

Editorial

The Middle-Aged Revolutions

Ana S. Moura/AMP Rodriguez General Editor

Irene Flunser Pimentel Guest Editor

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If we are fortunate enough, we will be able to say (or already said), as Dante Alighieri before us, we are in the *middle of the journey of our life*. And more times than less, we, like the great Italian poet, find ourselves lost in dark woods when that middle of the journey is upon us.

Persons, as individuals, are not the only ones that find themselves in the middle of the journey, facing suddenly a dark, wild, harsh, and impenetrable avenue. Events and countries more often than less find themselves in such situations. And the usual designation for the status is that they are at crossroads. Facing divergent pathways, in a manner.

*In the year of 1974,
on the 25th April,
something remarkable
and rare happened in
the European country
of Portugal.*

Decades of an authoritarian dictatorship ended in an almost bloodless transition that filled international media with awe. The so-called *Carnation Revolution*, in honour of the flowers that filled the gun barrels in the streets.

It is recent history, as we are one year from its fiftieth anniversary, one year from having a Portuguese middle-aged democracy, or boomer democracy, as generation z would say. And in the

middle of the journey of our Portuguese democratic life, we find ourselves also brave enough to venture to where all those that enter must, or not, abandon hope.

Revolution has more than one meaning. It can signify, of course, a change in a political system or government, whether through peaceful or violent means, but it can also stand for a change in the manner that people do things, in their habits and customs. It is interesting that the same noun that can designate change, and the subsequent alteration of the state of affairs, is also a synonym for circular movement. As such, you have that revolution stands both for breakthroughs and going around in circles.

On the other hand, you have Alternative History. By definition, Alternative History is a hypothetical past, after choosing a different outcome in a specific chronological event, henceforth called divergent point. Choosing divergent pathways, in a manner, and relish in the knowledge that they might bring, is the realm of Alternative History. We are not going to explore here the meanings of History, but Alternative can mean different, unusual, and also a different possibility of choice.

And those are the realms of inevitability. We are looking at the abyss and it is certainly looking back at us. Are authoritarianism and polarization the inevitable two paths that democracy and freedom have? Do we have a different path of choice? Are we looking for solutions in the present when we should look for them in the past? Is the democratic middle age crisis making us lose our identity?

When you look at the Carnation Revolution it is obvious why a bloodbath did not happen, when

everything would point at it as the inevitable result. The military that started the coup, as soon as they controlled the radio, told the people of the capital, Lisbon, to stay inside their houses, in order to avoid casualties in whatever could happen that day. And those persons, that had obeyed all their lives, chose that day to be disobedient and went to streets to, in the most human expression of being, *see what was going on*. And they surrounded the military vehicles, the tanks, the cars, watching closely. So closely that it would be impossible to shoot at the military without hitting them. And the regime military refused, or avoided, to act as it was demanded from them, in order to prevent a bloodbath.

Everyone, people and military alike, had been educated and trained to be obedient and their choice not to be so on that day made the world witness with surprise that not all revolutions, especially in that decade, lead to the same media titles of extreme violence and even horror.

There was blood, though it did not come from the military confront of the rebels versus those loyal to the regime. It came from the political police that did not care if their shootings into the group that marched towards their headquarters would kill or injure. Four people fell. The only blood spilled that day resulted from the actions of the only ones that kept acting as they had been educated and trained to do.

When we look at the crossroads of our present, through the lenses of an alternative past, maybe we should focus on how obedience and disobedience play a part in the divergence of results. And that if you chose disobedience or obedience that lead to blood spilled, then the woods laying ahead are truly worthy of causing you fear, and the monster in the abyss is indeed your reflection.