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Rethinking Democratisation in Spain, Greece and Portugal

Edited by Maria Elena Cavallaro · Kostis Kornetis

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Editors

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FOREWORD

When considering the Great Recession, that is, the economic crisis that affected several countries and specifically South Europe for about a decade (Questa parte mi pare sbagliata. La crisi cominciò nel 2008. Poi 2007-2014 sono 7 anni), the main recurrent questions scholars addressed have been about the social, the economic and the political impacts of that crisis on four of the five PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain, but not Ireland).

Thus, if we focus on political aspects, first of all, there were several analyses on elections with regard to how economic issues become dominant for voters under economic recession; how incumbent parties were punished when there is an economic crisis; the more general effects of the economic crisis on voting; the impact of the economic crisis on parties; and how the crisis deeply affected the welfare state in a specific group of countries, such as South Europe. However, all in all, the most recurrent position on the “Great Recession” stresses the change in voting and the punishment of incumbent leaders and parties, but at the same time emphasises that the reactions and consequently the impact was very limited. That is, almost everything seems to be confined to a temporary change in voting behaviour and some limited protest. Within this perspective, a socioeconomic analysis of the phenomenon, such as that carried out by two economists, states that “Despite its negative effects on incumbent governments, the economic crisis has provided few signs of fundamental political realignment, policy experimentation ... or mobilisation by new political actors. ... rampant economic nationalism or serious erosion of international collaboration has not emerged”.¹

Thus, on the one hand, the previous historical analyses suggested that in the past crises there were opportunities for profound changes, even in non-democratic direction; there was space for a reinvention of democracy with the addition of welfare institutions and policies reshaping the representative channels of democracy; there was even the possibility of strengthening representative actors, such as parties and interest organisation with the launching of neo-corporatist agreement and the overcoming of the crisis through them in the Eighties of last century.²

On the other hand, the present empirical research stresses how limited and partial the impact is, basically—we could add—because of the full legitimization of the democratic regime, which at least in a number of areas of the world does not have any viable alternative.

Differently from these past results, the most recent research on South Europe shows how serious and profound the impact has been especially on political participation and competition, but also in other domains.³ If we focus on parties and party systems, we can see how the economic crisis actually exercised contrasting pressures. To start with, there was an evident broadening of salient technocratic or “non-majoritarian decisions” aimed at achieving economically efficient solutions, such as abstract austerity policies. This was complemented by a diffuse open demand for more democracy, which unfolded in different directions. Profiting from the opportunities provided by the so-called digital revolution and following the example of *Pirates* in some central and northern European countries (e.g. Austria, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium) there was a request for stronger direct democracy with the enlargement of the space for participation and a growing demand for accountability and transparency. About parties, the empirical analysis has first shown an additional deepening of the *crisis of traditional electoral behavior*, with a fading degree of organisation and *greater electoral volatility*. Moreover, the new protest movements brought about a change in party systems with a *new tripolar structure* in Spain, Italy and Greece. About this feature, a possible stabilisation of dissatisfaction because of the lasting economic difficulties may even make the tripolarism stable.

Among the other most relevant changes we should include the *partial reshaping of cleavages*. First, there are transformations in the centre-periphery cleavage and the pro/anti-Europe cleavage, complemented by a strong recasting of the anti-establishment divide. In terms of the centre-periphery one, the economic crisis and the consequent cuts of public expenditure has been pushing toward stronger centralisation,

counteracting the previous trend that had been going in precisely the opposite direction of giving a major political role to the periphery. This has been happening not in the already highly centralised smaller countries such as Portugal and Greece, but in Spain and Italy too. In Spain, the growing conflict between Catalonia and Madrid because of this new trend is complemented by the muting of this divide in all the other regions, with the previous level of decentralisation remaining frozen in Galicia and the Basque Country. In Italy, the centre-periphery issue disappeared from the political agenda and the Northern League, which had been built around a programme of decentralisation, changed its leadership and programme to become a rightist party. Moreover, the consolidation of the pro/anti-European Union cleavage achieved a central position on domestic political agendas and was an obvious result of the austerity policies imposed by the European Union. At the same time, the new protest parties very strongly exploited the anti-establishment divide, which especially overlapped with anti-European positions. The left-right divide cleavage has also been achieving a renewed role because of the Great Recession.

The key explanations of the consequences of the economic crisis in a context of embedded democracies without an alternative are in the analysis of the past.⁴

In this perspective, the research presented here makes a substantial and original step forward in this path. In fact, the authors deepen the analysis by changing perspective. That is, their key question casts a new light on the past transitions to democracy. More precisely, the changes brought about by the economic crisis in Portugal, Spain and Greece bring to reassess the key factors of the democratic transition in those countries and the related public debate on them.

They consider those factors in terms of resilience or profound transformations within three domains: the political-cultural legacy at the core of transition to democracy, the attitudes and behaviours vis-à-vis European Union, the new space for social movements again with reference to the transmission of the past. Analysing what is happening to the three domains is a way to shed new light on the processes of transitions to democracy a few decades later. In this perspective, the economic crisis becomes a litmus test for the key elements of transition and the related resilience. This is a new way for a more in-depth reappraisal of the effective comparative salience of each element in the transition to democracy, some of them still relevant today.

Among the results of research, the volume presents, two aspects seem worthwhile to be recalled here.

The first one refers to how the reassessment of the processes of transition, especially in Spain and in Portugal, brought about as reactions the defence of the traditional “success story” interpretation to keep the salience of the foundational myths of those democracies. Second, such a defence of the past and its narrative is an important component of contemporary conflict among political actors. Consequently, they are presented and discussed instrumentally, mainly to get or keep consensus, rather than profiting of a reassessment of those processes to reconsider and in case make up for criminal or only unfair action perpetrated during the confused moment of the change.

Moreover, about Europe and its salience in the transition, the volume shows the majoritarian maintenance of pro-European attitudes complemented by some degree of wide spreading of a soft Euroscepticism. Despite the European request of strong austerity measures that created problems and sufferance to the people, those positive attitudes toward European Union are also explained as a reaction to the recognised flaws of domestic actors, such as clientelism and forms of corruption. The social movements are also a part of this picture as the volume brings to forefront. It investigates how the new actors use the representations of the past in an instrumental way to occupy the political space opened up with the economic crisis; and how local protest movements have been able to be politically central and to get a higher consensus by launching transnational campaigns against the austerity economic policies.

Overall, throwing new light on those macro-factors the book presents a collective, well addressed, reassessment of the key, great processes of change as the three transitions were.

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NOTES

1. M. Kahler and D. A. Lake (2013) *Politics in the New Hard Times: The Great Recession in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cornell University Press).
2. P. Gourevitch (1986) *Politics in Hard Times: Comparative Responses to International Economic Crises* (New York: Cornell University Press).

3. L. Morlino and F. Raniolo (2017) *The Impact of the Economic Crisis on South European Democracies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).
4. A. Costa Pinto and L. Morlino (eds.) (2011) *Dealing with the Legacy of Authoritarianism: The 'Politics of Past' in Southern European Democracies. Comparative Perspectives* (London: Routledge).

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(co-authored with André Freire, Ioannis Andreadis and José Manuel Leite Viegas, Routledge, 2016).

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Lost in Transition?

Kostis Kornetis and Maria Elena Cavallaro

TRANSITOLOGY AND THE “NEW” EUROPEAN SOUTH

One of the most dramatic turning points in twentieth-century southern European history was the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule in Spain, Portugal and Greece in the mid-1970s, namely the processes that brought about the end of the Francoist regime (1936/1939–1975), the Salazar-Caetano regime of Estado Novo (1933–1974) and the military dictatorship of the Colonels in Greece (1967–1974). What did these distinct processes of democratisation—the *Transición* in Spain (spearheaded by Adolfo Suárez following the death of General Francisco Franco in Spain in November 1975), the “revolutionary process” in Portugal (put forth by the Carnation Revolution of April 1974 that overturned Marcelo Caetano, paving the way to democratic elections) and the Greek regime change, dubbed *Metapolitefsi* (provoked by the militaries handing over power to the seasoned conservative politician

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Konstantinos Karamanlis in July 1974)—have in common? To begin with, all were invariably hailed as “success stories” of democratisation. Despite the complexities and discrepancies of each individual case, in the years that followed these transitions, all three countries shifted their political focus from the failures of said processes, to their achievements, postponing a deep analysis of the afterlives and legacies of the authoritarian past. Spain, Portugal and Greece promoted a pacific consolidation of democracy, sacrificing, at the same time, the construction of historical memory and the promotion of reflexivity on the role played by their respective civil societies and by European players and institutions. This took place in varying degrees, with Spain leading the way in looking toward what promised to be a radiant future, rather than back at the bleak and divisive political past.

Academic analysis of the three transitions tended to follow the trends set by the early “transitology” approach of the 1960s and 1970s, and especially the works of political scientists Seymour Martin Lipset, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, Robert Dahl, and Dankwart Rustow, who focused on consensus and pacts between elites as a precondition for successful transition to democracy.¹ During the early 1980s, scholars focusing especially on Spain, such as Paul Preston and Raymond Carr in the UK and Juan Pablo Fusi, Javier Tusell and Manuel Tuñón de Lara in Spain, followed the lead of such interpretations.² Furthermore at the end of the Cold War, scholars revived studies on regime change in order to deal with new case studies. The three Southern European cases were accordingly hailed as ideal examples of what Samuel Huntington famously labelled the “third wave of democratisation”.³ The Spanish case of “pacted transition” in particular was studied the most and was seen as an “exportable”⁴ type of a negotiated transition to Argentina and Chile during and after their respective transitions and to post-Communist Eastern Europe after 1989.⁵

The above studies described the democratisation process in Spain as the extraordinary result of a negotiated pact between the moderate and reformist sections of Francoism and anti-Francoism. A great deal of attention was paid to the role of political elites in setting the pace of the democratisation processes in Portugal and Greece as well, despite the fact that the collapses of the *Estado Novo* and the Colonels’ regime were triggered by dynamics generated by overseas conflicts (in the African colonies and Cyprus, respectively). For Gunther, Puhle and Diamandouros, “the democracies which emerged in ‘The New Southern

Europe' took on added salience and presented themselves as invaluable objects for social science analysis".⁶ Such interpretations, based on the idea of "velvet" processes, were not formulated by chance: they emerged during and after the end of the transitions, entering indirectly into public debate, and became vehicles of the consolidation processes that served to legitimise the path chosen by the respective political leaderships. The same interpretations were also utilised at the onset of the so-called Second Cold War (1979–1985) to reinforce the international allegiance and state linkage of the three countries to the western side.⁷

Similarly, the bulk of the research conducted on the eve of the twenty-first century on this "New Southern Europe" lacked any consideration of grassroots movements and civil society as decisive ingredients of democratisation.⁸ With a few notable exceptions, new research turned toward the role of leadership and decision-making processes, on the evaluation of the possible correlation between certain types of transition and political systems shaped after the end of authoritarianism and the factors which act as promoters or inhibitors of transitions. The conclusion drawn was that there were no established rules to be followed and that no actor was essential. Inside each national case study, the democratic emergence derived from a specific combination of causes that cannot possibly be reproduced.⁹ A number of scholars, particularly of history and sociology, such as Josep Fontana and José Vidal-Beneyto on Spain, Manuel Loff and Diego Palacios Cerezales on Portugal, or Dimitris A. Sotiropoulos and Serafeim Seferiadis on Greece,¹⁰ who had criticised the insufficiency of elite analysis for a global comprehension of the processes, promoted the idea of the singularity of each individual process. Many embarked on new research fields, focusing on specific aspects of the transitions, such as the role of the military, political parties or trade unions, embedded in their own reality. A number of interdisciplinary works cutting across history, political science and sociology focused on public opinion, the involvement of international actors and the major impact of neighbouring countries' transitions on one another. Moreover an increasing number of scholars moved away from the earlier structuralist approaches, and acknowledged the necessity to account for both "uncertainty" and "agency" in transitional processes, corresponding to Niccolò Machiavelli's "fortuna" and "virtù", to quote Philippe Schmitter.¹¹ Indicative of this shift of focus were the works by Nancy Bermeo on Portugal and on post-transition protests in Southern Europe in general, by Philippe Schmitter on the role of interest-groups during the

democratic transition and consolidation in Southern Europe, by Victor Pérez Díaz on civil society during and after the transition to democracy in Spain, by Robert M. Fishman on the role of labour representatives in the transition to democracy in Spain, by Sidney Tarrow on mass mobilisation and the impact of popular power in regime change in Spain, and by Pamela Radcliff on the impact of neighbourhood and other social movements in Spain during the Transition.¹²

All the above studies challenged to some extent the foundational political myths of the respective democracies, but did not manage to introduce new paradigms in academic narratives before the early 2000s. Influential historians maintained that Spain undertook a masterful transition to democracy, while political scientists in Greece did the same as far as the Greek *Metapolitefsi* was concerned.¹³ Finally, in Portugal too, the Revolution was hailed by historians as a solid step in a successful transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one.¹⁴ This was in spite of the fact that praise tended to focus on either 25 April 1974, namely the day of the outbreak of the Revolution, or on the aftermath of decolonisation, rather than on the more complex PREC period that marked the 19 months of revolutionary governance (25 April 1974–25 November 1975). Despite the above-mentioned challenges to these political and academic narratives, the latter seemed to be rather well-consolidated into the first decade of the new millennium.

THE CRISIS AS CAESURA

The onset of the European sovereign crisis that began in 2008 triggered renewed criticism and delegitimation attempts of these “success story” narratives. It generated important public rereadings of the political transitions from authoritarian to liberal democratic rule. Few of these revisions were flattering for either the established tropes of transitology or the national narratives regarding the transitions and consolidation of the countries that were once considered to be “a unique laboratory for the testing of propositions relevant to theories of redemocratisation and democratic stability”.¹⁵ Almost ten years since the onset of the economic crisis, there is a widespread sense of a structural connection between current politics and political transitions as parts of the same historical cycle that now seems to be coming to an abrupt close. While the social welfare paradigm in the European South has reached its limits, the collapse of

bipartisan political systems, the rise of new political actors, such as Podemos in Spain and Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal, and the reinforcement of others, such as SYRIZA in Greece, further calls for a novel reflection on the recent past.

Hence, in all three countries the emerging problems on the quality of Southern European democracies linked with unstable majorities, weak governances, corruption and clientelism in the administrative sector and the increasing gap between trade unions and political parties, were attributed to the weakness of the institutional and political changes made during the transitional or post-transitional periods. Claims regarding residual traces of the nondemocratic legacies of the past became common in political and public discourse. In Spain, a major criticism was uttered on the very nature of the transition as a pact between old and new political elites that foreclosed transitional justice and especially the recognition of the victims of the Francoist dictatorship. The supposed continuity in repressive mechanisms of the state and the weak attitude of civil society's opposition to the dictatorship in Greece and the repressed issue of the colonial wars and the postcolonial condition in Portugal, respectively, came under critical scrutiny.

This edited volume brings together nine original case studies from the fields of history, cultural studies, political science and sociology to revisit the dominant historical narratives and the memory around Southern European transitions to democracy more than forty years after the demise of authoritarian rule, by addressing the timely issue of whether such historical processes still fall today under the rubric of "velvet democratisations". This is the first book to examine the past and present and the discourses developed around them in the three countries, reconnecting with a long-lost tendency of looking at these three cases together, as was the standard practice in social science scholarship on democratisation in the 1980s.¹⁶ Spain, Greece and Portugal serve as ideal case studies for a transnational analysis due to the similarities in their political and financial conditions and the significant social and cultural changes that occurred in the aftermath of the dictatorships¹⁷ as well as in the academic narratives that were produced. The volume further examines the extent to which the economic crisis shifted our attention toward other transition-related concepts and challenged our consolidated perception of them. Finally, it is the connections between poetics and aspirations, rhetoric and repertoires of grassroots activists in the transitions

and the current economic crisis in all three case studies that are of crucial importance for rethinking the dialectics between past and present.

The volume is divided into three sections, each of which engages with a key concept and its transformation over time: public memory, Europeanism and grassroots mobilisation.

REMEMBERING TRANSITIONS

Spain, Greece and Portugal represent three separate cases of dealing with transitional justice, which gave way to three distinct post-authoritarian arrangements regarding amnesty, clemency, pardon, trials or purges. In Spain, the past was dealt with through the granting of a blanket amnesty in 1977, including both to political prisoners but also to regime perpetrators. By contrast, the newly established Greek democracy put the so-called “*protaitioi*”, namely the ringleaders of the 1967 coup, on trial. The latter received death sentences, which were however immediately commuted to life imprisonment. Greek torturers were not amnestied either, as in other cases following the collapse of authoritarian regimes, such as those of Turkey or Latin America, although most received remarkably mild sentences.¹⁸ At about the same time Portugal went through a series of purges of public institutions, in other words, an *épuration légale* on a grand scale. Differences in the ways in which the three countries dealt with the regimes through justice also produced an entirely diverse handling of the memory of the respective regimes, including commemorative practices of the past. Moreover, traumas involving mass graves from the civil war and post-civil war period in Spain,¹⁹ the Turkish invasion of Cyprus and an ongoing military presence and political deadlock in the case of Greece, and the war crimes and refugee crisis of the ex-colonies in Portugal, all remain open wounds directly connected to the transitional and post-transitional periods.

In order to unpack these complex synergies, the first section of the volume, titled “Conflicting Memories of Transition” proposes a reconsideration of the use of the term public memory—in the tradition of Paloma Aguilar’s rich work on Spain.²⁰ It is only through a systematic analysis of the former, we argue, that we can reach an understanding of the ways in which social actors perceive the transitions to democracy today. The dominant idea of the “master frame”, forged by political and media discourse, is a precious tool that helps us make sense of the hegemonic narratives on the peaceful and consensual transitions in the

European South. With the advent of the economic crisis, a competing master frame emerged, however, especially—though not exclusively—from grassroots actors. It casts doubt upon the success story of these countries and proposes instead a much more critical version of past events; the Spanish critics of the so-called “*Régimen del 78*” is a powerful case in point. Such a questioning of the past indicates the need to look at how public memory of events evolved over the last forty years—in terms of institutions, party politics, academic discourse and representations. It thus focuses on the role of collective memory in the political, public and intellectual domains in the three countries.

This opening section indicates the ways in which cultural institutions and individual party strategies in the three countries are, even today, deeply influenced by the memory of transition. It addresses the following questions: how do actors and national societies construct narratives of their past and how do those accountings change over time? How do political actors tackle materially focused questions about the past—such as whether to unearth mass graves that hold the victims of past conflicts? How did the economic crisis influence such cultural dynamics? And, finally, how do national interpretations of the past influence the political trajectory of contemporary societies? Chapter 2 stresses the dialectic between positive and critical narratives of the Spanish transition to democracy in the period 2008–2016, while Chapter 4 also juxtaposes Spain with the Greek case. These chapters trace the dominant political, scholarly and popular narratives and their transformations over time with bottom-up perspectives that question the dominant top-down narratives. Chapter 2 looks at public memory and the ways in which it has been affected both by official historiography and political discourse but also through a series of representations, including cinema, theatre, television and literature (Gustran and Quiroga). A tacit issue tackled by Chapter 4 is the generational one, and in particular, the way in which the two competing narratives (the celebratory and the critical) correspond to a generational clash between people who navigated the transitions and a third generation that tries to “remember” them at present (Kornetis).²¹ The evolution of the narrative on the authoritarian past is central also in Chapter 3 (Raimundo and Generoso de Almeida). Focusing, this time on the role of parliament, Chapter 3 traces the behaviour of Portuguese political parties during the parliamentary decision-making process of transitional justice bills and “transitional” bills from 1976 to 2015. This included all legislative proposals that sought to

deal with the authoritarian past (historical investigation and truth, justice and reconciliation, reparation and acknowledgement, and education and memorialisation).

SHIFTING VIEWS VIS-A-VIS EUROPE SINCE THE 1970s

European integration has been one of the driving forces of the democratic consolidation of Southern Europe. The European Economic Community (EEC) influenced this process indirectly, firmly anchoring Spain, Greece and Portugal within the western bloc and helping enhance a modernisation plan that included the reconstruction of political parties on the liberal democratic model. According to Lawrence Whitehead, “The EEC has acted as a powerful catalyst both of democratisation and national redefinition in contemporary southern Europe [...] by offering an elaborate structure of economic and social behavior”.²² Following their accession to the EEC in the early and mid-1980s, these countries obtained a stronger standing both in European and international affairs. The positive meaning of their membership was widely promoted, while European institutions were praised for helping to consolidate democracy and to stabilise national economies.²³ The outbreak of the economic crisis challenged this narrative.

The volume’s second section, entitled “Europeanism, Europeanisation and Euroscepticism since the late 1970s”, focuses on the changes occurred as a consequence of the 2008 crisis and revisit the three countries’ attitude toward the European Union since their transition toward democracy. The political consequences of the crisis cannot be confined only to the debate on the role played by the respective governments; they rather affect the entire spectrum of political voices reacting against the internal consequences of external events. The political landscape began to be characterised by a higher level of fragmentation and polarisation, by the emergence of new political actors and less consensus toward traditional parties. At the same time, extraparlimentary mobilisations with larger demonstrations and strikes became much more widespread. In all three countries, the economic crisis further undermined the socialist parties, meaning those forces founded or refounded during the transitions which went on to play a leading role in democratic consolidation. While critics on Europe are growing at present in the three countries