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UNSETTLING THE IBERIAN
TRANSITIONS TO DEMOCRACY
OF THE 1970S¹*Pamela Radcliff*

There is no question that one of the most dramatic turning points in twentieth-century Iberian history was the transition from authoritarian to democratic regimes in Spain and in Portugal in the mid 1970s. Almost from the beginning, the two processes were linked together, and, along with Greece, celebrated as the Southern European vanguard of Samuel Huntington's famous "third wave" of democratic transitions. The "transitology" sub-field that emerged in the 1980s to explain this unexpected "third wave" identified the Southern European transitions as model exemplars and yardsticks that could potentially be exported to other locations, especially Latin America or Eastern Europe. But by the mid 1990s, the hegemonic view of the model Spanish and Portuguese transitions began to unravel, as competing interpretations, both scholarly and popular, pulled out foundational threads from the seamlessly celebratory narrative. While these debates have been multi-faceted, they are clustered around two different sets of questions. The first generally accepts the success of the transitions, but debates which factors were most important in the democratization process. The second reconsiders the unqualified success of the transitions, especially in Spain, where critics unhappy with the perceived deficits of democratic practice today have claimed to locate at least part of their origins in the inadequacies of the transition process. This article maps out these debates and suggests ways in which the disaggregation of the Spanish and Portuguese cases from the singular Iberian model might enrich these debates and shed new comparative light on both democratic transitions.

The aggregation of the Spanish and Portuguese cases within a Southern European model was consolidated in a series of books on the transition to, and consolidation of, democracy. Building on Emmanuel Wallerstein's categorization of Southern Europe as a "semi-peripheral" region, the authors of the first volume sought to draw the neglected region into comparative political science models (O'Donnell et al. 1986). More importantly, they argued that the recent transitions had, at long last, brought Southern Europe into the range of "normal" Western European patterns, a conclusion confirmed by a later volume that identified these new democracies as unique models of consolidation within dozens of "third-wave" democratic transitions (Stepan and Linz 1996). The new "transitology" interpretation emerged from the apparent conundrum of these unexpected transitions, which did not seem to fit what had been the dominant theory of democratization: namely, that before a country could transition successfully to democracy, according to the argument in Seymour Martin Lipset's seminal 1959 article, it had to pass through certain stages of economic and social "modernization." Instead of a gradual

long-term transition over generations, Spain and Portugal underwent political transitions from long-standing authoritarian regimes to western-style democracies within a few short years. Their new explanatory model emphasized the role of actors over structural changes and of contingency over determinism, of transitions as an uncertain space in which human agency, particularly that of elite political actors, was decisive. By the end of the 1980s, when another series of transitions from authoritarian rule took place in Eastern Europe, it was the Southern European “elite actor” model that was held up as the preferred road map.

At the same time that the model was consolidated, there was always an underlying tension between the Spanish and Portuguese cases. Coming from the post-hoc perspective of consolidated democracies, Philippe Schmitter (1998) used the term “equifinality” to conceptualize how countries can take radically different paths to the same general destination. Their considerable differences had to be minimized in order to shoehorn them into the same interpretation; thus, at the outset, Portugal’s revolutionary rupture, set off by a colonial crisis that provoked a left-wing military coup in April 1974 that in turn unleashed a grass-roots popular revolution, could not have looked more different from Spain’s “pacted” transition between old regime and opposition elites. In fact, Spanish elites in 1975–76 viewed Portugal as a negative model to avoid, and the fear of “portugalization” was itself a stimulus for the famous Spanish “consensus.” The unitary Iberian model only functioned when the revolutionary period in Portugal was viewed as a temporary deviation on the road to the “normal” Western European democracy that it eventually became. From the November 1975 counter-coup, moderate elites began to take control of the process and the revolutionary forces were largely defeated. Even so, it was clear that, in reality, it was the Spanish transition that was the “ideal type” for the Southern European model that transitologists were eager to export (for a more extended analysis of the scholarship on the “Spanish model,” see Radcliff 2015).

The optimism that this model could be exported anywhere reflected the confidence that structural obstacles need not be an impediment to democratization if political actors made good decisions. However, it was precisely the fact that so few other democracies outside Southern Europe managed to consolidate that eventually undermined the conviction that elite agency had been the only key factor in their success. Thus, the faltering of democratic legitimacy in Latin America, the uneven consolidation in the ex-Soviet bloc and the virtual halt of the third wave of new democratizations after the early 1990s began to chip away at what had been the dominant theoretical approach in the 1980s. While few scholars would discount the importance of short-term elite decisions and “crafting” in precipitating regime change and constructing solid democratic institutions, most would now qualify that they are necessary but not sufficient to a successful transition and, even more so, to consolidation.

Instead, the trend since the 1990s has been to turn the spotlight on other factors – and other actors – in explaining the Southern European “success” model. In particular, much of the scholarship over the past couple of decades has emphasized that transitions cannot be made only by a handful of farsighted men, and sought to demonstrate that the broader population – of men and women – were also active agents in determining the outcome. In general terms, there has been a widespread critique of the “top down” view of the pacted transition, both as an ideal model but also as a description of reality. In this latter category are a plethora of works that approach the transitions “from below,” arguing that the “elite agency” narrative offered only a partial view of the transition process.²

From a culturalist perspective, scholars have argued that elites operated within symbolic frameworks and cultural norms that both shaped their actions and operated as mobilizing myths (Edles 1995; 1998). In her path-breaking book on the Spanish transition, Paloma Aguilar (1996) argued for the role of collective memory in structuring the options of political actors

as well as the attitudes of the broader population. In particular, she made the case that the widespread desire to avoid re-opening the cleavages that had produced the Civil War helped frame the context in which an unlikely consensus between regime reformers and anti-Francoist opponents was imaginable. During the transition, the myth of national reconciliation, supported by all major political players from the Communists (PCE) to the new center-right party (UCD), provided the foundation for negotiations and eventual pacts, including the agreement to “forget” the traumatic past, which was epitomized by the 1977 Amnesty Law that freed anti-Francoist political prisoners but also foreclosed prosecution of Francoist officials or any sort of “truth and reconciliation” discovery process.

In Portugal, the very different context of an unwinnable colonial war in Africa had discredited the Salazar dictatorship so badly that there were few defenders of this past in 1974. Also different from Spain was the lack of a polarizing civil war at the dictatorship’s origins. As a result of this distinct context of simultaneous decolonization and democratization, the coup and revolution opened a process of rupture or “radical discontinuity” that unleashed an extensive process of purging and transitional justice, not amnesty and reconciliation (Costa Pinto 2006). It was only after the revolutionary forces were defeated that the moderate elites constructed their myth of national reconciliation, based on the rejection of both the “authoritarianism of the right” (the dictatorship) and the “authoritarianism of the left,” as the revolutionary period was framed. Thus, the eventual transition to a Western-style liberal democracy after 1976 was constructed upon its own culture of “forgetting,” in this case of the revolutionary origins of the new regime (Maxwell 1995).

As part of the broader trend to explore the transitions “from below,” scholars have been bringing the Portuguese revolution back into the center of the story. The revolutionary period used to be the exclusive property of Marxist historiography, which celebrated this period as a heroic but failed socialist revolution, but this interpretation paradoxically reinforced the notion that it was a dead-end process with no impact on the subsequent democratization process. More recently, social movement scholars have explored the diverse and widespread grassroots movements as popular actors in a much more complex transition process that integrates the revolutionary period instead of suppressing or bracketing it (see Palacios Cerezales 2003 for an overview). Instead of being reduced to either “authoritarianism of the left” or failed socialism, popular mobilization during the revolutionary period has been re-framed as part of a wide-ranging debate over empowerment, forms of democracy and citizenship, and competing visions of the future society that left a lasting imprint on Portuguese society (Fishman 2011). From this perspective, rather than a simple alternative between authoritarianism and democracy, the transition played out different versions of a democratic future (for a re-framing of the constitutional debates along these lines, see Monica Brito Vieira and Filipe Carreira de Silva (2010).

Despite important differences in the nature and scope of popular participation in the Spanish case, the social movement scholarship has followed similar lines of inquiry, resurrecting alternative democratic visions in the popular mobilization of the transition. In both countries, scholars have explored the more familiar trade unions and working-class organizations, which they identified as key popular and often “early riser” players in the transitions (Domènech 2008). But they have also turned increasing attention to the less studied phenomenon of urban social movements, often rooted in neighborhood-based groupings and associations, which created alternate visions of modern urban life that would empower ordinary citizens against developers, landlords and an indifferent state (Molinero and Ysás 2010; Pérez Quintana and Sanchez León 2008; Radcliff 2012; Ramos Pinto 2013). Even under the dictatorships, urban residents began to petition the government for adequate housing and services, from education

to running water, and in the process created new conceptions of citizenship and identity that became increasingly politicized over time. While popular mobilization around these issues was limited during the dictatorship, the networks and identities constructed formed the basis for the urban movements that exploded during the transition period. In a classic work on the urban movement in Madrid, scholar-participant Manuel Castells (1983) celebrated the unique scope of the Spanish phenomenon in a post-1968 European context, but more comparative analysis might confirm a broader Iberian phenomenon rooted in the specific urbanization problems of authoritarian capitalist regimes, in which unregulated private development and an unresponsive state leave ordinary urban residents without effective legal channels to pursue their claims to a liveable city.

Exploration of the transition “from below,” especially from the perspective of urban social movements, also opened the door for the inclusion of female actors in the story, although the Iberian cases have received less attention than in scholarship on transitions in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Because women rarely held high government positions in the authoritarian regimes, or were prominent among opposition leaders, the elite agency narrative was essentially a masculine one. Feminist scholars have made the general argument that women are more likely to participate in politics at an informal level, especially in community-based organizations linked to quality-of-life issues. In transitions from authoritarian regimes, women’s groups usually focus on prisoners, cost of living and women’s rights. Research on the Spanish case has demonstrated that women indeed formed prisoners’ support groups and housewife associations that lobbied for lower consumer prices, joined neighborhood improvement associations, and held the first feminist conference at the end of 1975, just after Franco’s death (for an overview, see Threlfall 2005; see also Radcliff 2008, 2012, chs. 3 & 5). During the Constitutional debates, feminist leaders framed such issues as adultery, divorce, abortion, childcare and birth control as gendered democratic rights. In Portugal, most of these rights except for abortion were granted up front by the revolutionary state, which may explain the lack of a visible feminist movement there (Ferreira 2011). In any case, aside from specific gender studies, women’s participation is still largely sidelined in the master narratives, especially in the Portuguese case, and even in the social movement scholarship on the transitions “from below.”

Beyond revealing similarities in popular participation and social movements in the two transitions, social movement studies have also illustrated significant differences which deserve further exploration and comparison. Most dramatically, in Portugal the popular movements, whether of urban dwellers, industrial workers or landless laborers, engaged in revolutionary forms of activism that directly challenged not only the political power of the old regime but also the economic and social structures and hierarchies of a capitalist society. These included massive land expropriation and collectivization in the south, worker management experiments in industries and systematic home occupations in the major cities. An earlier generation of scholars tended to interpret this activity through the narrow ideological lens of communist revolution, but recent studies have suggested a more heterogeneous and even contradictory set of motives that emerged from a largely uncoordinated grass-roots process. From any angle, this was precisely the “portugalization” scenario that Spanish elites sought to avoid through a combination of negotiations with anti-Francoist parties and unrelenting police repression against strikes and demonstrations. Initial comparative analysis suggests that the state’s capacity and willingness to repress and contain popular mobilization was the decisive factor in distinguishing the scope and form that mobilization took in each national case (Durán Muñoz 2009). Whereas in Portugal, the left-wing military coup and the precipitating colonial quagmire divided the political and military elites and unleashed a crisis of state authority, in Spain

the military and policing apparatus, as well as the state administration, remained intact. Thus, it was the crisis of the state, rather than a distinctively radical ideological starting point that provided much greater scope for popular mobilization to transgress political and economic boundaries in Portugal and develop ever more radical forms.

The significance and impact of all these popular movements on the course of the two transitions and the shape of the future democracy is still a subject of lively debate. Although there are plenty who still defend the more familiar story that downplays the significance of popular participation in shaping the outcome of the transitions, social movement scholars have produced a growing number of studies that suggest plausible alternate narratives. In the Portuguese case, the question revolves around what legacies the revolutionary mobilization left in the legal, political, social and economic structure of the democratic regime established in 1976. Was the Constitution more participatory as a result of popular pressure, was the state more responsive to popular demands, or did the eventual “de-socialization” of the Constitution that occurred over the course of the 1980s wipe out all traces of the initial radical projects? In contrast to Portugal, where scholars are only beginning to examine the role that popular mobilization had in precipitating the crisis of the regime (Accornero 2012), in Spain the focus has been on demonstrating the causal link between popular mobilization and the origins of the transition. Thus, they have made the case that popular mobilization, growing in intensity from the early 1970s, was a significant factor in forcing regime change. On the one hand, increasingly vociferous protests torpedoed the Francoist elites’ initial plans for minimal reforms, and on the other they strengthened the hand of the opposition parties in eventual negotiations. Instead of a pre-designed peaceful transition to democracy “bestowed” by Francoist reformers, as implied in some of their memoirs, democracy was “conquered” by pressure from below (see Pere Ysàs (2010) for a concise presentation of this argument).

All of this scholarship on the transition “from below” has aimed to unsettle the apparently idyllic story of peaceful, negotiated and somehow seamless transitions that still lingered in popular culture. In the alternate narrative, the Western-style democracies that emerged from this process were constructed at least in part on the suppression and/or demobilization of popular struggle and distinct visions of a democratic future. In recognition of this element of struggle, recent scholarship has also sought to re-inscribe the role of violence and conflict, as well as the uncertainty that accompanied it, into the transition process (Baby et al. 2009; Bermeo 1997; Costa Pinto 2006). In the Portuguese case, the reintegration of the revolution into the transition story both opens up other possible futures and shines a light on how they were disarticulated in the process of consolidating a liberal democracy. While there was no armed revolutionary “storming of the winter palace,” there was significant coercion, intimidation and threats in the grass-roots attacks on property owners and “savage purges” (Costa Pinto 2001, 79) of police and other officials, few of which were actually controlled by the Communist Party (PCP), despite claims to the contrary on both sides of the political spectrum. At the same time, counter-revolutionary groups, particularly in the north, carried out violent attacks on communist offices and symbols, and, of course, the state and the army finally recovered its repressive capacity in violently containing the revolutionary movements after November 1975.

In the Spanish case, popular contestation and violence were more contained by the coherent resolve of the state, but a combination of left- and right-wing terrorism and repressive policing created an ongoing current of violence that belies any simple picture of peaceful consensus. Scholars debate the scope of this violence and its consequences on the quality of the subsequent democracy, but many would agree that it must be better taken into account in calculating the real costs of the transition. Moreover, there is broad agreement that, in the case of the Basque Country, the high level of violence there during and after the transition created

its own regional dynamic. Violence took the form of massive unruly protests, police repression and, of course, escalating Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) terrorist attacks, all of which seriously undermined the legitimacy of the new democratic regime among the population. If the greater acknowledgment of violence throughout Spanish territory reduces the black and white contrast between “peaceful” Spanish and “violent” Basque transitions, few would question that the Basque case was in a category of its own, a virtual failed transition, which included low levels of support for the new Constitution, a polarized party system and strong anti-systemic movements (Muro 2011). With the recent rise in separatist sentiment in Catalonia, reflected in the pro-independence electoral victories, the larger question of how well the Spanish transition dealt with the regional nationalist question, or the territorial structure of the state, has become part of a broader re-evaluation of the achievements of the transition in public and scholarly debate.

In fact, over the past decade, there has been a rising trend towards more critical perspectives on the Spanish transition as a whole, arising from dissatisfaction or concerns with the current practice of democracy, which has been tainted by corruption scandals, political polarization and deep economic crisis, in addition to the separatist challenge. On the one hand, critical voices have always existed: the official ETA and Herri Batasuna positions on the new regime in 1977 were that it was a “continuation, reform or mere change of image of the dictatorship” (cited in Aguilar 2001, 101); whereas on the other, defenders of the successful pacted transition remain (Encarnación 2011; Gunther 2011); but there is no question that, in recent years, attacks on the “myth” of the “model” transition have gained momentum. Although few would argue that the democratic regime was not an improvement on what preceded it, and most Spaniards still probably view it as an achievement (in a 2001 poll 86% of Spaniards reported being proud of the transition [Moral 2001]), critics blame the “democratic deficits” of the present on either the “incomplete,” “limited” or “flawed” transition, or even the “non” transition or “post-dictatorship.”

At the core of these critiques is the accusation that the pacted and controlled transition, so extolled by the transitologists, failed to make a complete rupture with the authoritarian regime, leaving the ghosts of that past literally haunting the new democracy. One focus is the exploration of the “authoritarian legacies” that resulted from the continuity in personnel at all levels of state, military and judicial administration. Another is to draw links between the secretive “top-down” transition and the perceived “low-quality” democracy with limited popular participation and lack of transparency at the top. Partly drawing on both of these claims is the contention that one of the key “original sins” of the transition was the political decision to view the traumatic past as a “shared tragedy” perpetrated by “two demons” instead of assigning responsibility to the dictatorship. This latter issue has generated a virtual “memory war” in the public sphere, waged by both defenders and critics of the 1977 Amnesty Law and the broader agreement to “bury the hatchet” in the name of national reconciliation (Graham 2012, ch 7).

The memory wars in Spain were unleashed by two precipitating events: the 1998 extradition order against Pinochet that exposed Spain’s own lack of transitional justice and the first exhumation of a Francoist mass grave in the year 2000. Civil society groups such as the Association for the Recuperation of Historical Memory began to advocate for digging up and identifying more “*desaparecidos*,” but also for more public recognition of the victims of the dictatorship. In response, conservatives rejected the charged label of “disappeared” victims and argued against opening what they viewed as a Pandora’s box, citing fear of unleashing past hatreds. During the Socialist government of 2004–8, the PSOE (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) responded to grass-roots pressure with the so-called “Law of Historical Memory,” a “post-transitional justice” measure passed after much amendment and discussion in 2007 (see

Alves Raimundo 2012 for a comparative analysis of post-transitional justice in Spain). For the first time, it officially condemned the Franco regime as illegitimate and committed the State to rehabilitate its victims. Not surprisingly, the law did not satisfy everyone, with those on the left upset that Francoist judicial sentences were not to be overturned and the conservative Partido Popular (PP) party refusing to vote for it, on the grounds that it provocatively poked open old wounds. While the PP had presented a law in 2002 condemning “totalitarian” regimes and expressing moral support for their victims, the party has yet to directly condemn the Franco regime itself.

What this current debate in Spain has revealed is the continuing lack of consensus, not only about memory politics during the transition, but also about the longer trajectory of twentieth-century Spanish history leading up to that moment (Boyd 2008). Taking shape in both popular and academic historical scholarship are conflicting master narratives (including various intermediary positions) that assign distinct political meanings to the transition and what it produced. For conservatives, the “pacted” reformist transition was the result of a gradual process of democratization that began during the Restoration liberal regime (1875–1923), was derailed by the radical and intolerant Second Republic (1931–1936), and was facilitated once again by the stability and economic growth provided by the Franco regime in its later phases, by which time it had left its fascist and violent past behind. This narrative culminates in the peaceful transition led by reformist Francoist elites, who planned the final step of political transition, which they implemented after Franco’s death. Feeding into this version of twentieth-century history is a revisionist neo-Francoist strain of popular history that justifies the military coup of 1936 as a patriotic response to a chaotic republic.

The contrasting left-wing narrative argues that the only source of Spain’s democratic tradition lies, not in the elitist Restoration regime but in the popular democratic Second Republic, which was brutally crushed by a fascist dictatorship that derailed the country’s modernization and contributed nothing to the democratic transition, whether directly or indirectly. In this narrative, Spain’s democratic tradition was preserved and carried forward by the anti-Francoist opposition, culminating in the popular mobilization that forced regime elites towards real rupture. The left narrative diverges at this point as to whether the anti-Francoist democratic culture ended up completely crushed, or even betrayed by the official left parties, culminating in the “non” transition outcome, or whether the complex balance of forces produced an admittedly imperfect transition with both “lights and shadows.”

The debates on the memory politics of the transition reflect this divergence. From the latter perspective, the Amnesty Law and the politics of national reconciliation were pragmatic and functional solutions embraced by a left that viewed them as the best hope for democratic consolidation, as the then PSOE leader Felipe Gonzalez has reiterated in recent years. Far from being a “self-amnesty” imposed by the Francoist elites, the Amnesty Law was pushed by the left on reluctant conservatives. Amnesty, in contrast to amnesia, was a conscious decision not to let the past count in the future, a decision which did nothing to stem the outpouring of publications on the traumatic past in the decades to come (Juliá 2010). Further, in an international context that preceded the current transitional justice conceptual and institutional framework, it would be anachronistic to expect that opposition groups should have demanded trials for Francoist officials. Without significant pressure groups advocating for transitional justice, and in a context in which military authority was still intact, a viable alternative path is difficult to envision (Aguilar 2001). At the same time, this path left various “shadows” of authoritarian legacy, including the continued influence of Francoist police, judges, bureaucrats and military officials, as well as public symbols such as street names and the massive memorial to the Francoist war dead, the “Valley of the Fallen.” Although there is disagreement as to the level

of damage this legacy inflicted on the democracy moving forward, most in this camp agree that the current democracy would be strengthened by acknowledging the costs of decisions made during the transition.

From the other, more uncompromising perspective, the “pact of oblivion” was mistakenly agreed to by opposition parties primarily out of fear, in a transition defined not by hope but by military supervision. The pact institutionalized the “impunity” of torturers and murderers and abandoned the victims to an imposed official amnesia that suppressed their voices and denied their very existence. In this view, the pact was not simply a political agreement but an enforced culture of silence that permeated not only official institutions and discourse but also most of the mainstream press (Resina 2000). While these critics acknowledge that academic scholars published works that uncovered the perspective of the victims of the Civil War, these did not permeate public or popular culture until the literal “unearthing” of the mass graves brought the violence into full view (Jerez Farrán and Amago 2010). The silence encompassed not just the victims of the past but the radical left of the popular transition, whose alternative democratic projects were actively demobilized and then marginalized under the neo-liberal hegemony of the center right and left parties that took control of the post-Francoist regime. This culture of “repressed memories” left a wounded society whose transition to a truly democratic society was blocked by its inability to work through its difficult past (Martín Cabrera 2011). Some have called for a new “second transition” which would move beyond the limits of the first incomplete, or inauthentic transition (Fontana 2005).

In this debate about the transition’s contribution to the current “democratic deficits” in Spain, there is surprisingly little in-depth comparative analysis of the “deficits” of other European democracies with distinct origins. Without such comparison it is not always clear which deficits are rooted in Spain’s “peculiar” experience and which are shared by other “post-modern” democracies. Before reviving what sometimes sounds like the 3.0 version of the classic “failure” narrative of Spanish history, it is important to place Spain within broader discussions about the crisis of democratic modernity in a post-’68 and post-’89 Europe.

But the most intriguing and under-explored comparative touchstone should be Portugal. Given that the first phase of the Portuguese transition contained many of the elements that critics of the Spanish case wish had occurred in their own country, comparing the impact of this different path on the quality of the two democracies seems like a fruitful research agenda. Under the transitology model, the revolutionary phase in Portugal was bracketed as ephemeral to the real story of the establishment of a liberal democracy by center left and right moderate parties. But if the revolution left real legacies in the shape of Portugal’s democracy, as recent studies suggest, then disaggregating the homogenizing “Iberian model” would open space for exploring possible distinct outcomes from Portugal’s “dual transition.”

Thus, in regards to historical memory and authoritarian legacies, the Portuguese revolution took a very different path from Spain that, despite later reversals, was never completely obliterated. With the rupture of the coup and the crisis of the state, the Portuguese transition opened precisely the radical break with the past that anti-Francoists desired. With a dominant anti-fascist discourse, the revolutionary government unequivocally condemned the Salazar regime as fascist and undertook the most extensive process of transitional justice and symbolic delegitimation of all three Southern European countries (Costa Pinto 2001, 2006). Between the banning of existing conservative political parties and the purging of individuals, it was difficult for the Salazar elite, in contrast to the Francoist elite, to re-constitute itself in the new democracy. Thus, even though many purged military and political elites were reincorporated in the late 1970s, most did not come back to play leading roles and there was no important political party that carried the legacy of the authoritarian regime. In contrast, some 30,000 Francoist officials

transferred seamlessly to the democratic civil service, in addition to continuity in the upper echelons of military and political elites, including a major political party led by an ex-Francoist Minister, Manuel Fraga. On the symbolic level, the Portuguese state undertook a coherent and immediate campaign to remove statues, change national holidays and institute secularization measures. The government even funded a Commission, not dissolved until 1991, which was granted access to state archives, and whose job was to publicize and disseminate documentation on repression and censorship as well as create a museum of the resistance. At the same time, grass-roots revolutionary groups carried out their own unauthorized “savage” purges, targeting the political police, capitalists, media elites and local political figures. The anti-capitalist or anti-monopolist purging of private sector economic elites made Portugal the only example of socio-economic “re-distributive” transitional justice in Southern Europe, resulting in massive land seizures in the south and worker-controlled industries around Lisbon. This multi-faceted effort to break with the dictatorial past and create an egalitarian democracy embodied the aspirations of many anti-Francoist militants in the 1970s as well as their defenders today.

Of course, many of these revolutionary measures were reversed over the course of the following decade, which was why it has been plausible to minimize the impact of the period on the later democracy. In particular, the re-distributive transitional justice projects were disarticulated, with most purges, worker self-management and expropriations reversed by the end of the decade, leaving Western-style capitalism in more or less the same dominant position as in Spain. Formal procedures of transitional justice were also halted, under a new rhetoric of national reconciliation and re-integration. The Constitution that established a mandate to “build socialism” through the “democratic power of the working class,” and which declared nationalizations and expropriations to be irreversible was gradually “de-socialized” over the 1980s. But at the same time, it appears that many of the symbolic measures linked to the uncontested rejection of the dictatorship were never dropped (such as the commitment to the “ideals of April 25”), and that continuity of personnel was significantly disrupted by the purges. While there was a certain “culture of forgetting,” it was aimed more at the revolutionary period than at the dictatorship itself. Thus, at least some of the legacies identified by critics of Spain’s democracy seem to be weaker in the Portuguese case.

The question of whether these differences have left a measurable impact on the quality of the two democracies has generated some comparative research, but it is neither extensive nor conclusive. It does seem clear that the “memory wars” that have exploded in the past decade in Spain are not as powerful in Portugal,³ with less interest in Portugal in challenging the dominant narrative of the past or the perspective on the transitional justice process (Alves Raimundo 2012). However, the different level of public debate does not speak directly to the quality of democracy in each country. More research needs to be done on the impact of continuity versus rupture on the subsequent functioning of their democratic regimes. One recent comparative study argues that, paradoxically, the police forces in Spain were subject to structural overhaul much more quickly than in Portugal because of the greater need to establish democratic legitimacy among a force that had played such a repressive role during and immediately after the transition (Palacios Cerezales 2010). On the other hand, another study argues that the revolutionary origins of Portugal’s democracy left a stronger civil society with more capacity for self-organization and greater recognition by the state than in Spain (Fernandes 2015), while another argues that democracies born in social revolution like the Portuguese one are more likely to have a higher quality of democracy (Fishman 2011). However, another tempers these claims, arguing that demobilization in the Portuguese case led to greater marginalization of social movement voices than in Spain, because of the greater transfer of social movement activists to government positions in the latter case (Ramos Pinto 2013).

These suggestive studies offer a tantalizing window into the insights about the legacies of transition paths that could emerge out of a more developed comparative “Iberian Studies” framework. Ironically, this research agenda both confirms and unsettles the transitology model that first brought Spanish and Portuguese transition studies together. On the one hand, it confirms that the transitions away from authoritarian regimes, occurring in the same corner of Europe only a few years apart, offer an obvious point of comparison. But on the other hand, it unsettles the homogenizing process that paradoxically reduced ongoing comparison between two cases that were seen as exemplars of the same model. Instead, it encourages scholars involved in re-assessing the transitions in each country to bring the Iberian counterpart back into the analysis, drawing not only on the obvious similarities but also on the striking differences, offering a fresh perspective on both cases for the next generation wrestling to come to terms with the past.

Notes

- 1 I thank Antonio Costa Pinto and Pedro Ramos Pinto for their suggestions based on an earlier draft of this article.
- 2 See, for example, the special issue of *Ayer* 79/2010 (3) dedicated to the transition, which lays out this agenda. A widely cited early theoretical source was Tarrow (1995).
- 3 See Perdigo Ribeiro (2011), for an interesting discussion of the albeit limited public debate over the government’s framing of April 25, 1974, as “evolution” versus “revolution” during the 2004 celebration.

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