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Heirs of the Wall. The Events of 1989-91 and the Continuity of the Southwest European Communist Parties. PhD Project*

Through this study I will offer a reflection based on primary sources, discourse analysis, and published literature on the reaction of five Southwest European communist parties to the historical events that occurred between 1989 and 1991, such as the Fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the Coup d'État in the USSR (1991). Using the methodology inherent to the history of present time, a study will be conducted on the Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, French and Italian communist parties. Among others, factors related to their origin, orientation followed and the different paths after the collapse of the so-called *real socialism* motivated my choice. A comparative, transnational, interdisciplinary research will be carried out that promotes connections between political science, political history – highlighting the analysis of the party's route and ideology –, and communication science – including the analysis of the party press during that period and the use of political discourse study techniques, including the provision of a new framework for speech and content analysis.

Objectives

A primary objective is aimed at the description of the parties' historical and ideological background. I will observe the relationships between them in a comparative manner, as well as factors related to their origin and development as European political institutions. The project's goal is to create an openly comparative study, finding points of separation and connection between the parties that will allow us, among other conclusions, to infer considering their peculiarities of a possible existence and the definition of a Latin type of European Communism. The secondary objective stems precisely from the previous one. The parties' reaction to defining moments in the years under study will be contextualized by conducting exploratory interviews to party leaders from that period, as well as investing deeply in document analysis, which includes minutes from congresses that took place between 1989 and 1991, and, as a main source, the parties' press archives. This material will be studied from the viewpoint of speech, proposing to that end a specific and original analysis framing scheme.

The project will draw an accurate picture of the consequences and the reaction of the parties under study to the collapse of *real socialism*, how they adapted themselves to the absence of an international communist movement, and the conditions that caused the various parties to choose strategies as diverse as maintaining their identities or, in other cases, incorporating broader political coalitions, or even ceasing to exist. Based on these objectives, a structured conclusion combining a pan-European comparative study will be provided.

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Detailed Description

No other epoch in recent history had such an impact on Europe as the movements that led to the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, and the process from the end of the World War II to the extinction of the USSR in 1991. This change had such an impact in historical thinking that, as a result, theories emerged proclaiming that the end of the Cold War would also mean the “End of History”.¹ Even though other kinds of thinking arose at the same time challenging Fukuyama’s point of view, and other works have been produced since then to facilitate the study of these years with the required distance from the immediate factology, it is clear that by then Communism had lost its political space in Europe, signifying a highly dynamic period in the repositioning of the various political forces shaped by communist ideology.

My study is focused on Southwest Europe, where communist parties have been implemented since the 1920s. Five of those parties were chosen for this study: the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), the French Communist Party (PCF), the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI). The choice of these five parties met criteria associated with several factors. First of all, phenomena connecting those parties, such as the existence of a cultural community and social models of South-European countries that generated a sort of proximity that will lead us to question whether there is indeed an identity of Latin/Southwest European communist parties. Also, the fact that these parties have undergone a phase as clandestine political organizations: a prolonged one in the Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan and Italian case; shorter in France. Finally, the fact that two of these parties (PCI and PCF) have taken part in their respective governments during the Liberation of Europe, more precisely between 1944 and 1947; whereas another one, the PCP, has also risen to power at a period of national liberation in 1974, and maintained representation in the government until 1976. In each case, the rise to power is related to a process of national liberation from right wing authoritarian regimes, with or without foreign occupation. This study could have included the Greek case. I decided nevertheless to leave it out of the study’s scope to give the subject as much cultural homogeneity as possible, which is also reflected in the history and social model of the countries.

These parties are also analyzed by differentiating criteria. In particular, the inclusion of four “Eurocommunist” parties (French, Italian, Catalan and Spanish) as opposed to the Portuguese case which is included by some authors into a group called “the abnormal Eurocommunists”,² a group including Yugoslav and Asian, particularly Indian Communism. Also, I will assess whether it is during the period between 1989 and 1991 that the parties reformulated themselves and if this was a result of the events that marked the end of a cycle. As these events will be the subject of my analysis, I may afterwards counteract the reactions of various political parties and understand, through the analysis of several types of sources and documentation, the importance of that period in the positioning of these parties. Therefore, I will study some interesting details, namely, the fact that the Italian Communist Party was the only one ceasing to exist, alongside with the Catalan – even though, among the four parties studied, they were considered to be the furthest away from Moscow. Given the situation of the four countries under review, can we pinpoint the Fall of the Wall as the trigger to the for the basic change of Communism in the West? Or was Communism in

¹ Francis Fukuyama: *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, Free Press, 1992.

² Aldo Rizzo: *La Frontiera Dell'eurocomunismo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1977.

Western Europe already in regression and the crisis in Eastern Europe has been a push to a breakdown that had already been perceived as inevitable?

In terms of methodology employed for obtaining answers to these questions, a comparative, interdisciplinary, transnational study will be conducted. Comparative, insofar as I propose, through the historical events and ideological outcomes, to evaluate the perception of these parties in their own universe of the social change occurred during the years 1989-91. I shall focus on the official reactions, but the parties' electoral representation and social implantation during that period will also be evaluated. Following that, this study on the individual parties will be intersected and the various reactions will be compared to create an overview. My research has an interdisciplinary aspect benefiting from my training in the field of Communication Science. In this regard, a new framework of discourse analysis will be offered. As a new tool, this can, and should, constitute a new instrument for other studies of the kind and allowing a broader research that could be extended in the future to other parties or historical periods. The documents under review – which will be the object of the original framework – will primarily be the resolutions arising from the congresses held by the parties during the years under study. The transnational nature of the objects under analysis and the sensitivity of a subject that is part of the history of the present pose some challenges. Regarding methodology, we are aware of the limitations inherent to a political analysis of such a nature.

My interest in this subject arises from the results achieved in my research for the Master's degree, based on the Portuguese case of the communist movement, whose discussion in international events already took place. I consider, however, that this matter could be pursued further. I am therefore aware of the relevance and potential of transnationality implied by this study, for which I propose a comparative approach using interdisciplinary tools, where the historical and ideological study provide the methodology required to reach firm conclusions and produce new knowledge.

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