Entangled Transitions: Between Eastern and Southern Europe 1960s-2014

In under two decades, authoritarian political systems collapsed across Europe – in the south of the continent in the 1970s, and then in the east between 1989 and 1991. Although much work has been done on these processes in each region, and comparative work carried out on post-authoritarian transitions and memories, there has yet to be any sustained scholarship that examines the ‘entangledness’ of these processes in the context of broader European and global processes of the late Cold War and its aftermath. Taking a longue durée approach, this conference will explore these inter-relationships between the 1960s and the present day. 2014 marks the 25th anniversary of the fall of state socialism and the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the transition from dictatorship on the Iberian Peninsula and in Greece: an ideal time to consider the relationship between these processes that have been central to modern European history.

Transnational histories of post-war Europe have hitherto been focused on connections between western and eastern Europe, or western and southern Europe, but have paid little attention to east-south exchanges. This event will address the networks through which these linkages emerged (governments, international organisations, expert groups such as economists, exiles, diplomats, cultural groups, dissidents, churches, NGOs and so on), and explore those ideas (e.g. modernisation on the periphery, development, authoritarianism, dissidence, human rights, subnational nationalisms, and the relationship to Europe) which gave meaning to those linkages, whether in imagined or real terms.

By analysing these connections, this conference aims to develop new perspectives on broader developments in international history, such as détente, the end of the Cold War, processes of globalisation, regional integration, and democratisation. As this conference wants to stimulate a multi-level analysis, proposals may adopt a local, national, transnational or international focus to consider these trans-regional connections. Submissions are encouraged not only from those who work on these regions, but also from scholars of e.g. globalisation, democratisation, regionalism and dissidence whose work touches on these themes. It is hoped that this conference will lead to the creation of a longer-term network. We seek contributions around the following themes:

1. DISCOVERY AND ENTANGLEMENT

Although state socialist eastern Europe and the right-wing authoritarian regimes of southern Europe are often separated out in academic work and popular memory, these regions were also marked by important points of convergence. In addition to longstanding structural similarities, for instance in terms of economic development, Catholic culture, and their location at the periphery of (western) Europe, both regions faced similar issues and challenges that emerged from the 1960s onwards, captured in terms such as dissidence and democratisation, and in debates about their relationship with a unifying Europe and a globalizing world.

The complex combination of divergences and similarities raises many questions about the relationship between these regions, and about the material and ideological connections through which this relationship developed at the transnational, national and local level. How did political, economic or cultural actors perceive the relationship between these regions during the Cold War? How did each region ‘imagine the other’? How did state socialist understandings of southern European authoritarianism, or southern European understandings of eastern European state socialism, shape perceptions and interactions? To what extent was a sense of mutual recognition or distance shaped by imagined connections, such as a common European identity, common struggles or a shared Catholic culture, for instance? To what extent were physical linkages and networks important, through e.g. bilateral relations between countries, or inter- and transnational networks established by churches, cultural groups, economists and other experts, communist and dissident movements, human rights/ peace NGOs, students or exiles? Did western Europe, or international organisations, play a mediating role in this relationship?

1. TRANSITION AND ENTANGLEMENT

Although the eastern and southern European transitions were dubbed part of a “third democratisation wave” (Huntington), we know very little about trans-regional entanglements and mutual impacts in transition. In what ways, and to what extent, was the socialist East implicated in changes in southern Europe? What was the relationship between the bloc and resistance to southern European authoritarianism? What was the role of the Spanish, Portuguese or Greek exile in eastern Europe?

What effects did the southern European transitions of the 1970s have on political, economic or cultural debates – and specifically the question of the future of state socialism - in the socialist East? What impact did the actions of southern European Communist parties in transition have in the East?

What was the relationship of southern Europeans to the changes in the East in the 1980s? What connections existed between southern Europeans and eastern European dissent? Were Cold War divides increasingly being transcended by e.g. human rights organisations, or was the Iron Curtain still a fundamental barrier?

III. ENTANGLED AFTERLIVES OF TRANSITION

How was the collapse in the socialist East interpreted in southern Europe, and welded to domestic political, economic and cultural debates about the past, present and future? How, for example, did the breakup of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia affect the political strategies and discourse of Catalan or Basque independence movements?

How did the mode of transition in the South affect debates over transitions and their aftermath in post-socialist eastern Europe? How, for example, did the quick entry of southern European states into the EC in the 1980s resonate in debates over Europe and integration of the East?

How have these transitions been connected in academic discourses, e.g. transitology; in national memory cultures in these regions; or in ‘European memory’? How have the supposed inadequacies of southern or eastern European transitions been connected in contemporary debates?

The organisers encourage potential participants to suggest other themes that allow us to explore these entangled trans-regional histories. This conference is organised by the Leverhulme Trust-funded ‘1989 after 1989’ project at the University of Exeter and the research unit MoSa (Modernity & Society 1800-2000), in co-operation with Complutense University of Madrid. It is scheduled for December 8 -10 2014, at KU Leuven. Some funding will be available for travel and accommodation, although the precise amount is not yet known. Participants will be asked to enquire about funds from their home institutions.

Please send a proposal of around 250-300 words, and a short academic CV, to Natalie Taylor at the University of Exeter: N.Taylor3@exeter.ac.uk The deadline for submission is April 7, 2014. Participants will be notified by early May 2014.