century populist moments from a historical perspective. At the start of the current “populist wave”, pundits and academics justified the lack of support for populism in Portugal by falling back on the conservative metaphor of the “mild-mannered country” – claiming that the Portuguese were not prone to political radicalism. An examination of the country’s contemporary history reveals a different picture. Following case studies that encompass the Portuguese First Republic, the *Estado Novo* dictatorship, and the Carnation Revolution, we seek to demonstrate that populism in Portugal has been a force to be reckoned with.
KEYWORDS: populism; Portuguese contemporary history; social movements; charismatic leadership.

Populismo no país dos “brandos costumes” - uma história dos momentos populistas portugueses do século XX (1917--1976). Este artigo analisa os momentos populistas portugueses do século XX numa perspetiva histórica. No início da atual “vaga populista”, especialistas e académicos justificaram a falta de apoio ao populismo em Portugal recorrendo à metáfora conservadora do “país dos brandos costumes” – afirmando que os portugueses não eram propensos ao radicalismo político. Uma análise da história contemporânea do país revela um quadro diferente. Através de estudos de caso que englobam a Primeira República Portuguesa, a ditadura do Estado Novo e a Revolução dos Cravos, procuramos demonstrar que o populismo em Portugal tem sido uma força a ter em conta.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: populismo; História contemporânea portuguesa; movimentos sociais; liderança carismática.

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Populism in the "mild-mannered" country – a history of Portuguese twentieth-century populist moments (1917-1976)

INTRODUCTION

Populism has been a prominent feature of global politics for (at least) the past decade, but the "trend" arrived late in Portugal's case.[1] Academics and pundits were left to wonder about the reasons for the "absence" of populist parties and discourses in the country. Several arguments were put forward to justify this "exceptionalism": socioeconomic conjunctural specificities (Salgado and Silva, 2018), the "buffer" role played by traditional left-wing parties during the crisis (Lisi and Borghetto, 2019) and the discouraging legacies of the authoritarian regime (Heyne and Manucci, 2021), to name but a few.

However, this perplexity also led to some hasty claims asserting that the Portuguese electorate was averse to "negative" campaigns, mistrustful of blunt discourses and traditionally moderate "in relation to what it is willing to accept as radical discourse" (Almeida, 2018). These arguments play into the hands of the conservative image of the "mild-mannered" country, keen on forgetting moments when the crowd erupted as the driving force of political change. The recent emergence of *Chega* took charge of dismantling this narrative. But there are other ways to do so.

One of the most productive is through an analysis of Portuguese contemporary history. There were several populist moments throughout the twentieth century, emerging during different regimes, led by different personalities and supported and participated by multitudes with different demands and aspirations. Still, historians studying Portugal (and historians in general) have usually been reluctant to broach the subject of populism, often deemed as too

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"metaphysical" a concept (Honório, 2018). Although some works highlight its historical significance (Raby, 1983a, 1983b, 1988; Zúquete, 2022) much remains to be done because "without an analysis of the implications of the populist phenomenon, it is impossible to make sense of the political history of contemporary Portugal." (Raby, 1983b, p. 63).

Between the First Republic and the current rise of the populist radical right, several movements and charismatic leaderships managed to rally the disenfranchised multitude against a status quo often deemed impervious to popular demands. Delving into the lively field of populism studies allows us to rethink such moments, looking at them as more than mere episodical twitches in an otherwise tranquil political landscape. Together, they reveal not only an ever-changing understanding of what "real democracy" should look like but also similar patterns of mobilisation and resistance – either against aristocratic republicanism, fascism or standing for different ideals of democracy. With that in mind, we chose three poignant case studies. First, we will analyse Sidónio Pais' time as President of the Republic (1917-1918), underscoring the modern nature of his discursive and performative skills. We then look at Humberto Delgado's 1958 presidential run as leader of the democratic opposition to Salazar's *Estado Novo*, positioning him as a paradigmatic example of a post-fascist populist leader. Finally, we turn our attention to the post-revolutionary populist movements led by Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho and Ramalho Eanes following the 1976 presidential election.

These movements often referred to each other, but also to populist movements from around the globe. They shared discursive tropes, gestures, ideas, and mobilising strategies. If we consider these inspirations and repertoires, we can argue that populism is, in fact, a transhistorical "traveling idea", affiliated with the timeless debates about the nature of the democratic ideal, while at the same time adapting and transforming itself according to specific historical contexts. Therefore, we also want to highlight the relevance of the ongoing debates about populist phenomena to the study of history. The way in which populist movements engage with the past, weaving "retrotopias" (Bauman, 2017) that seek to take us back to an idealised time when the "people" lived together as one is already significant. But the newfound attention given to theoretical-discursive approaches and to the affective and performative dimensions of popular politics should also force a revision of seemingly consolidated narratives about past political movements, one that, hopefully, can also complexify our approach to present-day populist experiences.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY POPULISM?

It is traditional to begin discussions on populism by defensively admitting our inability to fully define it. This is not, however, due to a lack of theoretical development. There are several ways to make the concept operational, rendering it analytically valuable. The most diffused and pragmatic model was proposed by Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (Mudde, 2004; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017) in their "ideational approach". They argue that populism is characterised by moral opposition between the "people" (pure and good) and the "elite" (vile and corrupt), a "thin ideology" flexible enough to ally itself with different ideological values and principles (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). Although this approach promoted a significant increase in comparative studies, it was hampered by two serious liabilities.

First, if we bear in mind that both the "people" and the "elite" can be defined in radically different ways, such a definition can be either too broad – in that it would eventually become an inherent feature of democratic politics – or too restrictive – and therefore prone to normative bias, equating such a moral register with a threat to the values of pluralism and liberalism (Katsambekis, 2020). Mudde and Kaltwasser note that, although this Manichean language is a defining feature of populism, perspectives on who can or cannot be integrated into the categories of the people or the elite are changeable, which allows us to identify "subtypes" of populism. However, and to avoid once again breaking down the universe of movements that can be labeled populist, they offer only two categories to frame these different strands: exclusionary populism (the radical right) and inclusionary populism (the radical left). This dichotomy between exclusion and inclusion (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013) is organised in three dimensions – the material, the political, and the symbolic – but always highlighting the fact that both of these categories call the values of pluralism and liberalism into question. This equivalence has been politically useful to those who want to disqualify any political opponent who challenges the status quo. The emphasis on the moral paradigm serves a strategy that aims to delegitimise both the criticism that populists direct at the "system" and the divergent readings they convey in relation to society's economic and social divisions (Katsambekis, 2020). The demand for a strengthening of democracy, common in part of the populist movements, is thus disregarded.

Second, the ideational approach builds a deductive theory of populism, which first defines it conceptually and then makes it visible through different case studies – rather than inductively seeking a definition of the phenomenon through empirical or ethnographic research (Dean and Maiguashca, 2020). For an approach that emphasises the realm of ideas, it seems that the best way to

analyse them is through statistical text analysis. The ambition to build instruments that allow populism to be "measured" places the ideational approach within the traditional behaviourist theories of social sciences, rooted in a mechanical conception of causality (Hawkins, 2018). It shows a drift towards the scientification of the humanities, reflected in the inability to accept the incomplete and imperfect nature of human knowledge, which would position theory and not statistical methods as the privileged way to interpret certain social data (Mondon, 2022).

Instead, we opted for an approach that, rather than seeking to scrupulously define the concept of populism by focusing on the question of morality, highlights its discursive, performative and affective dimensions. In this sense, the work of Ernesto Laclau, namely *On Populist Reason* (2005) is fundamental. He argues that populism can be reduced neither to rhetorical appeals made in the face of certain popular demands nor to a typology of movement or leader labeled as anti-system. The specificity of the populist logic (or "reason") lies in the way it reflects the practices through which society is divided into antagonistic camps in the struggle for hegemony (Howarth, 2014) particularly in political movements and systems characterised by contestation. Laclau shifts his focus to the way that the "people" emerge as a collective actor in populist projects, capable of drawing political boundaries between an "us" and a "them" within a given social formation, creating and recreating political identities. First, there is a set of social demands that is not met through institutional means; when they are not met, these demands create a relationship of affinity between them (forming a "chain of equivalence"), cemented around a common symbolic universe that can be embodied by a leader who presents themselves as the interpreter of this generalised discontent. The more elements that are included in these chains and the more social spaces they cross, the higher the populist index of a given movement. Second, this chain is held together by "empty/floating signifiers" (signifiers without a meaning). Laclau states that these are not just concepts whose interpretations can be equivocal or ambiguous, but rather ways of referring to the limits of a given discourse, to the internal borders of an unattainable totality – arguing that this lack of definition is inscribed in the very nature of the political. The people of populism were thus constructed through a process of catachresis, one that recognises the existence of a place within the system of representation that is constitutively unrepresentable, but which, while remaining "empty", can be the object of processes of signification. Popular identity expresses the totality of a community as that which is denied and, as such, remains unattained.

Despite its contradictions and its more programmatic dimension, the discourse-theoretical approach proposed by Laclau significantly broadens the

horizon of possibilities for studies on populism. By focusing on the ontological and transcendental dimension of populism, while recognising the contingent nature of its manifestations, it shifts the focus from the more "static" ideological and institutional field to the performative and rhetorical construction of popular identities. The discursive and interdiscursive analysis of populism leaves the strictly semantic plane, highlighting how affective bonds are created and different emotions (e.g. hope, resentment or nostalgia), symbols, and narratives are summoned, which sediment and synthesise the boundaries between us and them. Populism becomes a *way* of doing politics. And one with a long history.

The three examples we present below exemplify the variety of forms populism can assume, whilst sharing a common repertoire. They refer to contexts of hegemonic crises,[2] when an anti-elitist discourse, allied with strong charismatic and emotional bonds between leader and supporters, led to radical reinterpretations of the democratic ideal, dislocating meanings and social identities.

POPULISM AND REPUBLICANISM DURING THE PRESIDENCY OF SIDÓNIO PAIS

Stanley Payne described *Sidonism* as a "charismatic and populist" movement (Payne, 1986, p. 170), but only to trace a direct link to the authoritarian and fascist regimes that followed. This thesis merited several revisions that stress the particularities of Sidónio's rule (Samara, 2019; Silva, 2006). However, it is worth rebutting it through some of the debates we have summarised. Particularly as his populist and charismatic traits are often mentioned, but seldom questioned.

The First Portuguese Republic, proclaimed on 5 October 1910, never met the expectations of large segments of the population, particularly after it proved incapable of dealing with the political and social instability fuelled by the increasingly high cost of living and the unpopular participation in the First World War. After several upheavals throughout the first years of the regime, the Sidónio Pais coup, on 5 December 1917, was arguably the most original attempt to "save" the Republic. *Sidonism* did not break with the republican ideal, but rather aimed to build a "New Republic". However, the appropriation of the strategic/symbolic places of the Republican Revolution during the

2 For Laclau, these are periods "in which the basic hegemonic articulations weaken and an increasing number of social elements assume the character of floating signifiers" (Laclau, 1990, p. 23).

December coup nurtured more an idea of a return to the roots than of novelty, as did the support of Machado Santos, the regime's most pre-eminent and popular military strategist and one of its "founding fathers".[3] Significantly, an editorial from *A Capital*, a newspaper of the republican left, stated that "revolutions are great expressions of this [popular] will and must be considered as such […]. No doubt the Constitution is not respected at this point, but in certain cases necessity makes the law" (Catroga and Almeida, 2010, p. 210). In fact, military coups were seen as genuine manifestations of the national will, even more so than elections, which were invariably restricted and fraudulent.

The rationality that governed the military was to be transposed to the governance of the country. Sidónio intended to establish a government of those who were morally and technically more "competent" to legislate, alienating the "parasitic" political and financial oligarchy. In the words of the essayist António Sérgio[4] (who initially supported him), "[…] it is imperative that competent specialists act supported by a truly national, non-partisan government, with the help of enlightened and attentive public opinion". This required the creation of an organised elite, above the parties, aligned with the nation and not the state. A "true democracy", free of "Jacobin-demagogic" vices (Medina, 1988, p. 17).

This sort of moralist discourse with technocratic undertones is paradigmatic of the association of republican values with populist discourse. A divide was created between those who work and the idle rulers, which overlapped with the traditional populist division between the people and the elite. These were the bases for an "orderly revolt", which finds echoes in early liberalism and calls for the "repositioning of a primordial and natural order, eliminating those who were and are agents of its perversion – those who are too many among the members of the people" (Costa, 2021).

3 Machado Santos (1875-1921) was one of the key organisers of the Republican Revolution. However, he never managed to find his place within the new regime, remaining in a state of permanent conflict with its governments and leaders. A proponent of a conservative, authoritarian, protectionist, colonialist corporativist and anti-partisan republican ideal, he led continuous attacks against the corrupt ruling elite. To redeem the Republic, he tried to use his popularity to rally the people against the government, through violence and conspiracy. Before supporting Sidónio, he had already defended the brief dictatorship of Pimenta de Castro.

4 António Sérgio (1883-1969) was one of the most remarkable figures of the democratic opposition to Salazar's *Estado Novo*. However, during the First Republic, he was concerned with the need to implement institutional and economic reforms that could stabilise the regime and promote an intellectual elite that could rise above the partisan divides in the name of the common good. He supported the December coup during its early stages because he was convinced that a transitory dictatorship was necessary to implement a global project of reforms, but soon became disenchanted.

WHAT WAS "NEW" ABOUT THE "NEW REPUBLIC"?

Sidónio strove for complete dissociation from the image of the civilian politicians who ruled the First Republic. The adoption of a martial bearing established a poignant counterpoint, reinforcing a discourse against disorder and tempered by a social and charitable element. This gave the so-called "president-king" popularity that was measurable by the crowds who greeted him throughout the country.

Nothing about his attitude was accidental. Sidónio Pais had long abandoned his military duties and when he decided to wear his uniform in public (and one from the lower ranks), he did so to present himself as an ordinary man, "a soldier like the others", although endowed with exceptional heroism. In addition, he invested in different means of communication to maximise proximity and communion with the people. Besides stamps, illustrated postcards, cartoons, and carefully staged photographs, Sidónio used hitherto little-explored propaganda mechanisms. He campaigned through whistle-stop tours, a strategy coined by the American populist William Jennings Bryan which proved useful in a year spent in a permanent plebiscite, visiting regions and people that he saw as neglected by Lisbon's governing elite.[5] Sidónio considered that it was imperative for any modern politician to "go to the people, listen to their complaints and listen to their hearts to know if the people are with him" (Gaspar et al., 2009). He also resorted to innovations in political communication – namely film –, a characteristic feature of populist leaders to this day.

To allow oneself to be photographed among the sick, children and the poor or horse riding while brandishing a sabre and directing the artillery against insurgents were two sides of the same propaganda strategy. The conquest of power involves building a narrative in which rhetoric, affect and imagination play a central role. His was rooted, first, in a heavily gendered notion of charisma – an assertive strongman, a warrior, ready to act and make difficult decisions. Second, in a benevolent, Christian-like approach to the destitute masses which saw him dubbed "Father of the Poor".[6] He embodied a romantic ideal of

5 Sidónio positioned himself as the voice of "deep Portugal", a rural and conservative world that seemed to be under an ontological threat due to a perversion of traditional values. This dichotomy between the hinterland and the centres of political and economic power is often associated by populist discourse to the opposition between the people and the elite. Trump's appeals to the "real people" of middle America versus the Washington "swamp" is a good example. In Portugal, more recently, André Ventura's *Chega* has also given significant symbolic relevance to the "heartland" of Portugal.

6 Similar epithets were attributed to some notable populist figures such as Getúlio Vargas or Eva Perón.

chivalry and masculinity whose stereotypes were heavily reinforced during the First World War (Mosse, 1998).

Sidónio Pais also called for the first direct universal suffrage for men in Portugal. He was thus fulfilling a promise of the republican revolution, abandoned on the grounds that extending the vote to those who were "unprepared" to elect their leaders could jeopardise the regime and its institutions. For Sidónio, this was an exercise in "democracy by acclamation" (Rosanvallon, 2020). Although less than 60% of the electorate took part, it was an act whose significance cannot be understated. The first direct election of a President of the Republic represented a shift of power from the parties to the presidency. Sidónio was notoriously distrustful of the parties, and even when he created his own, the National Republican Party, he made it subordinate. It was his executive power that was to be strengthened and, in a clearly populist style, ritualistically validated at the ballot box. The populist people, to use Deleuzian language, is a "body without organs", which partly justifies the leader's disrespect for all procedural norms and parliaments which served only the designs of the ruling class (Pires Aurélio, 2021).

Furthermore, his measures to alleviate the effects of the famine and pneumonia on the most destitute had clear antiplutocratic undertones, typical of populist economic programmes (Eichengreen, 2018).[7] Most of them were ephemeral or ineffective, however, even the most unsuspicious sectors recognised that the social work of *Sidonism* had appealed to segments of the working classes. Bento Gonçalves, Secretary-General of the Portuguese Communist Party between 1929 and 1942, would say that "[...] the proletariat, without a sure guide, were at the mercy of the first political adventurer who touched their feelings. The vanguard suffered the same fate". (Brandão, 1990, p. 10).

After the initial successes of the "New Republic", Sidónio's presidency saw an increase in tensions between monarchists and republicans, as well as disputes between parliamentarians and presidentialists. Moreover, the broad social front that had supported the coup began to crumble. Given his assassination in December 1918, it is difficult to understand to what extent his charisma could have overcome all these difficulties. But perhaps the most significant legacy of this brief period has to do with the military. If the armed forces already enjoyed a prestige that gave them important popular appeal,

7 Perhaps the most remarkable were the rationing policies like the free distribution of food stamps (to counteract hoarding and speculation), the creation of municipal granaries and the war time windfall tax. These were some of the more workerist and populist policies regarding trade and industry (Samara, 2003, p. 184). It was also during Sidónio's rule that the country's first state sponsored social housing projects were launched.

after his presidency they seem to have gained more legitimacy for future political interventions. The relevance that Sidónio Pais gave to military matters and the way that he used this element in his public performances to assert his power might have resulted in a hybridisation of values associated with the military and the political environment, making a lasting intervention of these bodies in government possible, or even desirable. The military dictatorship that followed and the role of the military during the *Estado Novo* – both for the regime and for the democratic opposition – are telling.

But there are also links between radical republicanism and populism that are worth stressing. The construction of political identities is emphasised, creating the "people" as a unified whole. Also, much of the pluralism advocated by both liberalism and representative democracy is nullified (Chaguaceda and Camero, 2021, p. 62). However, there are also notable ruptures. The importance given by republicanism to the rule of law and institutions is incompatible with the impetuous desacralisation of populism. Moreover, Sidónio's focus was not on the *populus* (the constituted part of society) but on the *plebs* (those excluded from political society) – something all too evident in his plebiscitary approach to democracy (Vatter, 2012, p. 255). That being said, he advocated a republic where the head of state is also the head of government, a "dictatorial republic" with echoes in the years of the Convention during the First French Republic.

SIDÓNIO'S INSPIRATIONS

Sidónio Pais was no neophyte. When he became a freemason, he adopted the name Carlyle, in an allusion to the Scottish historian who became famous for his apologetic work on heroic leadership (a forerunner of the "theory of great men"), where profiles such as those of Oliver Cromwell and, significantly, Napoleon stood out. If Sidónio's speeches are not a clear demonstration of a mimicry of Bonapartism, there are interesting points of comparison. Napoleon also began by serving the Republic and it was its perceived downfall that justified his coup. Once in power, both organised plebiscites, personalising the positions they occupied and giving rise to charismatic phenomena (Silva, 1997, p. 225).

Furthermore, it is possible to draw parallels with figures such as Boulanger (Laclau's archetype of an empty signifier) or Napoleon III, who was the subject of historiographical treatment similar to that of the founder of the *New Republic*. He too has been labeled a proto-fascist, despite some historians characterising his era as positive for democracy, having given a routine character to the practice of universal suffrage (albeit falsified) and contributing to the association between the idea of liberty and political democracy becoming

established (Silva, 1997; Watkins, 2002, p. 173). Napoleon III also resorted to travels around the country as a form of permanent plebiscite, as a *mise en scene* of democracy and sovereignty that conceived of the people as a uniform and unanimous mass. Moreover, his conception of popular sovereignty was part of a triple framework, similar in all respects to *Sidonism*: popular expression is enshrined by the plebiscite (Louis Napoleon, like Sidónio, was the first to gain national office through universal manhood suffrage); representation conceived as the incarnation of the people in a leader; a rejection of intermediary bodies (Rosanvallon, 2020, pp. 94-95).[8] The republican populism of Marshal Floriano Peixoto in Brazil can also be seen as an analogous case (Silva, 1997, p. 17).

On the national level, his affiliations were also diverse. He was often compared to the mythical King Sebastian[9] or, due to his defence of a government of the competent and his charitable verve, to King Peter V.[10] If it is true that the *Estado Novo* sought to appropriate his legacy (a desire that was consummated when his body was transferred to the National Pantheon pending its inauguration), we should not lose sight of the echoes that his leadership had in other political quarters. Significantly, Sidónio Pais even had an impact on young Humberto Delgado, who said that he learned to respect and fear the crowds during Sidónio's rallies (Delgado and Figueiredo, 1991).

HUMBERTO DELGADO'S POST-FASCIST POPULISM

Humberto Delgado's presidential run represented one of the greatest threats faced by the *Estado Novo* before the Carnation Revolution. With the end of the Second World War, the Iberian Peninsula had become the last stronghold of an ideology that seemed irretrievably defunct, and the international defeat of fascism provided new arguments and hopes for those who sought to overthrow the dictatorship. Although the regime survived the crises triggered by the post-1945 world, tensions started to emerge, with the military leading putschist conspiracies and the reorganisation of opposition movements. The regime was able to respond to all these threats: the coups were thwarted; the opposition was harshly repressed, and Salazar managed to guarantee relative tranquillity

8 Also, Sidónio's and Louis Napoleon's appeals to social order were framed both by a reiteration of the republican ideals and by a revalorisation of the role of the church to enhance their legitimacy.

9 His disappearance in battle gave rise to a saviour myth that postulated that he would eventually come back and save the country from its state of decay.

10 His reign is often remembered as one dedicated to the improvement of the living standards of the people. His dedication to the poor and the sick, allied to his untimely death, further enhanced the processes of mythification.

for a few years. However, this was suddenly interrupted by Delgado's political "earthquake".

In 1958, a presidential election was held, and General Humberto Delgado was chosen to run against the representative of the National Union (the regime's single party), Américo Tomás. This option was not a pacific one in opposition circles, as Delgado was a military man who had long been committed to defending the dictatorship. After a stint in Washington, as the Portuguese military *attaché*, his positions on Portuguese politics started to take on a more critical tone, though not enough to put an end to doubts about his ideological stances.

Among the defenders of his candidacy was, again, António Sérgio, who argued that the ideal candidate for the opposition should meet two essential conditions:

> […] to be military, to somehow engage the army as a trustee of the seriousness of the electoral process; and to be a dissident of the regime, to facilitate the support of the repentant men of the 'situation', many of whom still occupying important positions of strength. [Pereira, 2005, p. 584]

In a similar vein, others would say that the electorate should be advised to vote for Delgado and not for Arlindo Vicente (the candidate of the Portuguese Communist Party) because "the local panorama prophesies mass support for the general, for his moderate features, his untouchability and even for his stripes" (Pereira, 2005, p. 620).

DELGADO'S MILITARY POPULISM

Both statements highlight the "populist relationship" Portuguese society had with the military, rooted in an element of instrumentalisation and dependency and a metaphysical conception of the moral values of the military (Santos, 1990, pp. 57-58).

The traditional republicanism of the Armed Forces allowed them to be presented as the "sons of the people" and their protectors against the arbitrary actions of the elite, as we have seen. Keenly aware of this, the dictatorship sought to obtain their support by attributing the status of "moral reserve of the nation" to the military. But this proved to be a double-edged sword. While the military remained on the regime's side, stability seemed guaranteed, but if the opposition succeeded in getting some military backing, the whole edifice of the regime would be called into question. As we shall see, the values that guided Delgado were, in fact, the same that led him to support the dictatorship in the first place. His campaign showcases how the defence of military virtue,

honour and discipline can turn against the regime if its institutions come to be generally perceived as hotbeds of corruption.

This instrumentalisation of the military by the opposition was of great concern for the regime. After the success of his first meetings, the authorities decided to ban the general from participating in political initiatives wearing his uniform. The General obliged and this did not go unnoticed. One of Delgado's staff members would say the following:

> Your uniform, General, your uniform of a Man without fear, of a liberator and Chief of the people, that uniform has even more stars, it has all the stars of all the hopes of that same people and it was woven with the rich cloths of the rich and the poor rags of the poor, in a mixture of faith that unites them all around the Man who spoke to them clearly and without fear and was therefore understood. [Pereira, 2005, pp. 628-629]

It would be difficult to find a passage that better summarises the different symbolic meanings given to the uniform, used here as an allegory for the inter-class and patriotic patchwork that makes up the nation. But Delgado's appeal was not limited to the call to the uniform. His personality also seemed to justify much of the hopes placed on him.

HURRICANE DELGADO AND HIS POLITICAL STYLE

Delgado became the embodiment of a mission of salvation, with a clear enemy and a strong public presence, based on physical courage and boldness. Delgado, like Sidónio, was at times an almost caricatural representation of the "virtues" of military *machismo* that we associate with caudillos everywhere. He invariably presented himself armed, barking orders at lower-ranking military and police forces. But his style and discourse had a more transgressive nature. He often refused to obey the orders of the political police, whom he frequently insulted and threatened, and resorted to assertive, humorous and at times vulgar language during his speeches – a use of "bad manners" (Aiolfi, 2022) which distanced him from the politicians of the regime while bringing him closer to large numbers of followers. He was abrupt and almost frivolous in the way he approached issues as decisive as the fate to be given to Salazar (summarised in the famous outburst "obviously, I'll dismiss him"). In his own words, these attitudes translated thoughts that "people had cherished for years", but which "due to justifiable fear or extraordinary cleverness, were never expressed in words". Private expressions became public and a discourse that had remained hidden started a process of catharsis, earning Delgado the epithet of the "fearless general".

This audacity played a decisive role in his popularity, allowing him to gain support from the most unusual sources – from monarchists to anarchists.

In fact, among the opposition to the regime, only the communists seemed reluctant to support him, as they did not want to see their influence dispersed in a wider movement that they could not control. In any case, the more traditional opposition sectors felt overtaken by a movement that, in a short period of time, with limited propaganda and with little or no organisation, had managed to hold rallies attended, apparently spontaneously, by thousands of people. After all, with his straightforwardness and refusal to compromise, Humberto Delgado had achieved something that would have been unimaginable just a short time before: he had put the fall of Salazar on the immediate agenda and made it a direct consequence of his election.

The most impressive of his rallies took place in Porto. After a train journey from Lisbon with several forced stops along the way due to the enthusiasm of the people, Delgado was received by a crowd the likes of which the regime had never seen. Reports from that day reveal the transcendental nature of a campaign that had taken on a messianic dimension. "He was the people, and the people were everything for him", said one of his supporters, effortlessly highlighting the populist character of the moment. "The people gained faith; it was a resurrection of feelings for the lives of those people" (Rosa, 2015, pp. 223-224), said another, stressing both the emotional bond established between leader and supporters and the idea that the General's campaign was bringing back something that had been lost.

The regime could not allow a repetition of such an event. After Porto, all other meetings were heavily controlled by the police and harshly repressed at the slightest outburst of popular defiance against the regime. However, an indelible mark had already been left on the imagination of those who opposed the regime, and the memory of Delgado's campaign would resonate for years to come.

DELGADO'S POST-FASCIST POPULISM

Despite Delgado's antagonism towards the regime, the rupture that his candidacy heralded did not call into question all the ideological and moral pillars of the *Estado Novo*. Instead, we might think of Delgado as a manifestation of what Federico Finchelstein (2019) called "post-fascist populism". He defines it as an attempt to bring the fascist experiment to democracy, blending social participation with intolerance and a rejection of pluralism. This would characterise leaderships that, although inspired by fascism, recognised that they could not recreate it after 1945. Alternatively, they proposed authoritarian interpretations of democratic ideals, abandoning unrestricted violence and coordinating fascist and liberal legacies. Notable cases include Juan Perón, but also General de Gaulle. There is no evidence that either of them directly inspired Delgado,

but their discourses and political trajectories do share compelling affinities. Namely, some core post-fascist features: palingenetic nationalism; conspiracy theorising; charismatic authority and militaristic masculinity (Traverso and Meyran, 2019). In short, a political logic that represented both continuity and a transformation of fascist ideals, rearticulated through a process of historical resemiotisation (Newth and Maccaferri, 2022).[11]

In his electoral manifesto, he defined the Portuguese people as "austere, principled and unified with regard to essential values – the Homeland, Family and Religion". This was nothing more than an indolent paraphrasing of Salazar's triptych, "God, Fatherland and Family". He would also avoid defining his candidacy as "oppositionist" or "democratic", placing the emphasis instead on "independence" and appropriating concepts often employed by the government, such as "national unity" or "salvation". Taking the contradictions of his programme to their ultimate consequences, he would even define himself simultaneously as "a citizen identified with the current Constitution and with the precepts of the Universal Declaration of Human and Citizen's Rights approved by the United Nations" – which to any antifascist of the time was a contradiction in terms.

Moreover, his goal was not to abolish the regime, but to restore it according to what he perceived as its foundational values – much like we have seen in the case of Sidónio. The first declaration of his candidacy puts it clearly:

> If it was the Army that on 28 May 1926 [the foundational date of the regime] removed the Republic from its normal constitutionality, it is only fair, logical and necessary that now, one of its eminent representatives and also a fighter of 28 May, should, through legal proceedings, reintegrate the country into the offended constitutionality, bringing into full force the rights and guarantees expressed in the Portuguese Constitution of 1933. [Rosa, 2015, pp. 207-208]

We cannot know what type of leadership the general, if elected, would impose, although his confessed distrust for parties and the idea of setting up a provisional "strong and authoritative" military government might lead one to believe that his enthronement as a model democrat was rash.

Delgado's programme clashed with some of the core principles and values of the democratic opposition. His campaign, based on generic slogans and the primacy of patriotism, sought a common denominator that would win him wide support and erode the ranks of the ruling party. A former Salazar acolyte

11 This differs from neo-fascism, which is a fascist-inspired ideology based on the defence of fascist ideals after their defeat in the aftermath of the Second World War (Bruno, 2022).

and serving general, his candidacy attracted segments of the population that the traditional republican candidates did not appeal to. Rather than being transformed by the irresistible liberalising appeal of the USA during his stay in Washington, Delgado mirrored the tensions introduced by the Cold War, sketching a third way between capitalism and communism, mixing authoritarian legacies with democratic precepts and adopting a style and language that gave new value to the ritual nature of the political spectacle. In any case, this is a typical example of a charismatic leader and a markedly populist movement, which populated the imagination of many of those who, years later, became involved in the Carnation Revolution.

JANUS-FACED POPULISM – *EANISM* AND *OTELISM*

The Carnation Revolution began a new stage in the relationship between the Armed Forces and Portuguese society. The aura the military already had was now associated with their role as liberators of the people from authoritarian rule. The 25 April 1974 military coup was followed by a radical, transformative and largely autonomous popular movement with a wide array of demands. As the new regime was unable to respond to them through institutional channels, it was up to the military to lend a hand, finding concrete solutions for the problems of the working classes. The popular ratification of the coup was essential for the establishment of what became known as the "People/MFA (Armed Forces Movement) Alliance". Conditions were ripe for another populist moment in Portuguese history. The demise of the old order was followed by a heterogenous crisis where different projects for the future of the nation clashed during months of intense political struggle.

And fully fledged populist leaders with a long-lasting impact on the political imaginary of the time did emerge, representing different sensibilities regarding the outcome of the Revolution. Namely Ramalho Eanes and Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho. If the former came to represent the ambitions of those who sought a "normalisation" of political life and a transition towards liberal democracy, the latter embodied the hopes of those who wanted to extend the revolutionary process. Each of them is indelibly linked to the dates that usually delimit the Revolution. While Otelo was the beginning, the face of April's new dawn, Eanes represented a possible ending to the revolutionary excesses. Both shared striking antagonisms, but also communalities.

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1976

The 1976 presidential election pitted them against one another, polarising Portuguese society between two antagonistic blocs which synthesised

incompatible values and ideals. If on one side there was the "operational brain" of the Revolution, who proposed to take the spirit of "25 April to the Presidency" (Otelo), on the other was the strategist of the 25 November 1975 coup,[12] who presented himself as the guarantor of "Freedom in Safety" (Eanes). They offered their voters two portraits where they could project both an ideal of society and an ideal of themselves. Otelo's candidacy enabled the radical left, faced with the disintegration of its ranks, to recover its momentum – albeit temporarily. In turn, the moderate sectors considered it necessary to form a common bloc in support of a candidate capable of debunking any extremist impetus. This only seemed possible through the profile and trajectory of Ramalho Eanes.

Both Otelo and Eanes claimed to place the interests of the people above their own, running for office to safeguard both national identities, and the conquests of the Revolution – of which they had different understandings. And they could only be successful if they managed to transcend partisan disputes, something they managed to do through vague but emotionally bonding discourses and performances.

OTELO'S RADICAL POPULISM

Otelo underwent a process of speedy political radicalisation from 1974 onwards. At the helm of COPCON,[13] he gave military support to popular movements, defending house occupations and land seizures. This granted him a mass following, sustained by the sympathy of workers' committees, neighbourhood committees and cooperatives. Significantly, he would consider that he could have been the Fidel Castro of Europe, had he only "read more". After all, both led loosely organised movements identified with the aspirations of the oppressed, while disdaining party politics and seeking to appeal directly to the masses (Raby, 1983a, p. 3). As for his political organisation, he borrowed heavily from Samora Machel's FRELIMO[14] and its interpretation of grassroots democracy. Although Otelo's political influence had greatly diminished by 25 November 1975 coup, he considered himself to have been invested with a popular mandate he could not ignore. In May 1976, he confirmed his presidential run, a decision that led to "the purest expression of radical populism in contemporary Europe" (Raby, 1983b, p. 75).

12 Military operation instigated by the seizure of military complexes by dissident paratroopers, perceived as a preamble to a *coup d'état* plotted by military personnel sympathetic to the radical left. It provoked successful retaliation from the "moderate" military units, led by Eanes, who became a symbol for the cause of "order".

13 A military command which backed popular movements in both urban and rural contexts.

14 Mozambique's national liberation movement.

Otelo’s campaign reinforced the idea that Portuguese society was divided into two opposing poles. On one side was the candidate chosen by the bourgeois parties, the landowners and the bosses (R. Eanes), and on the other, the candidate of “popular unity”. The Manichean divisions created by the Revolution were clear: exploiters against exploited, rich against poor, the bourgeoisie and the capitalists against the workers and the people. For Otelo, the working classes he sought to defend are seen as a relationship of opposition. He would classify them as “all those who live from their work and only have their work to live on. They are the office workers, the civil servants, the industrial workers, the agricultural workers, the small and medium farmers and tenant farmers, the poor merchants” (Ferreira, 1976). The class dimension that remained absent in Eanes could hardly be missed in Otelo’s speeches.

His view on what democracy should look like is also revealing of the populist nature of his platform. We were faced with a scheme of popular organisation based on a military-hampered direct democracy that valued the virtues of anti-parliamentarianism and anti-bourgeois non-partisanship (Raby, 1983a, p. 31). Otelo and his supporters espoused a radical conception of citizenship and an aspiration for a profound transformation of the capitalist order and, although this did not amount to a political programme, it was enough to create a political frontier between the people and the oligarchy in a typically left populist fashion (Katsambekis, 2019).

Otelo’s radical left credentials were also evident when he defended the need to “theorise practice”. That is, to denounce the revolutionary intellectuals who impose their frameworks on reality, in a critique typical of left-wing populism (Mouffe, 2019)”. The theory ought to emanate from grassroots action, from the spontaneity of the popular movement, directed against those who dubbed it “anarcho-populism” or sought to tame it through a Leninist party (Zúquete, 2022, p. 121).

During his campaign, he used a wide array of popular symbols in order to arouse emotions and mobilise collective imagination. The first rally was in Grândola, the town that became the anthem of the Revolution, alongside Zeca Afonso[15] and immersed in a sea of carnations. The idea was to allegorically go back to the first day of the Revolution, recreating it whenever possible. Also, notably, one of his first initiatives was to recreate the journey Delgado had made to Porto in 1958. Otelo established a symmetry between both events, appearing before the crowd alongside a poster of Humberto Delgado. In his opinion, the parallel was justified. He also had as adversaries “most of the

15 Singer-songwriter who composed several songs decrying the regime, among them “Grândola, Vila Morena”, the most notable anthem of the Revolution.

apparatus, the campaign money and the media" and, while it was true that he was not facing an established "tyrannical" power, he was facing a "not yet tyrannical" power seeking to establish itself. In both cases, we were dealing with charismatic leaders involved in radicalisation dynamics that managed to transcend the institutional and organisational limitations of their formal support bases (Raby, 1983b, p. 76). By promoting this affiliation, Otelo was also seeking to reactivate the antifascist past, positioning himself as a pallbearer of a struggle that was one and the same.

The results gave Otelo 16% of the national vote, concentrated mostly in Lisbon's industrial belt and the rural south. However, the lack of organising structures and several sectarian quibbles ended up eroding that support base during the following months. His campaign was the last cry of those who wanted to reignite the revolutionary process, but nonetheless the most expressive electoral result of the Portuguese radical left to this day.[16]

Eanes' orderly populism

Ramalho Eanes' manifesto was conceived as a way to harmoniously articulate the interests of his heterogeneous support base. The general himself considered that it contained "generic statements" and was "open to various interpretations". According to his opponents, the manifesto seemed "made in a political laboratory, in order to please all those who support it, without strictly saying anything".[17] In fact, by putting the focus on the "intransigent defence of workers' rights", democratic achievements, national independence and the Constitution, it differed very little from any other. However, when Eanes discussed those very ideas at rallies and interviews, this started to change.

The Revolution had linked the people to the working classes, stressing a class dimension which was in stark opposition to the images of the people disseminated by the ideology of the *Estado Novo*. Eanes' campaign, however, engaged in a new process of resignification of the collective subject of the Revolution. Pointing to the need to put an end to the "excesses" that threatened to "replace one oppressor by another", he considered that the people comprised all those who were interested in a project of national reconstruction, including landowners and businessmen. Despite this broader understanding, he sought to marginalise Otelo's "supporters". He labelled them as "parasites who build utopian revolutions at the coffee table", demanding they "also work and

16 For more on the otelist movements following the elections see Ferreira (2019); Gonçalves (2023).

17 *Gazeta da Semana*, 03-06-1976, p. 4.

participate in the real revolution, putting aside hatred and intolerance".[18] The words and the phrasing reveal affinities with the "orderly" populism we have associated with Sidónio. The idea of revolution was transformed, moving into the field of the concrete achievement of a common goal: the reconstruction of the country. Otelo's supporters, on the other hand, were perceived as "bands of utopians, not to say idiots", at the service of external agendas. Socialism, a word that had been co-opted by almost all political forces by that time, was one of these foreign ideas that, in his view, went against 800 years of Portuguese history.

His discourse was permeated by the "regenerative" logic of populism. Revolutionary discourse should be replaced by "honesty" and, above all, "common sense" and "competence". By this he meant restoring the rule of law, exchanging revolutionary legitimacy for constitutional legality and giving citizens a sense of security that would allow everyone to know "what they can count on".

He was not the model of a "popular" candidate, either in terms of his public performances or in the content of his programme. However, it should be noted that, at the time, this apparent lack of "charisma" appealed to certain segments of the population. If it was understood that the wish of most of the Portuguese electorate was to put an end to almost two years of instability, Eanes could be elected President "by virtue of a profound desire for peace, order and security, more than by loyalty to a socialist programme".[19]

After the lukewarm start to his campaign, the hostile feelings aroused during his trips to the south of the country reinforced the personality traits that helped Eanes become president. After an attack on his motorcade, the images of his defiant attitude made the front pages of newspapers and helped build a portrait of physical bravery while praising "his composure, dignity and courage in the face of all provocation".[20] What was once seen as a sign of rigidity, was now perceived as resolution and determination. Charisma is in the eye of the beholder.

Eanes' supporters also voted for a candidate who showed a deep distrust in the party system, showcased by his difficult relations with the leaders of the two main parties (PS and PPD[21]). This is not to say that Eanes was opposed to the establishment of liberal democracy; however, it shows that at a time of crisis, populist rhetoric was indispensable to gathering significant popular support around the democratisation process idealised by the "moderates".

18 *Jornal Novo*, 21-06-1976, p. 8.

19 *Expresso*, 19-06-76, p. 4.

20 *Jornal Novo*, 23-06-76, p. 6.

21 The Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Party.

His two terms as president were characterised by tentative suggestions of a move towards presidentialism, which saw him dubbed as “Bonapartist” and “Gaullist”, but was also compared to “Sidonism” (Maltez, 2005, p. 236). The creation of an *Eanist* party in the mid-1980s (aptly named the Democratic Renovation Party), with the goal of “bringing morality into Portuguese political life” and “renovating democracy” after his second term, was even more explicit in its populist rhetoric, which remained politically relevant until the end of the 1980s (Zúquete, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

There is a thread connecting these populist moments to which no historian should be indifferent – the way that populist movements engage with the past and with history. The new wave of populism has shown, rather emphatically, that resorting to evocations of the past – either exalting moments of national glory or those where there was an idealised sense of unity among the people – is one of the most effective ways to build strong identarian attachments. This sort of use of the past is well identified within the rhetoric of the populist radical right, whose nostalgia seems motivated by a longing for a restoration of an ideal of national (but also temporal) sovereignty lost in a globalised and multicultural world (Scopelliti and Bruno, 2023). But populist movements in general are built on political antagonisms that follow a contingent choreography, albeit one permeated by sedimentations and reactivations across the political spectrum (Laclau, 1990; Venizelos and Stavrakakis, 2023). Nostalgia is, therefore, not just a reactionary or conservative emotion, as its radical declinations can deploy the past to right historical injustices, honour those who would otherwise be forgotten and continue their struggles (Kenny, 2017).

Using the past to obtain an emotional attachment to a certain political cause is not exclusive to populism. In the same way that vehement appeals to the people’s sovereignty are not. Emotions are never absent from political performances (Eklundh, 2020). However, populist movements are better equipped for this exercise in political alchemy, as any platform that aggregates a wide range of people requires an ability to assemble different legacies and memories, no matter how contradictory, into the same “history”. What we can be sure of is that every populist movement has a veritable repository of past populist experiences that can be put to work for different political agendas. All of them are part of continuous transhistorical reinterpretations of the democratic ideal that reveal how history can act as a guide between the present and the future and as an intermediary between a collective memory and a longing for hope (Elçi, 2021).

As for the case of Spain and Portugal – the former "exceptions" in the European populist surge – they owe much to the tropes of the populist radical right movements of our time. However, they also have a wide assortment of repertoires they can mobilise, either to recover an authoritarian discourse in post-fascist fashion or to affiliate their political projects with deeply seated myths of national decadence and salvation rooted in nostalgic exultation of a glorious national past (Ferreira Dias, 2022; Forti, 2023).

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