Twentieth Century Portugal
[A Historical Overview]
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Preface and Acknowledgements

1.

Providing an overview of Portugal’s 20th century historical evolution and reshaping is a challenging task, not only because of the time span involved – one hundred years of the most recent, vivid and controversial history – but also because of the variety of political experiences that Portugal endured in those years, each aiming at the establishment of one given social and institutional framework. For such a long-established country – one of the oldest in Europe dating back more than eight centuries – the last one hundred years were among the most vertiginous and important in its history. It was a time of speedy and often contradictory change that set a backward and underdeveloped nation on the road towards the present national economic development, political democracy and free society, enabling Portugal to become, despite structural weaknesses, an actively participating member of one of the most advanced regions in the world.

This task of sketching the Portuguese 20th century becomes even more challenging when it is aimed primarily at an international audience (English speaking above all), which apart from perhaps a few facts, names and dates, is not specialist on the Portuguese contemporary reality. The broad purpose of this short book is therefore to familiarise all those who share an interest in the historical course of the Portuguese nation, with its reality, challenges,
myths, achievements, hopes and failures of this somewhat idiosyncratic and dualistic country. Hopefully, this will also contribute towards the cause of internationalising Portuguese historical issues and raising their profile.

2.

An abridged version of this text was originally presented – under the title «Modern Portugal(s)?. Political and Social Reshaping in the 20th Century: First Republic, New State and Democracy» – as the opening lecture in a «Summer School» post-graduate program organised by the Faculty of Human Sciences of the Portuguese Catholic University (where I've long lectured) and the Annenberg School for Communication of the University of Pennsylvania (USA), held in Lisbon in July 2007. The «Summer School's» general title was «(In)Visible Culture, Cultural Conflict and Portuguese Society», and the fortnight was attended by Portuguese and American doctoral students. The main goal of the historical overview on 20th century Portugal presented was to provide students with an introductory grounding that could cast light on the various contemporary themes and questions that followed, in the highly multi-disciplinary approach to the Portuguese reality set down for the whole «Summer School» program.

I would therefore particularly like to thank both Prof. Isabel Capeloa Gil, Dean of the Faculty of Human Sciences of the Portuguese Catholic University, and Prof. Barbie Zelizer, Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication, for staging, with their distinctive mark of academic entrepreneurship and energy, the joint «Summer School» initiative, and to express a very personal acknowledgement to the former for her invitation to participate, hence opening up the opportunity of drawing up the sketch of contemporary Portuguese history that follows.

The aforementioned lecture was revised and enlarged, especially in terms of the notes, and divided into twenty short chapters, each with its respective title. Beginning with an overview on the Portuguese reality at the turn of the century and on the crisis and failure of the old monarchy, its structure unfolds through a descriptive and interpretative summary of the three regimes the country experienced over the course of the 20th century – the First Republic, New State and Democracy – closing with a broad perspective not so much on what Portugal and the Portuguese were, but rather more on what they currently are at the beginning of a new century. Throughout the one hundred years that stretch from the demise of the Portuguese monarchy up to present-day democracy, the key dates were 1910, 1917, 1926, 1933, 1968, 1974, 1976 and 1986 – all important moments of change between political and institutional regimes (in the cases of 1910, 1926 and 1974) or inside an existing regime (in the cases of 1917, 1933, 1968, 1976 and 1986).

Along with the body of the essay, three appendixes are also included: a list of acronyms, setting out translations of all Portuguese political and social institutions, parties, movements or dated expressions, a short chronology, constituting the backbone of the book, and brief biographies of seventeen decisive historical or current figures of Portuguese life featuring in the text.

Lastly, a note on the bibliography. Originally, this essay was mainly (although not exclusively) prepared – and that feature was preserved here – with an English bibliography, because it was to be presented in that language to English-speaking students, and in an attempt to test what would be the sum of knowledge available in that language about recent Portuguese political and social history. A Portuguese reader, especially any academic audience, will not find in this book any new facts or original research on new
historical material – nor is this its intended purpose. It’s aim is – it should be stressed – to put forward an overview of a wide set of facts, names and historical arguments that are dispersed broadly across several titles and set them down in a short text seeking to present 20th century Portugal to a generalist international public. Otherwise said, this essay and its bibliography should be read as one, possible but debatable, outline of twentieth century Portugal; not as any complete, descriptive or authoritative work – a much more challenging task than that endeavoured here, which would also evidently have to exceed the number of pages presented and certainly the number of bibliographical references quoted.

Publishing this book would not have been possible without the support of various persons and institutions – that I would like to take this opportunity to thank: firstly, Prof. Luisa Leal de Faria, Vice-Rector of the Portuguese Catholic University, who, despite a very busy academic schedule, promptly read the final version of this text and not only encouraged me to publish but accepted it for publication by the Catholic University Press (which I would furthermore also thank for their excellent editorial work and collective enthusiasm), and brought about the sponsorship and co-editing of the book by the Luso-American Development Foundation (FLAD); secondly, Dr. Rui Chancerelle de Machete, Chairman of FLAD, the institution that co-edited this book, providing financial support and, above all, publicity within its own network of contacts across the English academic speaking sphere; and lastly, Prof. Kevin Rose, my colleague at the Faculty of Human Sciences of the Portuguese Catholic University, who wholeheartedly agreed on a last reading to provide the text with a final English language brush up. To all, my most grateful acknowledgements.

1.
Introduction:
The Burden of History and the Pace of the Century

Portugal is one of the oldest countries in Europe. As a political entity and a nation-state, it gained its independence in the middle of 12th century and has maintained stable frontiers since the end of the 13th century. Without regional divisions, divergent linguistic communities or ethnic-cultural minorities, the Portuguese national conscience is centuries old and has helped the country to survive whenever its collective independence was questioned². At the dawn of modernity, in the Renaissance Era, Portugal pioneered European overseas exploration, building a sea-borne empire that turned the nation into a massive world power in the 15th and 16th century. As the historian Charles Ralph Boxer has poetically put it, it was the Portuguese who first “linked up, for better and for worse, the widely sundered branches of the great human family; it was they who first made humanity conscious, however dimly, of its essential unity”³.

Douglas Wheeler once wrote that the Portuguese are “a people of paradox” with “a penchant for self-effacement which is disarmingly combined with self-aggrandisement”⁴. History, indeed, reveals this exact feature. From the end of the 16th century onwards, due to internal factors (above all the annexation of Portugal by the Spanish Crown during 1580-1640), and due to the rise of other European
maritime powers, it was downhill for the country: decline and decadence cast an ever lengthening shadow over the future only enhancing the nostalgia of past grandeur. A sense of national anxiety and crisis became almost second nature to the Portuguese elite – and so strong was this that at the end of the 19th century the leading Portuguese intellectual Oliveira Martins defined the country as “the ailing man of the West”5. Hence, the entire political, cultural and economic debate on how to achieve “the competing goals of modernity”6, turned out to be a long, sometimes conflicting and still ongoing debate on the themes of decadence, backwardness and regeneration, either through revolution, reform or a simple return to lost national virtues.

That is what the Portuguese 20th century was all about: fluctuating between a tiny continental strip, its African empire and European destiny, between monarchy, republic, dictatorship and democracy, between elite and masses, between the literate and the illiterate, between urban modernism and rural conservatism, between those who stayed and those who emigrated, between those (republicans and democrats) who wanted to reshape the country’s future and those (conservatives and Salazarists) who sought to find a refuge in the certainties of the past. Having experienced four different political regimes, four constitutions, four dictatorships, the murder of two heads of State (a King, in 1908, and a President, in 1918), one Prime-Minister (in 1921), and one former presidential candidate (in 1965) – not to mention the death in office of another President (in 1951) and a Prime-Minister (in 1980)7 – the Portuguese 20th century was a crucial period in national history. Some would even say it was the most important (re)defining century in the nation’s existence, alongside the 12th and the 15th centuries (foundation and the beginning of the maritime discoveries respectively), due to the speedy changes confronted within a global context of

European and world history that also dramatically altered after 19008 – the so-called “Age of Extremes” according to the well-known title of Eric Hobsbawm’s book.

While it is evidently the case that Portugal was no superpower shaping Western development, nevertheless its recent historical past stands out as a useful case-study highlighting paths taken by longstanding nations in their strenuous efforts to undergo and achieve democratic consolidation, social and cultural modernisation, economic development – and throughout all of this, a chance of international competitiveness at the dawn of our globalised third millennium. Indeed, the history of the Portuguese 20th century is far richer and more interesting than appears at first glance, despite its peripheral and second tier role on the world scenario. It was a century of rapid transformations in almost every aspect of the Portuguese collective and individual existence. Some say Portugal developed too fast, jumping stages, while others regret it was not fast enough to move up alongside richer countries that were, and continue to be, the definers of human historical development. However, one may safely conclude both for Portugal as with many other countries: while any political ruler of 1800 would still recognise his country if given the chance to rule in 1900, any ruler of 1900 would feel no such similarity if, by chance, he could have travelled through time to the year 2000.