

Power-sharing in the Tropics and the ubiquitous ‘presidential drift’: the mechanics and dynamics of unstable equilibrium in the “semi-presidentialism” of East Timor

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The relative merits of both presidentialism and parliamentarianism have been widely discussed for well over two centuries. In the last generation, a comparative newcomer, ‘semi-presidentialism’, has joined the intellectual fray¹. As the case of the two earlier notions, such captive place-holding at High Table is of course a reflection of the real-world political importance of what is at issue at levels like that of representation of community or its leadership. But in the latter’s case, there is more: discussions of ‘semi-presidentialism’, quite clearly, present us with what amounts to what amount to both simpler and rather more complicated issues. I want to contend that this should not come as a surprise. If we take a close political look at ‘semi-presidential systems of government’ it readily becomes clear that these are strange entities, indeed. At one level, this is little more than an expression of the hybridism of the notion. But we may go further than this – and I believe Timor-Leste provides us with a good case in point of a composite ‘altered’ form of ‘semi-presidentialism’, which we gain in scrutinizing.

When the expression ‘semi-presidential’ came to light, under the hand of a French constitutionalist, Maurice Duverger², it alluded to a mostly ‘legal’ form. After their multiplication that came about since the early 1990’s, ‘semi-presidentialist’ systems of government have shown themselves more as modalities of political power-sharing than as the idealized *tertium genus* Duverger had argued they gave body to. I shall argue that rather than a hypothetical ‘third formal path’ *between* presidentialism and parliamentarism, the semi-presidential model is a political solution which *adds* these two systems of government into a new, greater, whole. This is the main thrust of my argument in the present communication: that after the 1990’s explosion in their occurrence, ‘semi-presidentialist’ systems of Government have shown themselves more as modalities of political power-sharing than as the idealized jural ones.

I contend that, if seen from this perspective, and when placed in the wider context of other recent Lusophone experiments, the case of East Timor, although *sui generis*, is hardly exceptional. In fact, as we shall see, a gradient of sorts can be detected by a simple process of controlled comparison. S. Tomé e Príncipe, and, to a lesser extent, Cabo Verde, have been in the throes of oscillations between a parliamentarian pole and a presidential one, since their adoption of a semi-presidential system of government in the late 80s and early 90s. On their side, Angola and Mozambique have drifted steadily in the direction of a full presidentialization – a system of Government which in Guiné-Bissau finds an increasingly fuller, albeit complex, expression. Interestingly, local, ‘emic’, or ‘actor-centered’, explanations and etiological justifications for this ‘presidential drift’ strongly suggest its multiple motives, typically stressing ‘cultural’, ‘historical idiosyncratic’, ‘political, economic, and military’ reasons for this rather generalized shift away from the original blueprint. To my mind, this is a further symptom of the essentially *political* nature of any so-called ‘semi-presidential systems of government’³.

¹ The present paper is part of the Research Project “State-building/State-failure Debate: the case of East Timor” (PTDC/CPO/71659/2006), granted by the Portuguese *Fundação da Ciência e Tecnologia* (FCT/MCTES), of which I am a consultant. I want to express my gratefulness to Luís Elias, Nuno Canas Mendes, and Ravi Afonso Pereira for their critical readings of an earlier version of my text. The final version also benefitted from the perceptive and sympathetic comments of a keen anonymous referee selected by Michael Leach.

² In his deservedly famous 1973 book, suggestively titled *Échec au Roi*. Maurice Duverger identified then seven different semi-presidential Constitutions: apart from the French Fifth Republic one and the 1976 Portuguese example, Duverger included in his list those of Finland (1919), Austria (1919-1929), Ireland (1937), and Iceland (namely the Constitution of 1944).

³ A few authors, namely Lusophone ones, have long sensed the fact, even though it was never fully assumed. See, for example, Blanco de Morais, J. (1998), in his very clear “As metamorfoses do semipresidencialismo português”, *Revista Jurídica*, 22: 150, in which he claims, rather wistfully, that more than any other system “o semipresidencialismo exprime uma grande sensibilidade evolutiva em relação à influência que a prática político-constitucional e partidária exerce sobre a sua geometria” [translated freely, “‘semi-presidentialism’ expresses a great

In what follows, my efforts are mainly focused on a delineation of this insight and its application to the case of Timor-Leste. In the economy of the present text, I take a mostly ‘theoretical’ political stance, foregoing much of the empirical data that supports this reading. The objects of my analyses are also atypical as far as these sorts of studies go, as rather than worry about any of the minutiae of the normative framework of the ‘semi-presidential’ option, I place the bulk of my attention on the political dynamics of the system of government adopted. I do nevertheless try to go further than mere description, as it is also argued that the East Timorese case – although neither the case nor the model seem not to fit in easily with the data-set – is perhaps most usefully envisaged as a curiously hybrid performative system embodied in a ‘Prime-Ministerial presidentialism’ twinned with a ‘Presidential prime-ministerialism’.

Let me begin with the Timor-Leste system of government and place it from the very outset in a wider comparative context. On the face of it, the data-set is indeed somewhat complex. But analyzing it is not. And the conclusions which may be drawn from analyses are enlightening. As in many ‘Eastern European’ cases where a similar form of power-sharing was adopted, in East Timor the oscillation between the two poles has been able to survive one or two electoral processes – but it would be only prudent to assume that, as in other cases, it shall survive more of them; or, if it does, that it will do so without severe hiccups. ‘semi-presidentialism’ arose given its apparently more democratic façade, as an embodiment of tolerance and balance after one-party regimes were superseded⁴. The political mechanics of that option, however, were not sufficiently worked out, and that much was particularly blatant – we now see – in what concerns processes which took place in weak States, and in general in those prone to political atomization.

I argue that the constant oscillations detected in the semi-presidential systems of divided States are largely the result of intrinsic tensions between, on the one hand, a parliamentary political dynamics, in which decision-making is initially easier – as there tends to be an overlap between the legislative majority and the one in the executive – but at the price of runaway ‘factional’ fragmentation that entails a slower and more viscous process of decision-making. And, on the other hand, an initially slower, but progressively easier and less divisive, process of decision, as that which tends to occur in presidentialist politics, often forced as they are into uneasy ‘co-habitations’ – in which that overlap in normal circumstances does not obtain, but where more stable consensuses are as a rule laboriously reached. This has a few implications which are easy to chart. Here is a crucial one: not surprisingly, semi-presidential recipes work much better in peaceful homogeneous political communities, and less so in war-thorn and partitioned sociopolitical conglomerates like Weimar Germany, Guiné-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, or East Timor.

As a quite obvious matter of empirical fact, a curious political dynamic may be easily detected by means of the lighter of processes of controlled comparison: a dynamic which runs from a soft end – where a more or less unstable equilibrium prevails – to a much harder one, marked by unidirectional changes which are not really possible to revert. The immediate impression one gets from the diachronic progression of semi-presidential systems of government as soon as intra-Lusophone comparisons are carried out, is that we are facing a gradient. States like S. Tomé e Príncipe or Cabo Verde, at the softer, or lower intensity, end, have stuttered under the pressure of constraints on governance systems that oscillate between pushes for parliamentarism and pushes for presidentialism. Those of Angola, Mozambique and Guiné-Bissau have been subjected to a much neater, a higher intensity, presidentializing thrust. It is interesting to note that the local explanations for these oscillations and presidential ‘drifts’ pinpoint a variety of different motives for the inconstancy in what is written in their respective Constitutions – in

evolutionary sensitivity in relation to the influence constitutional and party practices exert over its geometry”]. Most Portuguese-speaking authors, however, follow rather uncritically M. Duverger’s constructs; thus see, eg, the tightly argued but ultimately unconvincing Canas, Vitalino (2007), “Reler Duverger: o sistema de Governo semipresidencial ou o triunfo da intuição ‘científica’”, in (ed.) Armando Marques Guedes, *O Semi-Presidencialismo e o Controlo da Constitucionalidade na África Lusófona*, número especial da *Negócios Estrangeiros* 11.4, Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, Lisboa.

⁴ A ‘structural’, or ‘confessional’, ‘semi-presidentialism’, is the position still taken by a few more ideologically motivated authors. In what concerns the case of East Timor, see, for instance, the recent Feijó, Rui (2009), “Elections and the Social Dimensions of Democracy/Lessons from Timor-Leste”, in (eds.) Christine Cabasset-Semedo and Frédéric Durand, *East-Timor. How to Build a New Nation in Southeast Asia in the 21st Century*: 123-139, Carnet de l’Irasec / Occasional Paper n°9, Bangkok.

some cases typically going for ‘cultural’ explanations, in others on ‘historical-idiosyncratic’ ones, and in a few other cases yet on political, economic or military causes for the ‘deviation’ [not rarely entitled a ‘*desvio da norma*’] detected. It is easy to demonstrate⁵ that all amount to quite linear convenient local defenses provided to justify a change widely perceived as essential by national elites⁶.

What is clear is that an enlargement of scope which includes other ‘semi-presidentialist’ examples, from the post-Kaiser German Weimar Republic to the Fifth French Republic of General de Gaulle (1958-1962), and the Portuguese post-25th of April Democratic Revolution of 1974, in Lisboa, and the latter and multiple Eastern and Central European post-communist ones, does resolve images nicely. It does so, to the extent that they widen the sample we have while at the same time as they suggest a very concrete in-depth historic-sociological explanation. And it is the following: ‘Presidential drifts’⁷ are extreme cases of the oscillations found in all ‘semi-presidential regimes’, ones which tend to come to the surface, above all – that is, in a both faster and more robust manner – in those State-building processes undertaken in political communities marked by strong political and sociological forms of pluralism; and they, correlatively, come to surface much less often and intensely in politically and sociologically more homogeneous, that is, less divided, political communities.

None of this constitutes a revelation, of course. Not once we become aware that the adoption of semi-presidential systems of government as a rule takes place in post-dictatorship societies, as a ‘cosmetic’ response demanded by ideological forces betting on rapid processes of fast-track democratizations in up to then non-democratic regimes. This template applies rather nicely to East Timor, after the civil war and the horrors of Indonesian occupation.

The initial draft of the new Constitution for the independent State – the first to be born in the 21st Century – was mostly the work of a Portuguese constitutionalist of renown, an academic, Jorge de Miranda. After a long process of ‘popular’ consultation, mostly irrelevant given the actual minor tuning and tweaking to which it led – except, as we shall see, in what concerns an ‘end-game’ in which Fretilin allegedly outfoxed a Xanana Gusmão who had already shown his disposition to run for the post of President of the newly created Republic, by emptying the Presidency and so reducing it to a more ‘ceremonial’ role that it is argued was earlier expected – a self-proclaimed ‘semi-presidential’ Constitution was adopted by the new state of Timor-Leste.

One would be hard put not to see the Timor-Leste Constitution as a ‘semi-presidential’ one. The Constitution is rather similar to the Portuguese one, albeit it bestows slightly weaker powers on the President, a largely symbolic Head of State elected by direct personal and universal suffrage for five years with mostly representational powers, although empowered by the fact he or she is the ‘Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces’ (article 85, b)), he or she has veto powers over all types of legislation (article 85, c)). True, the Timorese President may be ‘impeached’ by Parliament (Article 79, 5ff.), depends on a Parliamentary ‘authorization’ for travels abroad (article, 80), as well as for the declaration of a ‘state of siege’ or ‘emergency’, and of ‘war’ and ‘peace’ (article 85 g) and h)). But just as it is up to the President to designate and install the Prime-Minister (article 85, d)) following the results of separate legislative elections, the President can ‘dissolve the National Parliament in case of a serious institutional crisis’ (article 86, f)) and can also exonerate the Prime-Minister if the Government’s Program is rejected by the e National Parliament’ (article 86, g))⁸. This is of course the blueprint for a sharing of political

⁵ For a fairly detailed analysis (although by no means an exhaustive one) of this point, see my Marques Guedes, Armando (2009), “Semi-Presidencialismos e Processos de Presidencialização em Estados Lusófonos”, in (eds.) Bacelar Gouveia, Jorge e Assunção Cristas, *Actas do I Congresso de Direitos Lusófonos* (in print).

⁶ So there are both explanations gestated by power-holders and those that arise among opposition forces. Not surprisingly the first stressing the legitimate nature of the pressures, the second focused, instead, on their opportunism.

⁷ The expression “*dérives présidentielles*” is used by French analysts who refer to francophone African systems of Government, and in my own already quoted studies of Lusophone ones. See, for example, (eds.) Daloz, Jean-Pascal et Patrick Quantin (1997), *Transitions démocratiques africaines*, Karthala, Paris, and the many authors who systematically allude to the many “*dérives ‘monarchiques’*”; as well as in many articles included in my own already cited Marques Guedes, Armando (2009), *op. cit.*.

⁸ My translations. There is no point in listing here the many other competencies held by the East Timorese President, as the complete text may be found at http://www.constitution.org/cons/east_timor/constitution-port.htm. For the official English version, see <http://www.etan.org/etanpdf/pdf2/constfnen.pdf>

power between President and Parliament to which the expression ‘semi-presidentialism’ alludes. Given dispositions such as these, it is of course very hard to argue – unless one only has the model of a full-fledged presidentialism in mind – that due to the weakness of the President's constitutional powers and executive authority Timor-Leste should be portrayed as a parliamentary Republic. Although, to be sure, that revamping was likely attempted, time and again, as a tactical political bid – it is interesting, in this context, to note that the very popular Xanana Gusmão had committed himself to the Presidency before the then still in-the-making Constitution had clarified its ceremonial rather than executive role, something which he undoubtedly later regretted as he became aware he had been somewhat outfoxed by Fretilin on this matter⁹.

My point is that in a divided society this kind of power interdependence becomes easily short-circuited in a plural and divided society – inevitable overlaps and gaps are easily then instrumentally used in political infighting. To a large extent, a simple comparison with other Lusophone ‘split’ examples would have shown to attentive observers that such formal arrangements should have amounted to a forewarning of things to come. A mere lateral association, so to speak, would have warned the eruption of conflicts was nothing but a question of time: so, as could be expected, the power-sharing arrangement worked well for a time, but it then started oscillating according to the many new power-balances met along the road of State-building. Practices and dynamics are now changed rather radically, even if, nominally, everything is still expressed by all East Timorese as constitutional business as usual.

The upshot of these transformations followed suit. A major oscillation – in the sense of the expression earlier indicated – occurred in Timor-Leste in 2006, releasing political pressures and tensions which had accumulated for quite a while in the uneasy alliance in place – ones that pitted against one another eastern and western nationals, particularly those in Army contingents, President and Prime-Minister, the pragmatic ‘*resistentes nacionais*’ who had stayed behind and the mostly Marxian ‘cosmopolitans’ who had taken refuge in the wider world, and rather different political projects and governance *modus operandi*¹⁰. Materially, the crisis in April 2006 began when over four hundred armed men, the self-proclaimed ‘*Peticionários*’ – almost a third of the East Timorese Armed Forces (F-FDTL) – took up arms against a perceived discrimination in favor of their ex-Falintil comrades, those traditionally connected to Fretilin, drawn mostly from the Eastern part of the island. They were soon joined by members of the Police force and first demonstrations, but soon violence – although centered in Dili – quickly broke out virtually in the entire country.

Soon, the internal situation ran out of control. Fighting, often heavy, and generalized turbulence, were widely spread, in late May, when then Defense and Foreign Minister José Ramos-Horta – according to some accounts speaking for his Prime-Minister Mari Alkatiri – formally requested military assistance from Portugal, Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia. Matters escalated as armed gangs roamed Dili, torching and killing, refugees fled the capital in large numbers, and UN personnel begun to leave the ailing State. A not entirely clear situation of ever deeper unrest ensued. On the 30th of May, President Xanana Gusmão, used his constitutional prerogatives to taken on special security powers in a bid to quell the violence. The period of ‘emergency rule’, which, in accordance with constitutional dispositions, would last for 30 days, was to ‘prevent violence and avoid further fatalities’ and was meant to insure a ‘rapid reestablishment of public order’. Gusmão, took as a result sole control of the Army and Police forces and also – at any rate nominally – the supervision of the peace-keeping actions of 1,300 strong

⁹ Even if, to the best of my knowledge, evidence is circumstantial on this issue. It is interesting to quote Pedro Magalhães in this context, when he wrote that “[o] *objetivo [da Fretilin] por detrás da adopção do semi-presidencialismo em Timor-Leste foi menos o de ‘imitar’ o antigo colonizador do que neutralizar Xanana Gusmão*” [freely, “the [Fretilin-led] objective behind the adoption of ‘semi-presidentialism’ in East Timor was less one of emulating the colonizer than the one of neutralizing Xanana Gusmão”], in “Uma tragédia reencenada”, 2006, at <http://outrasmargens.blogspot.com/2006/06/uma-tragdia-reencenada.html> . As the powers bestowed of the President clearly lay bare, the ‘outfoxing’ at best led to a weak *de facto* format of a “semi-presidencialismo de pendor parlamentar” [with a “parliamentary *penchant*”], and not to actual parliamentarism.

¹⁰ Many Australian official reports on the crisis were pro-Xanana Gusmão, essentially blaming matters on Fretilin “radicals”. A rather partial and very pro-Mari Alkatiri take on the events and their historical background, which largely places responsibilities about what happened in foreign manipulations of Timorese political dynamics, may be found in the large Barbedo de Magalhães, António (2007), *Timor-Leste. Interesses Internacionais e Actores Locais, Afrontamento*, Porto, a work launched at the Fundação Mário Soares, in Lisboa.

Australian-led peacekeeping force s dispatched to the troubled islands since the 26th of April, that is four days earlier.

On June the 4th, 120 troops of the Portuguese Republican National Guard (GNR) landed in Baucau. Incidents related to leadership and coordination of military and police activities rapidly erupted, mostly pitting Portuguese and Australian soldiers against one another; but fortunately this was solved by means of an agreement celebrated on the 8th by the parties concerned – the four countries mentioned above. By the 16th of June, East Timorese rebels began disarming, when the top rebel leader, Lt. Cmdr. Alfredo Reinado, and his men, handed over ammunition and a few weapons to Australian peacekeepers. Mop ups, pressures and behind the scenes negotiations ensued – and on June 26th, Prime-Minister Mari Alkatiri, an old Fretilin hand who had lived mostly in Mozambique during the long period of Indonesian occupation, and whom, it was insinuated, illegally armed pro-Eastern Fretilin-connected militias, thus fanning and escalating the troubles – the insinuation had some obliquity built into it, as actually, in a material sense, that charge was made against Rogério Lobato and Roque Rodrigues and, officially, not directly against Alkatiri – presented his resignation. The resignation of the then highly empowered Prime-Minister was not an easy affair – and the chain of events took place as if in slow motion.

The stakes in terms of the tensions and dangers for national unity being what they were and perhaps also because the correlation of forces was for a long while not too clear, from the outset the then East Timorese President, Xanana, acted carefully. It is interesting to note how essentially political moves were undertaken under a legalistic and constitutional guise. A reduction in the incumbent Prime-Minister's powers was first suggested, then his voluntary resignation solicited, then came the idea of substituting him with two Deputy Prime-Ministers and finally, when the parliamentary Fretilin majority confirmed Alkatiri as their leader and he refused to budge, a wave of ministerial resignations ensued, triggered by the departure of Ramos-Horta, the Defense and Foreign Affairs Minister. On the 26th of June, as noted above, the very next day, Mari Alkatiri, explicitly assuming his share of responsibility for the crisis, announced his renunciation of the Prime-Ministerial post, stating he did it 'so as to avoid the resignation of His Excellency, the President of the Republic'. More changes were to come and surprising ones at that. As the dust settled, and under the grip of foreign military forces, the Government – i.e. Ramos-Horta – had earlier called on international forces to help stabilize a situation in flux, Timor-Leste was led to interestingly somehow *recast*, albeit with no formal constitutional changes at all (be they revisions or eventual 'amendments'), its *de facto* system of Government. On July 8th, President Xanana Gusmão appointed José Ramos-Horta as Prime-Minister. A team emerged.

In tense runoff Presidential elections which took place on the 9th of May 2007, the erstwhile Prime-Minister of the past year, Ramos-Horta – with 69% of the vote and running as an independent, the Fretilin flag having been bestowed on Francisco Guterres Lu Olo, his opponent – took the post of President. Finally, almost precisely a year after the onset of the troubles and violence, on the 30th June 2007, a parliamentary election was held, in which fourteen parties ran for the sixty five seats in Parliament. Fretilin, with an almost 30% showing, won the vote by a small difference – but in the absence of a clear majority, and after marauding mobs apparently linked to Fretilin again took to the streets of Dili on a rampage, the Party was not awarded the reins of power by José Ramos-Horta, the new President. Instead, Xanana Gusmão, the erstwhile President, became the new Prime-Minister, at the head of a coalition led by his newly-founded CNRT (*Congresso Nacional de Reconstrução de Timor*, a party to which Xanana gave the same acronym as that of the well-known and messianic 1998 *Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorense*)¹¹.

¹¹ Feijó, Rui (2009), *op. cit.*. here is a quotation from this work: "To sum up the meaning of those results, one might say that a new majority surfaced, and that there is now (explicit) convergence of President, Parliament and Government – something quite banal in presidential or parliamentary regimes, but not necessarily so in semipresidential ones (in fact, it represents one of the main lines of criticism of the model in the framework of transition and consolidation of democratic regimes). The fact that this new majority – with its own dynamic requiring further attention – gained power through elections generally accepted as free and fair, and acceded the reins of governance in a basically peaceful manner (there were public demonstrations against this, but no serious attempt at blocking the change in government or at challenging the presidential decisions in its proper locus, the supreme court of the land) must be underlined. In many cases of transitions to democracy, the moment at which a government is peacefully replaced by another one formed by the previous opposition after competitive elections marks the moment at which transition ends and consolidation begins. Both Spain (where the socialist Felipe Gonzalez replaced the centrist UCD in 1981) or in Cabo Verde (where the opposition leader defeated the historical

Although by no means a fact unheard of, the assumption of a Prime-Ministerial post by a former President constitutes a rather interesting case from the perspective of political legitimacy¹². Against the background of comparable processes, the question imposes itself: why did widely supported Xanana Gusmão, the former and first President of the Republic – this is, of course, nominally, the top post in the State hierarchy – run for the formally lesser role of Prime-Minister? Was it so as to ensure a well-respected and charismatic guerilla leader would effectively occupy the top executive post, so that Fretlin or Mari Alkatiri could not do it themselves? Was it this and a stark recognition that a formidable concentration of executive powers in the role of Prime-Minister had been achieved by Alkatiri, one which Xanana believed he could use to advance his own political and personal agendas, given the mostly ‘executive-oriented’ environment which came about in 2006 as a result of the heavily increased presence of ‘internationals’ in the country’s effective governance? Was it a mixture of all these? As a variation on this theme, could it have been because Xanana Gusmão realized that, according to the East-Timorese Constitution (and also given the very real power Mari Alkatiri managed to draw into the toolkits of the Prime-Minister), the President of the Republic does not actually hold the ‘top post’, but rather by then a mostly empty ceremonial one? Or was it instead the simple outcome of an ‘arithmetic calculation’ as to what was the best power-sharing deal which could be achieved between him and José Ramos-Horta, one of his few possible partners in a credible and personally stable arrangement?¹³

Such questions are surely very interesting and even stimulating, but I believe they largely miss the point. What matters most is *not*, indeed, the *petite histoire*, the nitty-gritty mechanics of events, but instead the contextual echoes evoked and the final outcome of the moves carried out. And that was the fact Xanana Gusmão moved to occupy the Prime-Ministerial post and in so doing brought his charisma and ‘Presidential’ legitimacy with him, further empowering the role which could be fulfilled by the Prime-Minister of Timor-Leste at the expense of the role of President – albeit it follows that he could do so effectively in part based on precisely the prestige and symbolic clout of this very role. It was a message sent loud and clear to both the Fretlin majority relegated to the limbo of opposition and to an acquiescent, trusting, and stalwartly pro-Xanana electorate. Moreover, this was a ‘memo’ which could be sent without too much of a political risk of fueling further instability – given the ancillary evidence that José Ramos-Horta too has considerable local public sway, as a consequence of his personal standing, and acknowledging that his politics and many of his personal networks are not wholly unpalatable to Fretlin. Ramos-Horta too, in becoming President on an independent ticket, bloated in parallel the presidential post. In good truth, the move led both of them to recapitulate, as it were, the roles they had played during the long struggle for independence: Xanana, inside, fighting directly and from within for his people, and Horta, on the outside, overviewing from the exterior and busy networking in the corridors of power: a winning recipe, and part of Timor’s national political repertoire¹⁴. Overall, the new team strongly

PAICV in 1991) are cases in point. In this sense, the electoral cycle of 2007 may be interpreted as a clear sign of progress in the consolidation of democracy in Timor-Leste”, p. 137. While rightly stressing the “now explicit convergence of President, Parliament and Government”, the author entirely ignores the significance of the fact the erstwhile President became Prime-Minister (and vice-versa) in these elections – or that a dual charisma-based team, ‘anointed’ by ‘traditional’ complementary resonances, was so created.

¹² After all, a somewhat akin switch occurred in Russia, albeit for very different motives and against a very diverse background, with Vladimir Putin becoming Prime-Minister as Dmitry Medvedev was elected to the Presidency – although, in this latter case, there was no ‘swap’ of posts or pooling of charisma.

¹³ There can be little doubt that Xanana Gusmão interpreted sustained signals from his power base as demands for a more pro-active, a more “executive”, stance. Was this an anticipatory attitude of Xanana, much in the spirit of what Yale constitutionalist Jack Balkin wrote in relation to the infamous 2000 Bush-Gore elections: “[t]o be sure, the meaning of these elections is constructed; their significance is generally appraised after the fact. It may not correlate with any particular voter’s actual intentions or reasons for voting. All politics, it is often said, is local. But the construction of these meanings is an important part of the way a democratic system works, both for outside observers and for the participants themselves. Ascribing a meaning to an election is how politicians understand their mandate, and, to a large extent, it is how members of the public understand what they have done collectively”? [from Balkin, Jack M. (2002), “Legitimacy and the 2000 Election”, in (ed.) Bruce Ackerman *Legitimacy and the 2000 Election*, in *Bush v. Gore: The Question of Legitimacy*: 210-228, Yale University Press, downloaded from <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/jbalkin/articles/essayon2000election.pdf>].

¹⁴ A term mostly applied by Charles Tilly for guiding “conceptual schemes” used, among others, by contentious political movements. For one of the many of his texts in which the concept of “repertoire” is discussed at some length, see Tilly, Charles (2001), *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.

enhanced – thus giving them a much needed supplement of credibility – the political mechanisms of governance of Timor-Leste; and it is interesting to note that they did so, not so much *outside* the ‘black letter’ of the Constitution, as by means of an instrumental reshaping of the role its dispositions fulfilled until the tragic events and processes of 2006 – by making use of a resonance still reverberating today.

My line of argument has been that, far from a jural *tertium genus* somehow placed *between* a presidentialist and a parliamentary system of Government, ‘semi-presidentialism’ is an entity of another order: a political form of power-sharing which strives to incorporate, *by adding them to each other*, a Parliamentary and a Presidential system¹⁵. Timor-Leste fits well – if somewhat atypically and in a rather unstable manner – into this modeling, as the lightest of comparisons easily shows us. I pointed out earlier that the data-set is complex. As in many ‘Eastern European’ cases where a similar form of power-sharing was adopted, in Timor-Leste the oscillation between the two poles has been able to outlive one or two electoral processes – but rarely more, and even those with hiccups.

What should that be the case? In Timor-Leste as elsewhere, ‘semi-presidentialism’ – even if in a watered-down version – arose given its apparently more democratic façade, as an embodiment of tolerance and balance once, after what was often a long struggle, one-party regimes were finally superseded. The political mechanics of that option, however, were not sufficiently worked out – particularly, we now see, in weak States, and in general in those societies prone to political atomization. As underlined from the outset, I argued that this is largely the result of intrinsic tensions between, on the one hand, a parliamentary political dynamics, in which decision-making is initially easier – as there tends to be an overlap between the legislative majority and the one in the executive – but at the price of runaway ‘factional’ fragmentation that entails a slower and more viscous process of decision-making. And, on the other hand, an initially slower, but progressively easier and less divisive, process of decision, as that which tends to occur in presidentialist politics, often forced as they are into uneasy ‘co-habitations’ – in which that overlap in normal circumstances does not obtain, but where more stable consensuses are as a rule laboriously reached¹⁶. Once this is cleared up, it becomes unsurprising that semi-presidential recipes work much better in peaceful homogeneous political communities – and less so in war-thorn and partitioned sociopolitical conglomerates like Weimar Germany and, in the case of Lusophone States, Guiné-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, or East Timor.

The contention is that once we push aside political legalism and wishful thinking and their associated pre-comprehensions, such a gradient of decreasing efficacy is not at all difficult to understand. As formal mechanisms for post-authoritarian or post-dictatorial power-sharing, ‘semi-presidentialist’ systems structurally propend to oscillations: they give body to forms of an unstable equilibrium. A gradient as the one found is surely to be expected, in which a ‘presidential drift’ affirms itself quicker and more robustly in political communities marked by strong sociological and/or political pluralism, and

¹⁵ This is by no means new, albeit my clear-cut formulation may well be novel. For a long time now, analysts of semi-presidential systems have shown to be well aware of its nature as, essentially, a mechanism of power-sharing. Benjamin Reilly – to give just one example close to our East Timorese case – appears to have gone as far as mapping out the normative difficulties in attempts at reconciling, by merger, the two systems in one ‘semi-presidentialism’ actually embodies. A quotation from his work: “while ‘semi-presidentialism’ has its benefits, it places unusual strains on new democracies. In particular, periods of divided government can put great stress on the stability of countries which have not yet developed established practices of political coexistence. In addition, the uncertainties of constitutional law in situations of shared power create their own problems: in these three country cases, disagreements over which particular office would exercise which particular constitutional powers was a recurring source of conflict. No constitution can codify all situations which office-holders are likely to face, meaning that even the most thorough constitutional text will inevitably leave some grey areas unspecified. This is a particular problem for semi-presidential constitutions, as it is precisely those grey areas of uncertainty which can provide the basis for ongoing conflict”, (in Reilly, Benjamin (2008), “‘semi-presidentialism’ and democratic development in East Asia grows” East Asia Forum, retrieved from <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2008/11/08/semi-presidentialism-and-democratic-development-in-east-asia-grows/>).

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that the local explanations and etiological justifications for this ‘presidential drift’ I have mentioned as common in Lusophone countries (and I suspect elsewhere, too) strongly suggest its multiple motives, typically stressing “cultural”, ‘historical idiosyncratic’, political, economic, and military reasons for this rather generalized shift away from the original blueprint. The curious thing is, they seems almost exclusively focused on *hindrances* to decision-making – and thus suggest what is at issue in their usage is not an analytical preoccupation but a power one. The point I want to convey is that the Prime-Ministerial option, or choice, of Xanana Gusmão should be envisaged in the same context.

correspondingly less so in more homogeneous and internally less divided ones. This is by no means a linear affair, of course: it should be noted that the political history of actual conflicts is also a variable here, as are, indeed, the electoral systems preferred. What Angola, say, S. Tomé e Príncipe, or Guiné-Bissau and the East-Timorese example show us, in convergent ways, is that the processes of ‘presidentialization’ so prevalent in Lusophone and other sociologically plural and politically fragmented ‘semi-presidential’ countries, are perhaps better contemplated as modalities of power concentration than as an empirical format for the accumulation of powers by either a President or another entity (say, the Prime-Minister) – so the very term is partly a misnomer¹⁷. The net result of the political bids for power and governability was therefore a curious model embodying both a concentration and a simultaneous power-sharing by two charismatic leaders; a novel ‘twinned’ figure piercingly, if in many senses implicitly, negotiated during and after the painful and threatening tensions unleashed in 2006 – and one drawn for an experience-tested and locally recognized ‘catalog’ of winning political formulas. None of this should come as a surprise, once one unveils ‘semi-presidentialist’ options as political ones, often chosen for the ‘ornamental’ reasons usually put forward by forces ideologically engaged in the rapid ‘democratization’ of former non-democratic regimes.

As I hope to have sketchily shown, the case of Timor-Leste, given its painful history of internal and external struggles and divisions, places it rather firmly in the unstable area of the gradient identified – but, most interestingly, it does so in the guise of a widely consented sort of ‘Prime-Ministerial presidentialism’ which runs hand-in-hand with a ‘Presidential prime-ministerialism’. That is, both as a functional and as an actor-centered affair. A curiously hybrid figure which, perhaps given the ‘cultural’ diacritical importance that personal charisma locally has, somehow embodies a circumspect ‘Presidential drift’ – but one that nevertheless at the same time recasts it as merely one of various possible trends of political polarization via the accumulation and simultaneous pooling of power in terms of a locally more intelligible indivisibility; and one that in Timor-Leste is associated to a personal complementarity which is, in itself, a piece of the local cultural-historical repertoire of political success formulas. This ‘building-block’ is, of course, greatly enhanced and sustained by the public perception of a well publicized lasting good working relationship between Ramos-Horta and Xanana – and by the power elites’ not too dissimilar reading of the role played by the duo during the crises, as well as before and beyond them. It is of the essence that both such ‘foundations’ work along *political*, rather than constitutional, axes.

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¹⁷ It is not only the term “presidentialisation” that may be misleading. “semi-presidentialism” is too: It is also difficult to fathom, as a purported *tertium genus*, why it could not instead called “semi-parliamentarism”.