

AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES AND PRO-DEMOCRACY SEMIOPPOSITIONS.

The end of the Portuguese dictatorship (1968-1974) in comparative perspective

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Abstract

This article discusses the conditions of failure and success of pro-democracy semioppositions to authoritarian regimes through a comparative study of the last phase of the Portuguese authoritarian regime (1968-1974). It specifies and reformulates Juan Linz's concept of semiopposition. In Portugal, contrary to Linz's argument, the moderate pro-democracy semioppositions participated in the regime's electoral moments and tended to take the greatest possible advantage of these periods so as to discredit the regime and to demonstrate that it could not be transformed from within. In order to make sense of this paradox, scholars should look at the institutional legacies and frameworks of authoritarian regimes. Specifically, we argue that the Portuguese Semiopposition failed because the institutional heritage of the *Estado Novo*, at the moment of the leadership succession, provided no opportunities for a reformist democratizing coalition to assert itself and promoted instead the radicalization of the semiopposition. Paradoxically, it was the more liberal institutional framework of the regime that made a political change guided by the democratic Semiopposition impracticable.

1. Introduction

Despite a trend towards the concentration of power, authoritarian political regimes are rarely successful in totally eliminating organizational pluralism and diversity of political groups. As Edward Shils notes, “single-party regimes have problems of opposition just as two-party and multiparty regimes do»¹. In this sense, any autocracy always contains a fundamental split between, on the one extreme, supporters of the regime, groups that benefit from it and support it, and, at the other, its declared opponents, who wish to overthrow it.

These two sectors, however, are not lacking in internal divisions. The partisans of the regime may be divided amongst conservatives and reformers. The former have a more inflexible interpretation of the exercise of political power, consider themselves the true guardians of the regime’s principles, and tend to privilege repression as a means to combat opposition. The latter are more tolerant, are more inclined to widen the liberties available to citizens and to semi-organized groups, and are less ideologically intransigent. Both groups seek the preservation of an authoritarian political order and their differences are mostly at the level of strategy, policy orientations, posture towards the restriction of rights and relationships to establish with opposition groups. In any case, they constitute differing groupings. In Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter’s words, conservatives are entitled Hardliners (*Duros*), and reformers, the Softliners (*Blandos*)². During the Portuguese *Estado Novo*³ between the early 1950’s and 1968, the Softliners were represented by the group headed by Marcelo Caetano, a figure who, although not a democrat, represented the “modernity within the regime”, espousing a project of modernizing the dictatorship through economic development and social welfare, as opposed to the Hardliners of Santos Costa’s militarist sector⁴.

Opposition groups seeking the regime’s democratization tend to split between radicals and moderates. Both seek an end to the authoritarian regime, but the former adopt a strategy of radicalizing political conflict, which may require the use of violence and armed struggle, the latter prefer the use of a set of protest initiatives such as civic mobilization and are more willing to negotiate with the elites in power towards transforming the regime into a democracy⁵. In Portugal, during the *Estado Novo*, for example, the Portuguese Communist Party was a case of radical opposition, while moderates were represented by the socialists and Catholics⁶.

Due to the difficulty in creating mechanisms to legitimize political pluralism, authoritarian regimes are prone to experience factionalism. The various groups which support and oppose the regime tend to simultaneously occupy institutions and organizations such as the single party, the state bureaucracy, the press, public companies or the armed forces. Their competition for power thus tends to be transversal to several of the regime’s institutions. One example was the competition between the *Opus Dei* technocrats, placed in technocratic ministries dedicated to economic and social development reforms, and the single party, the *Falange* during *Franquismo*⁷. As a result, autocracies often do not have clearly demarcated borders between government and opposition, and this tends to engender political groupings which are simultaneously inside and outside the regime, which occupy its institutions but display an attitude of semi-loyalty towards the current political order.

Juan Linz labelled these sectors the “Semiopposition”. In its extreme form, the Semiopposition is made up of those groups which control or are present in some of the

regime's institutions and which initially were supportive of the regime, but with the purpose of attaining goals «not shared by their coalition partners»⁸. One of these goals may be the wish to transform the authoritarian regime into a democracy. The important thing to keep in mind here is that, in certain contexts, authoritarian regimes may engender political groupings, present in the regime's institutions, who are simultaneously inside and out of the regime, and who seek the gradual and controlled evolution of the regime into a democracy. We call these groupings the democratic Semiopposition. One example was present in the socialist regime in Hungary, where existed a reform movement within the Kadar regime, made up of modernizing technocrats and political reformists, which, starting in 1987, was able to win politically over the regime Hardliners and over Kadar, the head of the government, who defended a program of political liberalization and socio-economic modernization, but under a non-democratic program⁹.

In Portugal, during the *Estado Novo*, the democratic Semiopposition was embodied during the period from 1968 to 1974 by a group of representatives in the X legislature of the National Assembly (*Assembleia Nacional*) (1969-1973) who became known as the *Ala Liberal* (Liberal Wing), and who defended the project of a gradual and peaceable transformation of the *Estado Novo* regime into a democracy. In the history of the *Estado Novo*, the emergence of this group is a historical novelty. Contrary to the period Salazar's rule, now the government sought to include dissidents in the electoral lists of the single-party, the *União Nacional*. To the "liberal" parliamentarians, the *União Nacional*¹⁰ "victory" in the 1969 election was a sign of a «desirable and healthy pluralism» towards a «democratic path (...) in accordance with the western European model»¹¹. During the 1969-1974 period, the *Ala Liberal* gains way as a political "third power", between the government and the opposition. Its deputies are solidly rooted in a regime institution, the National Assembly, which allows them to utter statements critical of the regime, and provides them the legitimacy to undertake political initiatives which would not be allowed were they not parliamentarians. Furthermore, they occupy positions in the state bureaucracy and the regime's institutions, they have a strong presence in the world of journalism through the newspaper *Expresso*, and partially set the agenda for public debate through a civic organization, the *Sociedade para o Desenvolvimento Económico e Social* (SEDES – Society for Economic and Social Development) and establish links to reformist military figures, such as António de Spínola¹².

But the *Ala Liberal* political project fails. Their parliamentary activity only succeeds in those proposals which present no threat to the regime's authoritarian nature. Proposals presented by members of the *Ala Liberal* which were meant to advance the regime's democratization were never approved. These included the proposals of amnesty of political prisoners, of a more independent judiciary, freedom of the press, religious freedom, union activity and, especially, the bill to revise the constitution which included a proposal for the direct and universal election of the president of the Republic. In 1972, liberal parliamentarians efforts to convince, first, the head of government, Marcelo Caetano, and later, General António de Spínola, to run in that year's presidential elections, in order to remove the hardliner Admiral Américo Tomás from the presidency of the Republic also came to naught¹³.

This article aims to find the reasons for the failure of the *Ala Liberal*'s political project. It is our contention that even if Caetano had had the will to democratize, the liberal parliamentarians' political and parliamentary activity was so vehement in its opposition to the regime that it swiftly did away with any possibility of negotiation.

This is a politically relevant fact. The liberal parliamentarians could have waited for the consolidation of Caetano's political project. More importantly, they could have waited for Américo Tomás's presidential term to expire, gone along with Caetano in the 1973 elections for the National Assembly and then to try to influence the course of political events and acquire power and positions within the regime. However, only three of the liberal parliamentarians were willing to do so. Most of them, since from the start of the second legislative session, become radical in their positions and go up directly against the regime. Now this underlined the extra-parliamentary aspect of the *Ala Liberal* and undermined its capacity to exert influence within the regime's institutions.

We argue that this is a consequence of the interaction of *Estado Novo*'s political and institutional heritage with the context of succession of António Salazar by Marcelo Caetano, which favored the radicalization of political positions and undermined the viability of reformist coalitions. We could expect that the greater the failure to influence or acquire power of a current or faction, the greater its propensity to radicalize its political positions and strategies and to adopt an anti-regime stance. This is in some way what happens with the *Ala Liberal*. From 1972 on, with the failure to stop the ratification of the bill 520/72, which strengthened restrictions on freedom of association, there is a visible radicalization in its positions and a declared antagonism towards the regime. However, this is not an inevitable outcome. There are contexts in which the pro-democracy Semiopposition, although having seen its political initiatives meet with successive failures, does not become radicalized, whether because the regime maintains its capacity of institutional coercion and cohesiveness, with no need for the democratic Semiopposition's support, or because there are simply no institutional and political opportunities and political stages for the radicalization to take place. The central point to stress is that the regime's institutional structure may not allow for the activity of the Semiopposition from becoming too radical. For instance, in Hungary's socialist regime, there existed a democratic Semiopposition from at least the 1960's onwards, but it was never radicalized, and it lasted, in fact, for much longer than the Portuguese Semiopposition¹⁴.

In the following pages, we will attempt to demonstrate the argument that the regime's institutions favored the political diminishment and radicalization of the *Ala Liberal*, by simultaneously failing to provide opportunities to access political power and by empowering other political actors, and making instead more rational a strategy of political radicalization of centrist groups. The institutional context is thus here considered a system of stimuli and barriers to political activity, insofar as it limits certain political positions in detriment of others¹⁵. Specifically, we argue that the institutional heritage of the *Estado Novo*, at the moment of the succession of António Salazar by Marcelo Caetano¹⁶, namely the interaction between government leadership, state leadership (the presidency), the parliament and the military provided no opportunities for a reformist centrist coalition to assert itself.

The war that the Portuguese authoritarian regime was fighting since 1961 in its African colonies is frequently pointed out as the single cause for the regime's failure in effecting a process of self-democratization. In Fernando Rosas's opinion, democratization was impossible while the colonial wars went on¹⁷. However, the destabilizing effects of war upon political regimes must be examined in their interaction with the regime's institutions. Throughout the *Estado Novo* in general, and in particular during *Marcelismo*¹⁸, it was not war in itself that prevented a peaceful transition to democracy, but rather its interaction with the regime's institutions, the way in which these amplified the issue of war and downplayed other issues. In what follows, we'll

demonstrate this argument by analyzing the political dynamics in each institution of the regime: the national Assembly, the presidency and the military. Then, we devote a section to the issue of leadership succession in the Portuguese authoritarian regime. Finally, we'll address the comparative and theoretical literature by reflecting on the conditions under which pro-democracy semioppositions to authoritarian regimes succeed or fail in conducting a transition to democracy.

2. The National Assembly

The National Assembly was a window of opportunity for certain sectors of the regime's elites who sought to transform the regime to assert their position. José Pedro Pinto Leite, one of the leading deputies of the democratic Semiopposition, had been the principal advocate of the notion of using the National Assembly as a tribune for the opposition and as the institution from which to launch initiatives that would promote regime change from within¹⁹. What happened in Portugal was, in fact, the opposite of what Juan Linz considers typical of Semioppositions: that the moderates, due to a political situation in which there is a certain amount of liberty and in which a combination of collaboration and criticism is always possible, tend to refrain from participating in the regime's electoral moments, so as to keep charges of collaboration at bay, while the extremist left-wing movements tend to take the greatest possible advantage of these moments so as to discredit the government, pointing out the fraudulent character of the elections²⁰. And this is due to the fact that, during the *Marcelismo*, the National Assembly acquired higher public visibility and political autonomy.

This fact, however, tended to favor a political radicalization of the democratic Semiopposition. In the first place, the assembly provided the representatives of the *Ala Liberal* with the possibility of claiming electoral and semi-democratic legitimacy, to confront the regime based on that premise and to try to gather support from groups displeased with government policies. Although their demarcation from the regime grew in intensity throughout the legislature, that direct challenge is present from early on. As early as the electoral campaign, Francisco Balsemão, a liberal deputy, declared publicly that in the upcoming legislative session it was imperative to undertake a constitutional revision so as to restore rights and liberties and to allow the creation of political parties²¹. Further, it is not without significance that it is with a government decree restricting the activity of cooperatives that there is a definitive split with Caetano, a moment in which the *Ala Liberal* is able to voice and promote an intense social mobilization of organizations and unions around a legislative debate²². As another liberal deputy, Francisco Sá-Carneiro, declared at the end of the parliamentary debate about this issue, the single reason that kept him from resigning from his parliamentary post was simply the need to fight against the government's attempts to achieve absolute power from within its institutions²³.

In the second place, the fact that they held positions in the National Assembly provided the liberal representatives with the possibility to establish links with sectors who wished to terminate the colonial wars. One example was the group of military men which coalesced around general António de Spínola, who opposed the continuation of the colonial war even if it meant regime change. From the beginning of the legislature, the liberal parliamentarians establish contacts with these men, and publicly support Spínola. In 1969, in a statement to the National Assembly about the harmful effects upon the Portuguese economy and society of the high expenditures with the colonial

war, Pinto Leite publicly declares that he had made contact with officers loyal to Spínola²⁴. In fact, the lead-up to the plans to back Spínola in the presidential election is Pinto Leite's visit to Guinea in 1969, where Spínola was both the governor and military commander²⁵. Lastly, the *Ala Liberal* also begins in 1972, to establish connections with the clandestine *Movimento das Forças Armadas* MFA (Armed Forces' Movement)²⁶, through initiatives such as the conference *Encontro dos Liberais* (the Liberals' Meeting), to which the latter are invited to as observers²⁷.

The fact that they were parliamentarians, and therefore, less subject to political control by Caetano than if they had been members of government allowed them some measure of autonomy and independence. For instance, a report of the political police (the *Direcção Geral de Segurança* – DGS) issued within the context of the debate on constitutional revision, warned of the possible «maneuver by a group of representatives, among them Dr. Sá-Carneiro, to arrange for new elections to parliament after the approval of the constitution» in 1971. According to the DGS, these deputies were trying to «force the government to call for new elections, for which it would not have its electoral machine prepared, and so allowing for the probability that they would obtain the majority in the National Assembly»²⁸.

From the regime's viewpoint, the *Ala Liberal* had two consequences. Firstly, it made Caetano's regime seem more repressive than it actually was. For instance, though Francisco Sá-Carneiro's articles in the newspaper *O Expresso* were often censored, this newspaper also benefited from privileged ties to the regime. This newspaper was only created with the relative freedom inaugurated by *Marcelismo*, and would never have been possible without the press law of 1971, which, though it upheld many of the former restrictions, still allowed for a greater freedom (for instance, newspaper directive boards no longer had to be approved by the government)²⁹.

To use Juan Linz's terminology, in the Portuguese case, the democratic Semiopposition was rapidly transformed into an alegal opposition, meaning, it acted to demonstrate the regime could not be transformed from within³⁰. As the *Economist* pointed out, with the resignation of the liberal deputies, «the government cannot anymore claim to have any plans for reform»³¹. In fact, in 1973, the deputy Miller Guerra declares that the experiment with a third force had failed, and that there were only two political options: to join the single party or the socialist/republican opposition³².

Secondly, it also created divisions within the democratic Semiopposition, which also weakened it as a group. Democratic Semiopposition groups are generally divided by a tension between technicians and politicians, the latter usually recruited in the liberal professions, represented by doctors and lawyers, and with a greater tendency to seek out a confrontation with the regime, while the former prefer a political action through the state's institutions and the bureaucracy. In the Portuguese case, the fact that the Semiopposition held positions in a representative assembly gave a greater public expression to the “politicians”, such as Sá-Carneiro, and underplayed the more conciliatory, centrist, individuals, such as Alberto Alarcão, José da Silva or João Salgueiro, the latter a member of government. Francisco Sá-Carneiro's speech about the deputies who had died in a parliamentary visit to Guinea-Bissau in early August of 1970 signals the predominance of “political” positions³³. Although Sá-Carneiro admitted that the «thoughts upon Europe» and the defense of economic and social development were an important contribution by Pinto Leite, and that it was these issues that had led him to support Caetano, it was the subject of the defense of civic and political liberties that Sá-Carneiro believed to be the true legacy of Pinto Leite³⁴.

The institutional context outside the Assembly further reinforced that tendency for radicalization. When it was confronted with the question of Salazar's succession, the regime had an institutional heritage which made agreements between Caetano and the liberal parliamentarians unviable. The succession of an authoritarian leader is one of the major problems that an authoritarian regime faces, and «the absence of mechanisms for self-renewal contributes significantly to the erosion of the legitimacy of those regimes»³⁵. A crisis of succession, which usually occurs after the death of a founding and charismatic leader, creates serious stability issues and tends to produce a dispersion of power and to accentuate the struggles amongst the regime's factions. The issue here is to find out whether the stability of the regime itself is affected. As Sigmund Neumann argued, autocracies tend to accentuate the personal aspects of leadership, and this seems to have been very strong in the Portuguese dictatorship. For instance, Neumann considered Salazar to be the dictator who most identified his persona with the regime³⁶. It is our contention that the political radicalization which pushes aside the possibility of a stable centrist field and which increases the possibilities of a regime crisis depends on the institutional structure of the regime at the time of leadership succession.

As Philippe C. Schmitter notes, during the final phase of the *Estado Novo*, Portuguese civil society had very low levels of protest and the Portuguese were, instead, characterized by high levels of political apathy. Hence, «the necessary, if not sufficient, sources of contradiction of an authoritarian regime are located within the regime itself, within the state's apparatus and not outside of it, in its relations with civil society»³⁷. Within this context, analysis should focus on the interaction and division of powers amongst the regime's institutions³⁸. In our opinion, the three major institutions in this respect were the National Assembly, the presidency of the Republic and the military.

The elections for the National Assembly in the *Estado Novo* served to “divide to conquer”, to divide the opposition and build coalitions among the segments of the dominant political elites³⁹. When he came into the leadership, Marcelo Caetano used the Assembly to this effect, by promoting the creation of the *Ala Liberal*⁴⁰. However, throughout the regime's evolution, the role of elections gradually changed, and, in particular, the costs of using the Assembly as a repository of the regime's factions became greater than the benefits⁴¹. With Caetano's arrival to the government's leadership, the contradictions of the National Assembly became explosive, impeding his project for “Renewal within Continuity”. On the one hand, Caetano's project for the National Assembly was not to turn it into a democratic institution, as the *Ala Liberal* required. The parliamentarians' political proposals were never accepted into the chamber, for they would always have to be subject to a previous negotiation with Caetano, and with the heads of the parliamentary committees, who controlled what transpired in the Assembly. Furthermore, the changes proposed by Caetano to the way the Assembly worked were so as to create a modicum of institutionalization for his project of a liberalized and softened authoritarianism. In this vein, Caetano instituted the creation of a parliamentary post responsible for the liaison between government and assembly and changed the regulations of the National Assembly in 1973. As Manuel de Lucena writes, the government sought to «associate more intimately to its work the obedient assembly»⁴².

But on the other hand, Caetano also used the National Assembly to gain political legitimacy, both internal and externally.⁴³ As Philippe Schmitter argues, the 1969 and 1973 elections were an attempt in, above all, political mobilization in support of the new authoritarian project and leadership, which is a novelty when compared to the *Salazarismo* period.⁴⁴ In fact, Caetano had no choice but to use this institution as a

source of power and legitimacy for his political project, since he had not been chosen by Salazar as his successor. Hence, Caetano also appeals to an electoral legitimacy. In the words of Manuel de Lucena, after Salazar, «any new chosen of heaven has much greater need for the regime's legal and institutional crutches»⁴⁵.

However, this left Caetano more dependent on what happened at the National Assembly. This situation made him much more vulnerable to oppositions that might crystallize within it, and especially to those initiatives which pointed out a contradiction between his appeal to popular participation and the maintenance of an authoritarian regime⁴⁶. For instance, Sá-Carneiro is especially critical of the government's decree which sets sanctions for individuals who run as candidates to the 1973 elections and later withdrew their candidacy⁴⁷. To make matters worse, Caetano begins to be attacked from the Assembly with proposals he had previously defended, such as the reinforcement of presidential powers, and which are now called for by the liberal parliamentarians, but which he now must contest⁴⁸.

A comparison with the assemblies under Franco reinforces this point. In authoritarian regimes, parliaments are distinguished by the degree of freedom and autonomy given to minorities and Semiopposition groups⁴⁹. In both their origin and their function, the Spanish assembly was markedly different from the Portuguese National Assembly. When they were created in 1942, they were merely a consulting organism, which assisted Franco in the legislative tasks. They did not approve laws and elections are not instituted until 1967⁵⁰. The head of state, Francisco Franco, had full legislative power, and he nominated every member of the assembly. As an institution, the Spanish assembly was thus tightly bound to the authoritarian order. Initially, their members were appointed *ex-officio*, that is, they were persons who already held posts within the regime (union leaders and mayors, for instance)⁵¹.

Consequently, the Spanish assembly was an institution with less autonomy and more dependent on the authoritarian leader than the Portuguese assembly⁵². It is true that, from 1966 on, when the new Spanish constitution created one hundred and eight seats, two for each province, to be elected by the heads of family, the Spanish assembly became an institution where there was some pluralism. However, the government only required their support for great constitutional changes, and it almost always controlled all the nominations⁵³. In Portugal, the government's control over the chambers was much smaller⁵⁴. A case which is similar to the Portuguese is Pinochet's Chile, where the continuation of the parliamentary assembly of the previous democratic regime contributed to make political positions more extreme, and, consequently, caused the opposition to play the decisive role in the transition, and not the Semiopposition. In Spain, by contrast, the transition tended to be carried out by the democratic Semiopposition⁵⁵.

3. The presidency of the Republic

The tensions between the head of state (presidency of the Republic) and the head of government also tended, at the moment of succession, to be aggravated. This tension was always a central feature of **Salazarismo**. In certain contexts, the rivalry was decided in favor of the head of government, with Salazar taking upon himself the supremacy in conducting state affairs, but the potential for conflict was always there, and, even during **Salazarismo** was the cause for several moments of crisis.

In the first place, the presidency of the Republic was always used by the regime's factions in their fights over the conquest of political power, fights in which Caetano had also taken part. For instance, between 1951 e 1958 Caetano established an alliance with President Craveiro Lopes, against the faction of Santos Costa, who represented the regime's hardliner sector. Lopes was an ally of Caetano's faction, considered the most reformist and linked to civil society, perhaps with the ultimate goal of replacing Salazar with Caetano in the presidency of the council⁵⁶. Another example is the strategy of the *Ala Liberal* to democratize the regime through presidential elections, pushing Marcelo Caetano and later Spínola towards a candidacy. This goal is declared from the start, at the electoral campaign of 1969. As Francisco Balsemão said, it was necessary to «institute a more presidentialist system»⁵⁷. Indeed, the fact that the president of the Republic could force the resignation of the head of government is an incalculable resource, disputed by the factions within the regime. But this always carried a conflict between the president and the head of government. This is why, during the constitutional revision of 1951, Caetano proposes the direct election of the president of the Republic, against those sectors which sought to reestablish the monarchy⁵⁸. And this is also the reason why he refuses to be a candidate for president in 1972.

This institutional imbalance is accentuated against the head of government when Caetano occupies this post in 1968. First, the liberal parliamentarians are quick to evoke Caetano's old opinion on the presidency of the Republic. During the discussion of the constitutional revision in June 1971, Francisco Balsemão brings to the debate the opinions expressed by Caetano in 1951, which were very similar to the ones now defended by the liberal parliamentarians. Like the liberal parliamentarians, Caetano had also argued that direct elections by universal suffrage, by ensuring a higher degree of popular participation, were the only option which provided more legitimacy to the regime⁵⁹.

Second, Marcelo Caetano inherits this institutional ambiguity and a situation in which he loses power in relation to the head of state. Contrary to Salazar, which always chose the head of State, Caetano had instead been chosen by Américo Tomaz, the president at the time. Therefore, more than ever, he had to take into account the presidency in his political actions. The president, in turn, quickly set the limits for the government's scope of action and, consequently, to the possibility of regime transformation. Américo Tomás was firmly in favor of maintaining the authoritarian nature of the regime. He believed that, in the last «electoral acts» «the good Portuguese people did not waste (...) a single chance to demonstrate» «the desire of continuity in institutions and of permanence in the fundamental principles which inspired their work»⁶⁰.

Thus, and for the first time in the *Estado Novo* the head of the government was more fragile than the head of state. With Salazar, the president of the Republic had always been relegated to a secondary role, but, after his death, the head of state gains enormous power in comparison with the head of the government, since the latter's nomination depends on the former. According to Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, the *Marcelismo* is a period in which the transition was made from «a governmental system of concentration of power in the head of government to a governmental system of concentration of powers with an unstable balance between the president and the head of government»⁶¹. Because of this, Caetano is a weaker head of government than Salazar, for he is trapped from the start by Tomás, who is not willing to accept substantial changes in the constitutional revision, especially concerning the powers of the

presidency. Hence, Caetano did not want to risk great changes, for that increased the chances of polarization and conflict among institutions. In fact, in taking the risk of presenting himself as a candidate to presidential elections, as the liberals wanted, Caetano would be entering into a declared conflict with the president Américo Tomás.

Moreover, even if his candidacy had been presented, Caetano also risked bitter conflicts with the military leaderships and even a possible right wing military coup attempt. The newspaper *Expresso* mentioned a possible coup attempt by the hardliner general Kaúlza de Arriaga against Caetano in 1973⁶². In fact, the presidential issue was also dependent on what happened within the military. The structure of the relationships among civilians and the military in the *Estado Novo* is the third variable which explains the lack of opportunities for the liberal parliamentarians to become a predominant faction within the regime.

4. The Military

The *Estado Novo* regime was never a fully civilian regime, and was always affected by a tension between civilian and military leaderships. Military coups were frequent and the military was divided in supporting either the government or the opposition⁶³. This fact restricted the scope of action available to any head of government and made the military central to any process of political change. Moreover, because of this the presidency of the Republic was always held by a military⁶⁴.

It should be noted that this fact is endemic to the institutional structure of the *Estado Novo* and is prior to 1961, the year the colonial wars started. However, the war only accentuates this aspect of the regime and, from 1961 on, the presidency is used to empower the conservative sectors of the armed forces⁶⁵. Just after the start of the colonial war, and in the wake of the failure of the military sectors in favor of political liberalization (the failed coup attempt of 1961 by Botelho Moniz), a conservative line becomes prevalent in the armed forces⁶⁶, which continues during the *Marcelismo*. Casal-Ribeiro represented this sector in the National Assembly. In his view, the armed forces were what upheld «not only the regime, but the nation itself»⁶⁷.

From the regime's standpoint it is very likely that Salazar, fearful of creating tensions among the military sectors, would always postpone the choosing of a successor. As Hermínio Martins argues, the frequency of military coups is typical of political contexts with high levels of uncertainty, and this happens mostly in institutionally ambiguous regimes⁶⁸. The regime's low level of institutionalization caused governments to be permanently under the threat of military coups both from the left and the right. During the *Marcelismo* these contradictions become greater. Salazar's successor had not been chosen by him and many generals raised the issue with Tomás that, in order for Caetano to occupy the post of head of government, it was necessary that the colonial war should not be questioned⁶⁹. Hence, Caetano did not dare to stand against Tomás in the presidential elections of 1972⁷⁰. Marcelo Caetano was under the permanent threat of a right-wing military coup and under pressure by more reformist military men advocating the end of the colonial wars, such as Spínola, who, from 1972 on, also began to consider a military coup. Following the 1972 elections, Spínola was already working with officers of the MFA, and as noted by João Almeida Bruno⁷¹, accepted an army coup as the solution for the termination of the colonial war. Thus, the most logical option available to Caetano was to serve as arbiter among the military

factions. Further, the uncertainty within the ranks of the armed forces was very high, and any project of change that Caetano might instigate would always imply the support of one military faction against the others. To support the *Ala Liberal*'s bill for constitutional revision, for instance, meant to seek out support in the reformist sectors of the military, particularly strong in the navy, where the reformists were represented by the admiral Roboredo e Silva, who supported the abovementioned project⁷².

The military elites were thus central to any process of political change and tended to generate political-military leaders. In Guinea, for example, a political-military group led by Spínola establishes a political agenda of democratization of the regime and tended to act autonomously from Lisbon. According to Carlos Fabião, Spínola's goal was to place his men in key points and to set off «a palace coup»⁷³.

Consequently, the civilian oppositions, and in particular, the democratic Semiopposition, were dependent of what transpired in the military sphere. This is why the main measure of regime transformation proposed by the liberal representatives, universal and direct suffrage of the president of the Republic, was in great measure taken also with Spínola in mind. And contacts with the military were crucial for the *Ala Liberal* in its attempts of regime transformation. For example, officers connected with the MFA or with Spínola attend the meeting organized by the liberal parliamentarians on July 28 and 29 of 1973, called the "Liberal Meeting ", although with the commitment not to speak in public⁷⁴. In the summer of 1973 the liberal deputy Magalhães Mota begins to hold regular meetings with members of the military, especially from Spínola's group⁷⁵.

In authoritarian regimes in which civilian-military relations are more predictable, whether because the regime is controlled by the civilians or is a fully military one, or because there is a separation between the military as an institution and the military in government, these problems do not arise, as the issue of the succession is more predictable and therefore less susceptible to engender regime crises. The central issue here is to understand in what measure is there an institutionalization and predictability in civilian-military relations. In a military-authoritarian regime this means «the establishment of formal rules that regulate the structure of power within the regimen and the distribution of government functions to semi-representative bodies, including the Armed Forces». If institutionalization is successful there are fewer problems with the issue of military leadership and both succession and the stability of the regime are easier to reach⁷⁶.

Spain was a much more civilianized dictatorship. The military as such had very little power in the regime, were confined to their headquarters and Franco exerted much greater control over them than Salazar in Portugal. They sought to share in Franco's power and to dislodge the single party, the *Falange* but they were always faithful to Franco and later to the king Juan Carlos and the Monarchy, that is, to the regime. The country was officially a monarchy (without a monarch), according to the 1947 Law of Succession, but Franco was head of government and chief of state. This loyalty to Franco allowed the military to accept the monarchy's legitimacy and the decisions King Juan Carlos later made towards transforming the regime. Thus, the military were less important as a political actor in any process of regime transition⁷⁷.

5. Succession of Authoritarian Leadership and Institutional Heritages

In short, the institutional inheritance of the *Estado Novo* regime at the moment of the leader's succession both encouraged a radicalization of positions on the part of the democratic Semiopposition and relegated it to a secondary role among the regime's political groups. Paradoxically, it was the most liberal heritage of the regime that made a political change guided by the democratic Semiopposition impracticable. The legislation of the *Estado Novo* had always maintained some liberal principles, such as freedom of association and assembly, which were only restrained through the activity of the police and the censorship⁷⁸. In comparison to Franco's regime in Spain, there were more institutions of liberal origin in Portugal⁷⁹. The liberal representatives themselves made that clear in their parliamentary activity. The reestablishment of direct suffrage in the presidential elections was meant, as the liberal deputy João Mota Amaral noted, as a return to the original intent of the 1933 constitution⁸⁰.

This fact is related to the origins of the Portuguese authoritarian regime, which did not promote a stronger rupture with the past, but evolved rather from within a military dictatorship, in which a Catholic reactionary current represented by Salazar gained prominence. Consequently, the autonomy of institutions such as the armed forces or the National Assembly was maintained, with a greater institutional continuity with the past⁸¹. In contrast, in Spain, the fact that the regime had begun in a civil war which destroyed more organizational and institutional traces of the democratic Republic, led to a greater political mobilization and to a more severe break with the past, but also to greater institutional innovation⁸².

This implied several consequences for the Portuguese authoritarian regime. In the first place, since there were a number of inherited institutions of a democratic past, there was a lesser concentration of power in the government's hands. Moreover, this greater dispersion of power tended to stimulate a rivalry between institutions and to create obstacles to their control on the part of the authoritarian leader. This contradiction is accentuated, however, during the *Marcelismo*, when institutions such as the presidency of the Republic and the military leaders take on an ascendancy over the government leadership. This made the leader weak and therefore less capable of establishing alliances with reformist sectors.

In authoritarian regimes with an institutional configuration which does not promote the dispersion of power and rivalry between institutions, the trend toward instability and ideological radicalization is weaker and the role of the Semioppositions tends to be stronger. In the authoritarian regimes of Mexico and Brazil, the fact that no president could succeed himself, afforded several factions of the regime the possibility of access to power, and made political change possible. In situations where the leadership was collective, as in some of the military dictatorships of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay) or where there is a term limit for the military presidents, the trend for polarization was also weaker⁸³.

The case of Franco's dictatorship is particularly enlightening in this respect. Here, there was a simultaneous identification of the head of state and the head of government, both roles being played by Franco, which resulted in the Spanish authoritarian leader's far greater power over the regime's factions, as compared to the Portuguese leader. Franco held weekly cabinet meetings, and his government was the true center of power⁸⁴. This is why, in 1947, Franco is able to overcome the regime's factions and push through the approval of a law regulating the succession of the head of

state in which Spain is defined as a monarchy, in which the successor is chosen by the *Generalissimo*⁸⁵. In Portugal, on the contrary, the council of ministers was very much centered on the figure of Salazar and not very developed as an organ of power. From a legal and constitutional perspective, in the *Estado Novo* regime, the government was only made up of the president of the council and of the ministers individually, and the council of ministers was not regulated as an organ of power. It was only with Caetano, in 1968, that the council of ministers is finally institutionalized⁸⁶.

This inhibited the development of strong leadership in the conservative sectors in Spain⁸⁷ and allowed more easily for the head of government to be an agent of political change and reform. This was precisely what happened when Juan Carlos took up the crown⁸⁸. After a brief rule by Franco's last prime minister Carlos Arias Navarro, Juan Carlos nominates Adolfo Suarez as head of the government in July of 1976, thus putting the democratic Semiopposition in power, and together with Suarez dismantles Franco's single party, issues amnesties to political prisoners and presides over the first free elections. Moreover, the fact that Juan Carlos had greater control over the assembly than any leader had in Portugal over the National Assembly, also allowed him to persuade them to approve the law of political reform in October of 1976, in which the assembly dissolved themselves, thus clearing the way for democracy⁸⁹.

In Portugal, the institutional architecture and heritage caused the criticisms of the regime made by the *Ala Liberal* to take up the defense, not of the creation of a new order but of the reinstatement of legality contained in the regime itself⁹⁰. This aggravated both the political tension and the institutional contradictions of the regime, since it made the Portuguese regime, which was even less repressive than Franco's, seem more repressive than it actually was⁹¹. Obviously, the context of war made the moderation of political forces difficult. In war contexts the trend toward political radicalization is stronger, generally creating political divisions between hardliners and reformists⁹². In the Portuguese case, these divisions are expressed in the conflicts between Hard-line military leaders such as Kaúlza de Arriaga and Luz Cunha (commanders-in-chief for Moçambique and Angola) and the Guinea group (António de Spínola)⁹³. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the government tends to be more severely affected and its power base is more fragile, especially when defeat is imminent⁹⁴. However, the structures of the political regime can further aggravate these tensions and they generally precede the onset of wars. We contend that the effects of the colonial war must be examined in their interaction the regime's institutions.

Firstly, it is still doubtful whether the war in and of itself gave rise tensions within the bureaucracy which led to the regime's collapse. Although military expenditures in absolute terms were rather high (43% of public expenditure and 7.5% of the GNP in 1968)⁹⁵, in relative terms, they were in decline, which does not indicate a structural collapse of the state⁹⁶. But even had this not been so, the war cannot be the single cause for the political polarization which occurred during *Marcelismo*. As Philippe Schmitter points out, there are questions yet to be answered, especially as to why the regime did not admit a military defeat earlier and why it proved to be so incapable of defending itself⁹⁷.

Secondly, there are cases where the Semiopposition came into power, also in situations of intense armed conflict and international pressure. In Spain the terrorist actions of ETA (*Euskadi ta Askatasuna*), the Basque separatist organization, which was created in 1969, provoked a strong reaction by the state, and, up to 1975, caused several deaths, promoted armed violence and even assassinated Prime-minister Carrero Blanco⁹⁸. In 1973 Spain experienced a situation of intense social conflict and protests,

with the fight over the state's political limits, the declaration of the state of emergency in the Basque territory, bombings and the execution of terrorists⁹⁹. Moreover, Spain was also experiencing colonial problems in Western Sahara, where a guerrilla, the Polisario Front, opposed the Spanish presence. However, the particular characteristics of Spanish political institutions did not make this issue a pressing political problem for the regime. Although Franco imposed himself as a general in the Moroccan war in the 1920s, it was possible for him to posit the option of abandoning the colonies in 1969, in opposition to the more conservative sectors¹⁰⁰. And there are also cases of authoritarian regimes where a reformist pro-democratic coalition proved impossible to stabilize, and this was due, as it was in Portugal, to the combined effect of the regime's institutions. In the Soviet case after 1989, for instance, the interaction of the effects of the Afghanistan war with the federalist institutions encouraged ethnic mobilization and contributed to the regime's collapse¹⁰¹.

6. Conclusion

Between 1969 and 1974, in the *Estado Novo*, there appeared, from within the regime's factions, a new political group, which became known as the *Ala Liberal*. This group constitutes what we have termed a democratic Semiopposition in an authoritarian regime, in so far as it is made up of politicians from the authoritarian regime who use their position inside the regime and the resources the regime makes available to try effect a transformation of the regime into a democracy.

Between 1969 and 1974 the *Ala Liberal* establishes itself in society and in the regime. It takes part in meetings and associations, establishes alliances with military, opposition and government sectors, and acquires capacity to mobilize public opinion and political notoriety. However, its project fails. The relationship of the liberal deputies with Caetano was never such as to permit the creation of a strong and stable alliance towards a democratic political project. Caetano saw the *Ala Liberal* more as a source for occasional support in the struggles amongst the regime's factions than as a permanent ally. In his view, the *Ala Liberal* was useful to keep the power of the Hardliners and of Américo Tomás in check, to distance himself from the left-wing oppositions outside the regime, and to obtain acceptance abroad, in democratic Europe¹⁰². Thus, the *Ala Liberal* served as a sort of left wing of the regime, of a semi-institutionalized opposition, created and supported by Marcelo Caetano¹⁰³.

The causes for the failure of the *Ala Liberal* are rooted in the institutional structure of the *Estado Novo* inherited by Marcelo Caetano in 1968, which promoted the political radicalization of centrist forces and of the democratic Semiopposition and provided few opportunities for the latter to take hold of political power and to strengthen a pro-democratization alliance with Marcelo Caetano. First, the fact that the democratic Semiopposition was rooted in a representative organ, the National Assembly, by virtue of being an institutional position which was partially legitimated by the popular vote, tended to favor those representatives who preferred a direct confrontation with the regime, appealing to their role as the people's representatives, pointing out their independence from the regime and demanding a democratization "here and now". This made them very impatient and always unsatisfied with the political measures introduced by Marcelo Caetano.

In second place, Marcelo Caetano and the government could not be very bold in establishing an alliance with the democratic Semiopposition, even had they so desired,

in light of two strong institutional barriers: the military and the presidency of the Republic. Caetano was a weak leader in facing these two institutions, he had depended on them in order to become Salazar's successor and was permanently under threat of a military coup. It is thus easy to understand that he would not be very bold.

The authoritarian regime's institutional architecture is the fundamental reason why it was impossible for it to undergo a peaceable and gradual democratization. The paradox here is that it was exactly the liberal and even democratic institutional heritage that brought on this result, by promoting a greater competition amongst institutions and a weakening of the executive power and especially by giving the Semiopposition strong incentives to appeal directly to a democratic legitimacy and to criticize the regime according to its own institutional premises. The political arguments used by the *Ala Liberal* were always based on the notion of re-establishing legality, accentuating the democratic and liberal aspects which existed in the constitution and in the law (presidentialism; universal and direct suffrage; freedoms of assembly and association). In this way, it increasingly aggravated the contradictions of the very institutions they wished to reform.

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² Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule. Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 15-16.

³ Portuguese authoritarian regime, 1933-1974.

⁴ Vasco Pulido Valente, *Marcelo Caetano. As Desventuras da Razão* (Lisboa: Gótica, 2002), pp. 40-50.

⁵ Robert Dahl, "Introduction", in Robert Dahl, (ed.), *Regimes and Oppositions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), p.12.

⁶ Hermínio Martins, "Oposição em Portugal", in Hermínio Martins, *Classe, Status e Poder* (Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais), 1998, p. 67.

⁷ Spanish authoritarian regime, 1939-1975; Juan Linz, Miguel Jerez, with Susana Corso, "Ministers and Regimes in Spain: From the First to the Second Restoration, 1874-2002", in Pedro Tavares de Almeida, António Costa Pinto, Nancy Bermeo (eds.), *Who Governs Southern Europe? Regime Change and Ministerial Recruitment, 1850-2000* (London and Portland, Or.: Frank Cass), 2003, pp. 72-80.

⁸ Juan Linz, "Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes", in Fred I. Greenstein, Nelson Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. III, (Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), p. 272.

⁹ Juan Linz, Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 296-306.

¹⁰ The *Estado Novo's* single party.

¹¹ António Valdemar (ed.), *Ser ou não Ser Pelo Partido Único* (Lisboa: Editora Arcádia, 1973), p. 177.

¹² Tiago Fernandes, "National Assembly's Liberal Wing, 1969 – 1973: a sociological profile", *Portuguese Journal of Social Science*, II, 2, 2003, pp. 1-33; Tiago Fernandes, *Nem Ditadura, Nem Revolução. A Ala Liberal e o Marcelismo (1968-1974)* (Lisboa: Assembleia da República/D. Quixote), 2006.

¹³ Silva Pinto (ed.), *Ser ou não ser deputado* (Lisboa: Arcádia, 1973), pp. 10-34.

¹⁴ Linz and Stepan, pp. 296-306.

¹⁵ Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen, Frank Longstreth, (eds.), *Structuring Politics. Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 6.

¹⁶ António de Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970) was head of government of the Portuguese dictatorship between 1933 and 1968. Marcelo Caetano (1906-1980) succeeded Salazar in 1968 and ruled until 1974.

¹⁷ Fernando Rosas, "Marcelismo: Ser ou não Ser?", in Fernando Rosas, Pedro Aires Oliveira (eds.), *A Transição Falhada. O Marcelismo e o Fim do Estado Novo (1968-1974)* (Lisboa: Notícias Editorial, 2004), p. 20.

- ¹⁸ Rule of Marcelo Caetano, Salazar's successor, as head of government (1968-1974).
- ¹⁹ Interview with Joaquim Magalhães Mota, July 18, 2002.
- ²⁰ Linz, "Totalitarian", pp. 154-155.
- ²¹ File "União Nacional: Sessões de Esclarecimento, 19.10.1969 - 23.10.1969", Archive PIDE-DGS, National Archives-Torre do Tombo, Lisboa, Portugal.
- ²² António Reis, "Cooperativas Culturais", in Fernando Rosas, J. M. Brandão de Brito (eds.), *Dicionário de História do Estado Novo*, Vol. I (Venda Nova: Bertrand Editora, 1996), p. 212.
- ²³ *Diário das Sessões da Assembleia Nacional e Câmara Corporativa*, January 17, 1972, p. 3033.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ Daniel Friedheim, "The Failure to Democratize Portugal "From Above": a Model of Innovative Leadership", Manuscript, Department of Political Science, Yale University, 1991, p. 20.
- ²⁵ Manuel Bernardo, *Marcelo e Spínola: a ruptura* (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1996), p. 261.
- ²⁶ The MFA was composed by a group of officers that because of professional and political reasons opposed the continuation of the colonial war and executed the coup of April 25th 1974 that terminated the Portuguese authoritarian regime.
- ²⁷ Interview with Joaquim Magalhães Mota.
- ²⁸ File "Francisco Sá-Carneiro, nº 3099-CI (1), 4, Grupo Sá-Carneiro: relatório de 10 Maio de 1971", Archive PIDE-DGS, National Archives-Torre do Tombo, Lisboa, Portugal.
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- ³⁰ Linz, "Totalitarian", pp. 154-155.
- ³¹ *The Economist*, February 10, 1973.
- ³² João Pedro Miller Guerra, *Progresso na Liberdade* (Lisboa: Moraes Editores), 1973, p. 500.
- ³³ *Diário das Sessões*, November 26, 1970, p. 1003.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), p. 48.
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- ³⁷ Philippe C. Schmitter, "Libertação por golpe", in Philippe C. Schmitter, *Portugal: do Autoritarismo à Democracia* (Lisboa: Instituto de Ciências Sociais, 1999), p. 199.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*; Zbigniew Brzezinski, Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Power: USA/USSR* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), pp. 188-189.
- ³⁹ Philippe C. Schmitter, "Impacte e significado das eleições "não concorrenciais, não livres e não significativas" no regime autoritário português, 1933-1974", in Schmitter, *Portugal*, pp. 88-90.
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