

From Land-Tenure Cleavage to Contentious Politics – the Intertwined Role of Catholic Church Hierarchy and Politics in Madeira Island

*Da Clivagem Fundiária à Política Contenciosa – o
Papel Interligado da Hierarquia da Igreja Católica e da
Política na Ilha da Madeira*

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Abstract

This article explores the protest events that evolved and led to popular mobilization in the Madeira Island. The long-lasting contentious tension and collective resistance amongst the local community (Ribeira Seca, Machico) vs. the Catholic Church hierarchy and regional power structures, during *ex-ante* and post-democratic periods were exposed throughout a process-based approach. It illuminates the waves and cycle of protest events by putting in place the historical and political context; the relation amongst the actors (institutional vs. non-institutional) involved; the mechanisms that linked those events; the claim-making and its repertoires of action, and the outcomes of contention. *How does land-tenure cleavage structured politics in the Madeira Island?* The findings suggest that the protests which evolved locally (Ribeira Seca, Machico) were driven by historical and territorial context and the interaction of institutional and non-institutional actors paved way to the cycles of contestation. In addition, the paths under which democratization took place and institutional dynamics, were shaped by those processes at the regional level. This article constitutes an important contribute to the understanding of the processual roots and the mechanisms that contributed to popular mobilization in Madeira Island. It also illuminate the causal pathways of Madeira Island political system over the last century, in particular the implication of the pre-existing structures to democratization and the pattern of regional democracy that we have today.

Keywords: contentious politics, Madeira Island, regional democracy.

Resumo

Este artigo explora os eventos de protesto que evoluíram e levaram à mobilização popular na Ilha da Madeira. A tensão contenciosa duradoura e a resistência coletiva entre a comunidade local (Ribeira Seca, Machico) versus a hierarquia da Igreja Católica e as estruturas de poder regionais, durante os períodos *ex ante* e pós-democrático, foram expostas através de uma abordagem baseada em processos. O artigo ilumina as ondas e o ciclo dos eventos de protesto, pondo em prática o contexto histórico e político; a relação entre os atores (institucionais vs. não institucionais) envolvidos; os mecanismos que ligaram estes eventos; a reivindicação e os seus repertórios de ação, e os resultados da disputa. Como é que a clivagem fundiária estruturou a política na Ilha da Madeira? Os resultados sugerem que os protestos que evoluíram localmente (Ribeira Seca, Machico) foram impulsionados pelo contexto histórico e territorial, e a interação de atores institucionais e não institucionais abriu caminho para os ciclos de contestação. Além disso, os caminhos pelos quais a democratização ocorreu e a dinâmica institucional foram moldados por estes processos a nível regional. Este artigo constitui um importante contributo para a compreensão das raízes processuais e dos mecanismos que contribuíram para a mobilização popular na Ilha da Madeira. Ilumina também os caminhos causais do sistema político da Ilha da Madeira ao longo do último século, em particular a implicação das estruturas preexistentes para a democratização e o padrão de democracia regional que temos hoje.

Palavras Chave: política contenciosa, Ilha da Madeira, democracia regional.

1. Introduction

«The people's story is also made through singing. Each verse, each tone, and each pause of this bundle of songs can be compared to the little pebble in the highest tower or the humblest hut that saw us born. Here goes our story» (Martins Júnior, 2004)^[1].

On 22 June 1969, the cleric José Martins Júnior assumed the chapelry of Ribeira Seca (Machico, Madeira Island). This event anticipated the long-lasting contentious tension and collective resistance amongst the local community vs. the Catholic Church hierarchy and regional power structures, during *ex-ante* and post-democratic periods.

The land-tenure cleavage constituted the critical juncture into action. The *Contrato de Colonia* established a customary system of land holding between the aristocracy (landowners) (*senhorios*) and the peasants (*colonos*) in which the peasants 'worked the land' and was forced to give half of what they produced to the landowners. The *Contrato de Colonia* had been introduced by King D. Manuel I (1496) and lasted until 1977 when the dependence of landowners was abolished and the property rights returned to the farmers.

1. Author's own translation: «A história de um povo também se escreve a cantar. Cada verso, cada tom e cada pausa podem comparar-se a cada pedrinha da mais alta torre ou do mais humilde casebre que nos viram nascer. Esta é a nossa história.», in *CD Machico Terra de abril*, 586º anniversary do Achamento de Machico e da Madeira, José Martins Júnior, julho 2004.

The landholding inequality, the economic and social deprivation which Ribeira Seca community lived in, compelled Martins Júnior to organize the claim-making within this community. He aggregated their claims and called for the attention of local authorities. Through his representation and orientation, this community organized themselves around common purposes and shared interests and were mobilized into collective action, appealing to political change around the economic structure framed by the *Contrato de Colonia* (land-tenure). They engaged in specific routines and a set of interactions against the *status quo* towards social and political change. They anchored their demands and claim-making, expressed their exploitation and deprivation conditions throughout lyrics, dance, and theatre performances. This constituted the main ‘repertoire of action’ in addressing local grievances to a “powerful landed elite”.

The inequality of state-society interactions (power relations), the landowner’s exploitation to peasants and their poverty conditions have been well documented by the European history. Prominent scholars have pointed out the long-standing literature on rural and the land-tenure conflicts across Europe in interwar periods and its trade-offs across democratic and non-democratic polities (Skopol, 1979; Moore, 1967; Tilly, 1990; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006); or the effects of landholding inequality on regime change (Moore, 1967; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Ziblatt, 2008).

In Portugal, a rural and peripheral country, property rights were at stake during democratic transition (1974-1976) in the Alentejo and rural north (mainland) (Cezerale, 2017). In the aftermath of 25 April 1974, a widespread popular mobilization called for landowning patterns reforms, the state apparatus, and companies in the industrial and financial sectors (Maxwell, 1986; Fernandes *a*, 2014). In the mainland, the agrarian reform established a partnership between the state and the landless workers and small producers’ organization to property management (Barreto, 1976; Fernandes *a*, 2014, p. 93).

At the insular territories – Azores and Madeira – a pro-fund rural-agrarian societies persisted (Lizardo, 2015; Câmara, 2012). Tensions and violent episodes marked the political environment during the transition to democracy (1974-1976) in the Azores and Madeira. For example, Américo Tomaz and Marcelo Caetano^[2] were exiled in Madeira Island in April 1975, and popular demonstrations erupted, demanding the “purge of fascists”. Separatist movements^[3] committed bombing attacks and other assaults on the headquarters of left-wing parties in both regions (Nepumoceno, 2006; Autor, 2021).

2. Américo Tomaz was the last President of the Portuguese republic of the *Estado Novo* dictatorship (1958-1974) and Marcelo Caetano served as Prime-Minister (*Presidente do Conselho de Ministros*) after Salazar’s death, from 1968 until the Carnation Revolution (1974).

3. The two most representative were the *Frente de Libertação dos Açores* (FLA-Azores Liberation Front) and *Frente de Libertação da Madeira* (FLAMA-Madeira Liberation Front). They claimed a self-government rule and an independent formula in a radical rupture with the State (Ferreira, 1995).

Thus, Madeira Island offers an ideal setting for research purpose. Several questions around the events that erupted on the island during the dictatorship (1930s to 1970s) and during democratization periods which led to popular mobilization, remain unanswered. Alongside democratization and decentralization processes, other elements had intervened on that. For example, the economic structure, the rurality and illiteracy among its population; or the economic dependence from the exterior (island remoteness) constitute a set of factors which allow us to explore: *a)* the role of political actors; *b)* the pre-existing institutional structure and the terms in which regional institutions come up (territorial autonomy) during democratization process, and *c)* how those constellations of elements exerted an enduring effect on the long-term of incumbency of regional-premier Alberto João Jardim, who was in office for 39 years (Author, 2015; 2018; 2021).

I argue that the relationship of non-institutional political actors (Catholic Church) and politics is important to this understanding. Thus, I shed light on the political dynamics at play within Ribeira Seca community (Machico), during pre-democratization and post-democratic periods, to engage in a long-standing debate about the pathways of Madeira Island political system. Thus, I ask: *How does land-tenure cleavage structured politics in the Madeira Island?*

I follow a process-based approach accounting for the main historical events, identifying the pathways and its trajectories; the mechanisms which triggered the episodes of contention; the actors involved, and the outcomes of those contention from 1970's to 2019 period.

Based on rich microlevel and novel data within a single case, it's revealed that the protests evolved locally (Ribeira Seca, Machico) were driven by historical and territorial factors and the interaction amongst institutional and non-institutional actors paved way to the cycles of contestation. The major aim of this article is to enhance the understanding of regional politics in Portugal.

The article is organized in three parts. The first section presents a brief theoretical outline on contentious politics and repertoire of action literature. Secondly, it is provided an overview of the historical and political contexts where the events unfolded and thirdly, it's analysed the narrative through the sequence of events and agency approaches. The final sections discuss and summarize the findings.

2. Theoretical Framework

Territory is an essential reference of political and social life (Keating, 1998; Hepburn, 2010). Territory have gained importance to the understanding of collective action (Tilly, 2000; Sewell, 2001; McAdam et. al., 2001), to the extent that specific territories have displayed critical episodes that have shaped subsequent political outcomes. Contextualizing and understanding how individuals and groups engage in contentious politics is critical to illuminating the mechanisms and processes that support it (McAdams et. al., 2001). Most of the protests evolve

locally and are driven by historical and territorial factors. Revealing such factors is critical to the role of “protest histories of individual populations” play within national political cultures (Imig and Tarrow, 2001, pp. 5).

Collective action or popular mobilization has long drawn the interest of sociologists and anthropologists. Scholars have documented the range of ways through which people express the constraints imposed by their social, political or cultural context in a given period, including protest events such as demonstrations, boycotts, or occupation mechanisms (Moore, 1966; Tilly, 1975; 1986; 2008; della Porta and Diani, 2006). People’s grievances and their capacity and willingness to advance their claims (McAdam, 1982); identity; a sense of a common purpose and a commitment to a cause (Touraine, 1981; Opp, 2009); or relative deprivation (Olson, 1965) have been appointed as the major mechanisms that impel people to engage in contentious behaviour (McAdam et. al., 2009, pp. 268).

The understanding that “local people and local issues, rather than nationally organized programs and parties have entered repeatedly into the daily collective confrontations” [that occur in any given context] (Tilly, 1995, pp. 19), is part of the explanation of people’s commitment to collective action, social interactions, and narratives (Tilly, 1986; 1997, Tarrow, 1998). As della Porta and Diani (2006) put it:

«Collective action does not spring automatically from structural tensions [...]. Numerous factors determine whether this will occur. These factors include the availability of adequate organizational resources, the ability of movement leaders to produce appropriate ideological representations and the presence of a favourable context. » (pp. 63).

Protests or protest events have been presented as critical tools of collective action across times, and often they have had transformative effects on societies (Sewell, 1996; della Porta, 2008). Such events can range from parochial to national configurations; be reactive or proactive; conventional, disruptive, or violent (Tilly, 1986; Tarrow, 1989; Kriesi et. al., 1995). Different forms of contention have been put in place at different times in several societies, setting the means through which different individuals or groups challenge the authority of political elites or an oppressive regime (Tilly, 1986, pp. 4) on behalf of their shared interests. Thus, it shapes a process in which societal and political transformation is expected.

Charles Tilly introduced the metaphor “repertoires of action” in the nineteenth century to characterise the popular collective action *modus operandi* (routines, organization, structure) that Great Britain experienced from the 1750s to the 1830s. Such repertoires, he explained, shaped the “claim-making routines that apply to the same claimant-object pairs: bosses and workers; peasants and landlords, rival nationalists’ factions and many more” (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007,

pp. 4; see also Tilly, 1986; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015). The “repertoire of contention,” has become central analytical tool for “identifying and making sense of specific routines of claim-making that are selected and acted out by people in their pursuit of shared interests and change during contentious interactions with others” (Alimi, 2015, pp. 410). Those attributes encompass a process of interaction within a conflict context focused on collective claims made to state institutions (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2009, pp. 261).

In recent decades, the repertoires of action and contention politics approaches have been expanded to better account for the interaction amongst a multiplicity of actors (in terms of episodes of contestation and their variations and regularities). The focus has been shifted from the subjects and objects of contention to the mechanisms that connect them to each other and to a broader range of institutions and actors (Tarrow, 2015, pp. 86) across time.

We know that traditional mobilization could take place “within the context of local communities to which individuals have long-lasting commitments such as peasants’ villages or urban craft guilds” (Goldstone 2001, pp. 151), or such mobilization might be seen as a type of small-scale contentious politics.

Political opportunity structure emerges as the main explanatory concept that of the conditions that trigger contentious actions (Tarrow, 2015 pp. 7; Tilly, 2006).

Political opportunity structure (POS) has been well-established in the literature (Kriesi et al., 1995; McAdam, 1982; McAdam & Tarrow, 2019; Tarrow, 1989, 1998) to account for role played by the contextual factors; strategies, and outcomes on mobilization (Tarrow, 1998). It covers an array of elements such as: *i*) the openness or closure of the institutionalized political system, *ii*) the stability or instability of political alignments; *iii*) the presence or absence of potential allies and *iv*) the state capacity and propensity for repression (Tarrow, 1989; McAdam, 1996; Kriesi, 2004).

Predominantly, POS illuminates the ‘political context’ (Eisenger, 1973), that is, the political system structure which promote or constrains mobilization. It refers to those aspects of the political system that affect the possibility that challenging groups must mobilize effectively (Tarrow: 1996; pp. 54; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015). The structure of opportunity, as Tilly put it, provides the “necessary and sufficient condition of contention” (Tilly, 2004, pp. 34).

3. Research strategy and data

Local grievances and interactions in local community (Ribeira Seca, Machico) assumed significant importance within Madeira Island politics during dictatorship and democratic periods. Its distinctive dynamics prompted by the land-tenure cleavage, and its claim making determined the role of agency led by Martins Júnior, and the confrontational repertoire that evolved in a specific political context. Focusing on a regional unit of analysis (island), I will examine the spatially

uneven nature of major processes of political transformation (Snyder 2001, pp. 94), exploring the relationship between politics and the territory (Hepburn, 2010) to advance an effective understanding of a broader political phenomena exhibited at the regional level.

For systematic analysis, the political and economic context is extremally valuable to the understanding of the main processes, mechanisms and actors evolved on mobilization (Tarrow, 1998).

Understanding the configurations of mobilization and the contentious path across the 1970s until present (1970s-2019) – it covers the last years of the authoritarian regime, the transition to democracy and the democratic period – it requires ‘thick description’ (Gerring, 2011) on the reconstruction of the critical events. It helps to shed into light the mechanisms that led to contention and gain leverage to the explanation.

The research strategy is anchored on a process-based tradition (Goodwin and Jasper, 2004) which considers the multiplicity of players and their interaction within the protests, underlying the relational nature of contention. For that, it is considered four dimensions: *i*) the historical and political trajectories that support the episodes of contention, *ii*) the constellation of players and their cleavages; *iii*) the nature of claim-making, frames, and narratives and how they evolve throughout the cycle of protests and, *iv*) the repertoire of action.

Empirically, I zoom-in the analysis, exploring narratives as a way that enabled a community to construct a common interest towards collective action (Mayer, 2014). That is, how protest events evolved over time through the agency of Martins Júnior. Alongside political context, agency is critical to the understanding of the strategies and how it affected the cycle of protest, to the extent that the actors involved are also path-dependent of their context. Thus, cycle of protests and contentious events are part of a longer contentious process and interaction amongst institutional and non-institutional political actors. By putting individual experience into stories, it's highlighted the analytic narratives which episodes and events and be decomposed into mechanisms and then reassembled into more general accounts of the process involved (Brady and Collier, 2005).

The period of analysis covers four decades (1970s-2019). I engaged with different data collection effort from regional and national newspapers to characterize and reconstruct the events within the political context that had prompted contestation. I've also considered public broadcast archives to frame the state of economy and the prominent social structure in the 70s.

The deprivation and oppression experiences, the claim-making and to whom they were addressed were voiced on lyrics, and for that I have focused on the main contents from published CDs. Additionally, I used the Martins Júnior's personal blog to strengthen the narrative and link all those constellations of elements that had interacted during these processes of contention.

For each event considered, the data is organized as follows: identification of actors; the claims they made; and the forms of action (repertoire) they engaged in, and to whom they were oriented. The main objective is to capture the sequences of events (change over time), trace the trajectories of change (claims, objects, and actors), create an accurate description of the political process, and illuminate the mechanisms of contention.

4. The Case: Madeira Island Setting the context – the social, economic, and political structure

This section presents the political opportunity structure (POS) and the protest events that erupted during the last years of dictatorship in the Madeira Island. It points out the main historical features and the characteristics of the regional political system which had prompted the claim-making and the action of institutional and non-institutional political actors.

«Before 25th of April, the people from Machico village lived ‘crushed’ in so many ways. Workers, peasants, and fishermen suffered exploitation and mistreatment by bosses, landlords, merchants, civil servants, etc. Much like poor people everywhere, they desired for a just law, a law of the people. But this law, could only appear through the rule by the people and for the people^[4]».

The *Contrato de Colonia* gave the institutional set-up in Madeira Island, where protests evolved – the landholding conflict among landlords (*senhorios*) and landless peasants (*colonos*). This economic structure was prominent in Madeira Island.^[5] It was grounded on a feudal model that had structured the economic production (wine, sugar, linen) alongside political structure (Câmara, 2002; Lizardo, 2015; Autor, 2021). The state organized productive activity around a *classe gardé* which concentrated all resources, especially within British people (Freitas, 1984). A mercantilist economic model fostered a rigidly hierarchical society in which most of the population was dependent on a small elite, which means, an exploited group organized by a patrimonial state (Autor, 2015; 2021).

Three protest events stemming from peasants revolved the Madeira archipelago during the *Estado Novo*'s dictatorship. These uprisings were known as *Revolta da Farinha* (Flour's Revolt) in 1934, the *Revolta do Leite* (Milk's Revolt) in 1936 and the *Revolta da Água* (Irrigation Revolt) in 1962. The *Revolta da Farinha* and the *Revolta do Leite* revealed the oppression that peasants lived in. They opposed

4. Own translation: «Muito antes do 25 de Abril, o povo de Machico vivia esmagado de tantas maneiras. Operários, camponeses e pescadores sofriam a exploração e os maus-tratos dos patrões, senhorios, comerciantes, funcionários públicos, etc. Como em toda a parte o povo pobre estava sempre à espera de uma lei justa, uma lei do povo. Mas essa lei só poderia aparecer quando fosse o povo a mandar, a escrever essa lei», In "Panfleto A luta do povo de Machico", outubro 1975, C.A. *Estatutos Cooperativa CPM*, Cartório Notarial de Machico, 6 de maio de 1975.

5. The *Contrato de Colonia* marked particularly Machico community, alongside Câmara de Lobos, Ponta do Sol and São Vicente villages.

to the dictatorship regime because the monopoly of the cereals, sugar and milk transformation was ascribed to big landlords. This event raised the prices and prompted popular demonstrations and boycotts, particularly, amongst docker sector (Freitas, 2011; Nepumoceno, 2006; Autor, 2021).

The *Revolta da Água* was a protest to “water rights” enabling the peasants to irrigate their land was displayed at the Ponta do Sol village (*Levada do Moinho*). The revolt lasted four months. A pacific and spontaneous protest turned into violent one (Fernandes b, 2008).

Those three revolts underlined the tensions around the scarcity and the deprivation that the islanders experienced during dictatorship period. The land-tenure customary arrangements imposed by the *Contrato de Colonia* made it extremely difficult for the peasants to survive. The peasant’s perception of their living conditions gave the impetus to change. The cornerstone of popular mobilization was systematically grounded on the peasant’s exploitation and deprivation by the landlords and their grievances around property and labour rights, who claimed, that “the land belongs to God, and the fruits to those who work on it”^[6]. Those grievances constituted forms of resistance in a non-democratic setting. It illustrated the islanders’ struggles for *autarcia*, the islandness circumstances of economic and political dependence from the exterior, and especially, exposes the social control dynamics framed by a landholding inequality structure.

4.1. The critical protest events

On 22nd June 1969, when the clerical Martins Júnior assumed the Ribeira Seca chapelry and recognized the poor living conditions and exploitation that the community lived in, he became the (local) agent in the aggregation of claims-making to address it in an institutionalized manner. The Ribeira Seca community, self-conscientiousness about their condition, organized themselves and were mobilized into collective action. They developed an innovative “repertoire of action” among which lyrics and song performances were presented as the main forms of protest^[7]. Mostly written by uneducated and illiterate women, these songs were performed and sang alongside their domestic tasks, particularly embroidering, which constituted one of the principal occupations in Madeira Island at that time.

Local community and local grievances became organized and institutionalized through the *Centro de Informação Popular* (CIP) in 1974^[8], reinforced by the prospects of the regime change into democratization. The CIP had channelled the collective action towards political, social, economic, and cultural terms,

6. Own translation: “a terra é de Deus, o fruto de quem a trabalha”, In Brito, Leonel (1977) *Colonia e Vilões*, Cinemateca Portuguesa – Museu do Cinema.

7. Influenced by the national context where the “Protest songs” had emerged during the democratic transition by the hands of several poets: Adriano Correia de Oliveira, Ary dos Santos, José Afonso or Fausto.

8. Peasants’ cooperatives were formed in the southern latifundia (Pinto, 2001).

such as proposals into local government reforms; the extinction of *Colônia*; improving living conditions of local workers (peasants; fishermen, embroiders) with some prospects of social welfare assistance and labour rights; and a set of educational issues regarding the liberalization of the political system (CIP, 1975)^[9]. The clerical Martins Júnior led this organization and was the key agent working on articulation of the people's demands.

The Catholic Church hierarchy have condemned the Clerical Martins Júnior' involvement on those political issues and Bishop Francisco Santana, who was had been appointed under the former regime, also have signalized Martins Júnior's political engagement at the local political institutions (*Comissão administrativa da Câmara de Machico*) on 5 November 1974. This episode launched the contentious path regarding the intertwined role played by Catholic Church and politics at the Madeira Island.

De facto, the role developed by the clerical Martins Júnior determined the subsequent events tangled with the regime change (transition to democracy) and the relationship between the Church hierarchy and regional political structures. The bishop suspended the clerical Martins Júnior *ad Divinis* on 27 July 1977^[10]. This event had assumed a transformative configuration on Catholic and political spheres:

«I was suspended and Bishop Francisco Santana, on that Confirmation celebration day, in the Church of Machico, who didn't allowed me to co-celebrate this celebration or to be the godfather of a confirmation candidate, and, finally, to everyone's astonishment, he required that I leave the church: "If you do not leave the church, I won't begin the Confirmation celebration. And if you don't leave, I'll suspend you *ad Divinis*". Of course, I didn't leave the church. In the day after, the Decree of the suspension came out^[11]».

9. The last decades of 19th century cooperatives were strongly disputed by social and political agents to transform Portuguese society (Freire and Pereira, 2017). The CIP have benefited from the political opportunity structure to encourage political transformation and the transition to democracy at the insular territory. For additional information, see: Martins, Bernardo (2015) "O Centro de Informação Popular de Machico – um Pólo dinamizador da Revolução do 25 de Abril (25 de Abril a 25 de novembro de 1975)", *Dissertação de mestrado em Estudos Regionais e Locais*, Universidade da Madeira.

10. The Madeira Church hierarchy, embodied by Bishop D. Francisco Santana and Agostinho Cardoso (who served as MP during the previous regime and Alberto Joao Jardim' uncle), promoted Jardim's political rise. Bishop Santana facilitated Jardim's service as *Jornal da Madeira*' (diocese newspaper) director, which culminated when he joined the regional cabinet in 1978 (Autor, 2021).

11. Own translation: «Fui suspenso porque o Senhor Bispo Santana, naquele Domingo de Crismas na igreja matriz de Machico, não me permitiu co-celebrar (e tinha-o feito em 1975 quando aí eu presidia ao município...) também não me permitiu ser padrinho de um crismando (exibi então o boletim assinado pelo pároco) e, finalmente, para pasmo de toda a gente exigiu que eu abandonasse o templo: "Sem saíres da igreja, não começo o Crisma. E se não saíres, vou-te suspender *ad Divinis*". Claro que não saí. Na Segunda-feira, saía o solene Decreto (!!!) da suspensão. Falta dizer que o Bispo Francisco Santana (Deus o tenha) preferiu suspender-me em vez de administrar o Crisma a quase uma centena de jovens que ali estavam com seus padrinhos e familiares. Não houve Crismas.», *Blogue Senso & Consenso*, José Martins Júnior, 31 de julho 2019.

Despite the *ad Divinis* suspension decree, Martins Junior refused to leave Ribeira Seca chapelry. The local community strongly supported him^[12]. Popular dissatisfaction was (re)organized and carried out by popular resistance against the repression imposed by Catholic hierarchy.

«Thereafter, the priest on behalf of the people started a different cult service, close to the Gospel and far from the Catholic Church. A ‘new order’ of faith and love, which sought to approach the ‘old order’ that Jesus brought two thousand years ago. (...) And so, here begins a new sheet of oppression and threats by the government and even more by the new bishop of Funchal, D. Teodoro Faria^[13].»

A broader popular mobilization occurred in 1985, triggered by the occupancy of Ribeira Seca chapelry by the police forces, sponsored by the regional government. The police occupied the Ribeira Seca chapelry for 18 days, from 27 February to 11 March, to throw out the priest from their place^[14].

«Once upon a time, there was a corner, marked by an intense rurality, explored during centuries by landlords. One of the lordships of the Earth – and of the soul of the devotees – possessed the talisman of the divine archangels, the Diocese. The head of the Diocese decided throw out the priest who was there. The people opposed to it. The bishop threatened to close the church, and in the face of popular opposition, he appealed to the government, which sent police forces to close the doors and bar a person who dared to set foot in the church patio. »^[15]

The church’s bells rang, people assembled, mostly women, at the church patio and stayed in a vigil during the police occupancy. The “old” repertoires gained new sense through the lyrics sang by the women: «The Church belongs to the people/ The people belong to God/ We always want the Church by our side/ How

12. Eugénio Perrigil in *Diário de Notícias da Madeira*, 12nd February 2023.

13. Own translation: «Daí em diante, o pároco por-conta-do-povo iniciou um culto diferente, próximo do Evangelho e distante da Igreja Católica. Uma ‘nova ordem’ de fé e amor, que procurava aproximar-se da ‘ordem antiga’ que Jesus trouxe há dois mil anos. (...) E por isso, começa aqui uma nova folha de perseguições e ameaças por parte do governo e ainda mais do novo bispo do Funchal, D. Teodoro Faria», In “A história da Ribeira Seca ainda está por contar”, *Comissão Popular da Ribeira Seca*, 14 de março de 1985. See also: *Clube de Jornalistas*, 17 de agosto de 2012.

14. “PSP tranca igreja a pedido do bispo”, *Diário de Lisboa*, 29 de fevereiro de 1985.

15. Own translation: «Era uma vez um recanto, marcado por uma intensa ruralidade, explorado por séculos de mandantes e senhorios. Um dos senhorios da terra – e da alma dos devotos – possuía o talismã dos divinos arcanjos, a Diocese. Um titular da Diocese entendeu expulsar o padre que lá estava. O povo do lugar opôs-se decisivamente. O bispo ameaçou fechar a igreja, e perante a oposição popular, recorreu ao governo que enviou forças policiais encerrar as portas e vedar o passo a quem ousasse por o pé no adro». See: Brito, Leonel (1977) *Colônia e Vilões*, Cinemateca Portuguesa – Museu do Cinema.

God lived/ The exploited people. »^[16] The clerical José Martins Júnior resisted and remained at the Ribeira Seca chapelry on behalf of the ‘will of the people’.

This event around Martins Júnior illuminates the contentious nature of politics and the alignment amongst Catholic church and the regional political government in containing protest events.

In meanwhile, as a form of counteraction, Martins Júnior was elected mayor of Machico in 1989. He stayed in office for eight years (1989-2001) and served as MP at regional parliament by the period from 2001 to 2007.^[17] Simultaneously, he had guaranteed the priesthood at the Ribeira Seca chapelry.

In 2007, Martins Júnior left political life, and on 30 November 2005, he was judged in a judicial process moved by the Madeira regional government (launched in 1991 and 2001). Through the request of the regional government, the public ministry (Court) accused the priest Martins Júnior of “acts of worship occurred in Ribeira Seca chapelry against Portuguese law”^[18].

The public ministry decided to extinguish judicial action in line with the 2004 Concordat amendment. Martins Júnior accusation no longer constituted a crime.^[19] Nevertheless, the religious issue remained unsolved. The judicial action intended to punish the priest Martins Júnior by the civil law, but the issue was essentially canonical. This event similarly revealed the tangled arenas where religious and politics interact(ed), and how the events that had unfolded over time are essentially path-dependent on the values, norms, and orientations of the Catholic Church hierarchy (embodied by Bishop D. Francisco Santana) and the regional government.

Several efforts were made to put an end to the longstanding quest of *Ad Divinis* suspension. Martins Júnior had appealed several times through different ways with distinctive bishops at the diocese^[20] to overcoming the situation and reestablish the regularity to the Ribeira Seca’ Christian community. However, he was unsuccessful.

16. «A Igreja é do povo/ O povo é de Deus/ Queremos a Igreja sempre ao nosso lado/ Como Deus viveu/ O povo explorado», In “A Igreja é do Povo, o Povo é de Deus”, In *CD A Igreja é do Povo, o Povo é de Deus*, CCCS-RS-Centro Cívico e Cultural da Ribeira Seca, 2014.

17. Martins Júnior was elected for the first time in 1976 to the regional parliament representing *União Democrática Popular* (UDP, Popular Democratic Union). In 2001, he returned to the regional parliament elected on Socialist Party’s (PS, *Partido Socialista*) lists, and stayed there until 2007 (Author, 2021). For more information: José Martins Júnior – Wikipédia, a enciclopédia livre (wikipedia.org).

18. Tolentino de Nóbrega, *Público*, 17 de agosto de 2008 “A Revisão da Concordata pode levar ao arquivamento do processo judicial” e “A Igreja pode recuperar o ‘padre vermelho’ que desafiou Jardim”.

19. Tolentino de Nóbrega, *Público*, 30 novembro de 2008, “Tribunal madeirense arquivou processo contra o padre Martins Júnior à luz da revisão da Concordata de 2004”. <https://www.publico.pt/2008/11/30/jornal/tribunal-madeirense-arquivou-processo-contra-o-padre-martins-junior-a-luz-da-revisao-da-concordata-de-2004-286225>.

20. D. Francisco Antunes Santana (1974-1982), D. Teodoro de Faria (1982-2007); D. António José Cavaco Carrilho (2007-2018) and D. Nuno Brás da Silva Martins (2018-present). See: Bispos do Funchal :: Diocese do Funchal.

In 2010, within a context of national celebration, the Pilgrimage of Fátima visited all of Madeira's chapelries excepting Ribeira Seca chapelry. The Bishop António Carrilho called for the 'ad divinis' suspension status, to justify the exception.

The Ribeira Seca' community had reacted to this event bringing a new piece into the 'repertoire of action':

«One day the Pilgrimage of Fátima / came here but did not enter / The Pilgrimage did not enter / It was a Bishop order (...) The Diocese didn't want / The image to come to the church / It came to the 'government school' / That is what God wants. (...) With or without a Pilgrimage / We are sons of God / We are people who work, and we will sing victory / This was one more piece to stay in our history^[21].»

The corollary of the *ad divinis* suspension process which started in 1977 ended up in 2019. The bishop replacement^[22] shed into light new avenues to the "Martins Júnior issue" verdict. The Bishop Nuno Brás ended with *ad divinis* suspension after 42 years. The priest Martins Júnior was officially nominated according to the canonical law to administer the Ribeira Seca chapelry^[23] in the plenitude of its rights, for two years^[24].

In short, the end of Martins Júnior 'ad Divinis' suspension was the outcome of several factors. The political change was essentially actors-driven, both at institutional and non-institutional arenas. The resignation of Alberto João Jardim as regional premier in 2015 after 39 years of incumbency gave to the new bishop the opportunity to put an end to the contentious path amongst Ribeira Seca's community and Catholic Church, over more than forty years. Therefore, the interaction of institutional and non-institutional actors constituted the cycles of contestation driver, benefited by the political opportunity structure and by local-community mobilization. It also outlines the paths under which democratization took place and the institutional dynamics shaped by those processes at the regional level.

21. «Mas um dia a Peregrina/ veio aqui, mas não entrou/ A Senhora não entrou/ Foi o Bispo que mandou. (...) A Diocese não quis/ Que a imagem viesse à Igreja/ Veio à 'escola do governo'/ É isso que deus deseja. (...) Com imagem ou sem ela/ Nós somos filhos de Deus/ Somos povo que trabalha e vamos cantar vitória/ Isto foi mais uma folha para ficar na nossa história», In "Fátima 2010", *CD A Igreja é do Povo, o Povo é de Deus*, CCDS – Centro Cívico e Cultural da Ribeira Seca, 2014.

22. Eugénio Perregil, *DN-Madeira*, 5 december 2021, "Paróquia da Ribeira Seca entra agora na normalidade da vida de uma paróquia". Paróquia da Ribeira Seca entra agora "na normalidade da vida de uma paróquia" — DNOTÍCIAS.PT.

23. "Padre Martins diz que levantamento da suspensão foi "boa nova" para a Ribeira Seca", *Lusa/Expresso*, 17 junho 2019. Expresso | Padre Martins diz que levantamento da suspensão foi "boa nova" para a Ribeira Seca.

24. José Martins Júnior was born in 1938. On 12 February 2023 he ends his term as Ribeira Seca chapelry administrator.

Table 1. Protest events from 1930 to 2023

Dictatorship period (1934-1962)					
Event	Time	Place	Actors	Claims	Repertoire
Flavour' Revolt	1934	Machico Ribeira Brava	National government Police forces Peasants	Against landown- ers' monopoly/state structures	Bemonstrations Boycotts
Milk' Revolt	1936	Machico Ribeira Brava	National government Police forces Peasants	Against landown- ers' monopoly/state structures	Demonstrations Boycotts
Irrigation water' Revolt	1962	Ponta do Sol	National Government Police forces Peasants	Against landlords' monopoly/state structures	Resistance vigilance
Democratic period (1974-2023)					
Popular Assembly – Public Meeting	14-6-1974	Machico	Clerical Martins Júnior Civil society	Appoint (tran- sitional) local institutions	Resistance (purge of fascists) Demonstration
The bishop Francisco Santana decision to throw clerical Martins Júnior from Ribeira Seca' chapelry	5-11-1974	Ribeira Seca	Police forces Clerical Martins Júnior Civil society	Exercise of political activities	Resistance Lyrics and sing performances
<i>Ad divinis</i> suspension	27-7-1977	Ribeira Seca	Bishop Francisco Santana Clerical Martins Júnior	Exercise of political activities	Resistance with community support
Policeman occupied Ribeira Seca' chapelry (for 18 days)	1985	Ribeira Seca	Bishop Teodoro Faria Regional government structures Police forces Clerical Martins Júnior Civil Society	Exercise of political activities	Resistance Vigilance Lyrics and sing performance
Regional government judicial action	1991/2001	Ribeira Seca	Justice (Penal institution) Bishop António Carrilho President Regional Government Clerical Martins Júnior	-	Resistance Vigilance Lyrics and sing performance
Court files the case	30 Nov 2008	Santa Cruz	Justice (Penal institution) Bishop António Carrilho President Regional Government Clerical Martins Júnior	-	Resistance Vigilance Lyrics and sing performance
Visit of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Fátima (<i>Imagem Peregrina N. Sra. de Fátima</i>)	8 May 2010	All Madeira' parishes	Bishop António Carrilho Clerical Martins Júnior Civil society	-	Resistance Vigilance Lyrics and sing performance
Canonical forgive- ness – the end of 'ad divinis' suspension Appointed as Ribeira Seca parochial admin- istrator (2019-2022)	16 June 2019	Ribeira Seca	Bishop Nuno Brás Clerical Martins Júnior	-	The end of the cycle of protest/resistance
Confirmation's celebration (after 42 years)	5 December 2021	Ribeira Seca	Bishop Nuno Brás Clerical Martins Júnior	-	The end of the cycle of protest/resistance
End of Martins Júnior priesthood at the Ribeira Seca	12 February 2023	Ribeira Seca	Bishop Nuno Brás Clerical Martins Júnior Clerical Manuel Ramos	-	The end of the cycle of protest/resistance

Source: Author's elaboration.

5. Concluding remarks

This article explored the protest events that evolved and led to popular mobilization in the Madeira Island during dictatorship (1930s to 1970s), during *ex-ante* and post-democratic periods.

Throughout a process-based approach, it is illuminated the waves and cycle of protest events by putting in place the historical and political context; the relation amongst the actors (institutional vs. non-institutional) involved; the mechanisms that linked those events; the claim-making and its repertoires, and the outcomes of contention.

Understanding how protest events evolved during *ex-ante* and post-democratization periods, called for intermediation from political opportunity structure approach and the agency role played by the clerical Martins Júnior. Alongside political context, agency was critical to illuminate the strategies and the understanding how it affected the cycle of protest.

For that, I engaged with different data collection effort to reconstruct those events. It allowed to identify the processes and the conditions/mechanisms under which the local community mobilization emerged (claim-making at stake), the relational nature of the key actors and the repertoire of their actions.

Those contentious events are part of a longer contentious process – spanned two political regimes – and interaction amongst institutional and non-institutional political actors, where the Catholic Church hierarchy and the regional institution revealed to be intertwined.

The progressive and disruptive nature of the Martins Júnior agency – in line with other movements that emerged within Catholic Church during the 1970s^[25] – determined the path-dependent nature of the institutional processes established during the democratic period. The ‘principal agent’ tale (Martins Júnior) helped to illuminate the non-institutional aspects (processes and mechanisms) that constituted the blocking blocks of the regional politics in Portugal.

The island’ structure of economy (mostly agrarian), the landholding inequality determined the unfolded events. The terms in which the process of democratization evolved, how actors interacted have contributed to the path of institutional performance turn.

This piece of research shed into light the “protest histories of [these] individual population” (Imig & Tarrow, 2001) from Ribeira Seca (Machico) which voiced their demands and claim-making of their deprivation conditions they lived in through lyrics, dance, and theatre performances. This constituted their ‘repertoire of action’ in addressing local grievances. Noteworthy, this local community had a strong women participation and that the lyrics were mostly written by illiterate women^[26].

25. For example, the “Padres do Pombal” was a movement that emerged in Madeira Island during the second half of the 20th century, inspired on Vatican II, which appealed for regeneration within the regional Catholic structure. This movement also assumed opposition to the *Estado Novo*’ regime. Consequently, those clericals (four) were relegated by the regional Catholic hierarchy and after the transition to democracy returned to civil life. They were also persecuted by the Madeira’ separatist movements (FLAMA) for 1975 year. See for more information: Aprender Madeira (aprenderamadeira.net).

26. The lyrics published in the cited CD’s have those women authorship.

The findings suggest that many elements interacted on those processes path. The interaction of institutional and non-institutional actors constituted the major driver of the cycles of contestation, benefited by the political opportunity structure and by local-community mobilization. It also outlines the paths under which democratization took place and the institutional dynamics shaped by those processes at the regional level.

The critical episodes that erupted in Madeira Island are contingent to contextual specificities. The conditions under which popular mobilization occurred was prompted by the socio-economic context, the agency of a local actor which, in turn, prompted the subsequent cycle of claim-making and protests. The contentious issue that was at stake evolved due to the elite's resistance against threats of redistribution in case of regime change. *De facto*, the transformation of the political opportunity structure – regime change – triggered into the end of the landholding conflict.

Moreover, the canonical issue that erupted after regime change with the *ad Divinis* suspension have prevailed contentious over four decades. After the resignation of Alberto Joao Jardim after 39 years of incumbency (regional government) and the replacement of the Bishop D. António Carrilho by the bishop D. Nuno Brás (Church hierarchy) it was possible to play out with this contentious issue.

In sum, from a territorially bounded context (Madeira Island) this article offered a systematic perspective that identified the opportunity structure that supported the cycles of contestation, how it encouraged political change and the pathways towards regional democracy. Empirically, those constellations of elements resonate with how democracy works at the regional level. The contentious interaction amongst the Catholic Church and regional political structures against Ribeira Seca community echoed also in terms of political/electoral outcomes. The Social-democratic party (PSD, *Partido Social Democrata*) has been in office in Madeira ever since the first regional election in 1976. Alberto João Jardim assumed the helm of the regional cabinet in 1978 and retained it until 2015. PSD constituted an electoral stronghold over time. The exception was in the Machico constituency, where opposition parties, firstly *União Democrática Popular*, (UDP, Popular Democratic Union) and then *Partido Socialista* (PS, Socialist party) led the municipality^[27]. In contrast to the other type of elections – regional, national and European elections – in municipal elections, Machico's voters presented a distinctive voting behaviour from the other constituencies, which mostly voted for the PSD (Author, 2021), suggesting that the previous mobilization process echoed positively on people's politization.

As the lyrics from Ribeira Seca's community put it: «People from Ribeira Seca/ People who are secure and genuine/ Fighting for the truth/ They don't get tired all their lives!/ Your name will be remembered / It has its history / This ground / is a Sacred Ground / Where we sang Victory^[28].»

27. The exception was during 1979-1989 and 2001-2013 that PSD assumed the head of the municipality. See: www.cne.pt.

28. Own translation: «Gente da Ribeira Seca/ Gente firme e verdadeira/ De lutar pela verdade/ Não se cansa a vida inteira! Seu nome será lembrado/ Ele tem a sua história/ Este chão/ é um Chão Sagrado/Onde cantámos Vitória», In «Chão Sagrado», *CD A Igreja é do Povo, o Povo é de Deus*, CCDRS – Centro Cívico e Cultural da Ribeira Seca, 2014.

This article constitutes an important contribute to the understanding of the processual roots and the mechanisms that contributed to popular mobilization in Madeira Island. It also illuminates the *causal pathways* of Madeira Island political system over the last century, in particular the implication of the pre-existing structures to democratization and the pattern of regional democracy that we have today.

In memorium of clerical José Martins Jr. (1938- 12 june 2025).

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