

Zuzana Poláčková & Pieter C. van Duin

Portugal and Slovakia in Comparative Perspective

Essays on Iberian-Slavic political, social, and cultural questions

With a foreword by Dr. Slavomír Michálek

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Foreword

It does not happen very often that material on Slovak history is used to carry out an exercise in comparative history writing by including historical observations on other European countries. But this is what the essays presented below are doing and I suppose that many Slovak historians will be surprised by the result. Comparative history writing is not something that is practised by many historians in Slovakia and in Portugal the situation is probably not much different, even though in Lisbon some comparative studies have been undertaken in a cultural and literary (but not necessarily historical) context. That the essays also include material on Spain and the Czech lands, indeed even on Brazil, makes them even more ambitious.

It is interesting that the authors of these essays pay attention both to the early modern period and to the twentieth century. The suggestion is that there are historical parallels between Portugal and Slovakia over a longer period of time. Of course there are also historical differences between the two countries, but a case can be made for the thesis that looking at the parallels helps to clarify certain historical questions or even the historical process in the two countries as a whole. However, there were few direct contacts between Portugal and Spain on the one hand and Slovakia or the Czech lands on the other hand. Only when Spanish or Spanish-Italian soldiers were sent to Central Europe to help suppress the Protestant Reformation there, or when Slovak and Hungarian Protestant ministers were sent to the Spanish galleys in Italy, was there a direct contact, in this case of a rather negative kind. The other topics examined in these essays try to draw parallels between historical developments in Portugal or the Iberian world and in Slovakia or Central Europe. One gets the impression that in various historical fields focusing on these parallels is a helpful method even if it is not always easy to do so.

Examples of drawing illuminating parallels are the essay on women and the essay on messianism, Vieira, and Komenský. In both the Iberian Peninsula and Slovakia women were not always

helpless in the face of witchcraft accusations. They could manipulate the accusations or intimidate other people by confirming they were witches with special powers.

The last three essays analyse political developments in Portugal and Slovakia in the twentieth century. The deterioration of political Catholicism to a form of semi-fascism happened in both countries and was the result both of internal tendencies within this movement itself and of external developments, including political chaos in Portugal and the domination of liberal secularists in Czechoslovakia. It is remarkable that in both countries the historical factor of Catholicism played a crucial role in cultural, social, and political developments. At the same time, however, communism was an important movement too. Both in Portugal and Slovakia the influence of communist ideology remains a notable fact.

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Preface

The idea to explore comparative dimensions of the history and cultures of the Iberian and Slavic nations was originally conceived and developed at the Faculty of Literature of the University of Lisbon and by the International Society for Iberian-Slavonic Studies shortly after 2000. Since then, annual conferences on various cross-cultural and interdisciplinary topics held in Lisbon have inspired a growing number of researchers in the linguistic, cultural, and historical fields, hailing from Portugal, Spain, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Slovenia, Scotland, the Netherlands, Brazil, and the United States. The authors of the present collection of essays figured among them, and we accumulated over time a number of unpublished papers based on our contributions to the Lisbon conferences. It was certainly helpful that our research was honoured and supported by the Instituto Camoes and the Portuguese Embassy in Bratislava. During the pandemic of 2020-21 we decided to bring out eight essays in a small publication with the aim of offering some examples of comparative Iberian-Slavic historical research. This, of course, is also meant to be a contribution to European history. While our more specific focus is on Portuguese-Slovak comparative questions, our collection also touches topics relating to Spain, the Czech lands, Italy, and Brazil. The inclusion of essay no. 5 on Brazil, originally written for a conference at Aveiro in Portugal, is justified because of its connection to the colonial concerns and activities of António Vieira (see essay no. 4) and the wide-ranging issue of ‘multiculturalism’. In the case of Portugal, of course, the latter is closely associated with the country’s historic colonialism and more recent ‘post-colonial’ challenges. Additionally, a historic variant of this issue persists in the shape of ethno-linguistic and nationality differences in Central and South Eastern European countries like Slovakia, Romania, and Bosnia.

Thus, while the Slovak-Portuguese comparison is our key subject, the comparative investigations presented in these essays are carried out on diverse geographic and historical levels. On the one hand we are concerned with Portugal, Spain, the Iberian Peninsula

as a whole, or Iberia's European and American extensions; on the other hand with Slovakia, the Czech lands, the former Czechoslovakia, or Slavic Central Europe. The dimension of comparison and parallel histories predominates over the dimension of direct historical or cultural contact in whatever form. Essay no. 3 is the only essay which investigates a special case of Iberian-Slavic historical contact, even though it concerns an indirect rather than a direct and a violent rather than a peaceful form of contact. In addition, there is a relatively strong focus on topics from the seventeenth and the twentieth century. The sixteenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries are not absent, however, but included in several comparative accounts in some of the essays. The strong presence of the seventeenth and twentieth centuries is the result of our research activities in recent years and does not mean that we regard other periods as less important or less interesting. It is clear that much work remains to be done if we are to arrive at a more complete picture of Portuguese-Slovak or Iberian-Slavic comparative history, and a historiography truly covering the broadest possible range of topics.

The three fields of historical inquiry explicitly mentioned in the title of this collection are the political, social, and cultural ones. They are represented in these essays in diverse forms and contexts. The history of European politics, of course, refers to power structures, political ideologies, and different forms of conflict, among others. The social sphere relates to the role and position of different (types of) social groups and different patterns of inequality, stratification, and socio-cultural group distinction, i.e. a whole range of social issues including economic inequality on one side and ethnic or religious inequality on the other. Indeed, forms of vertical (e.g. economic or gender) stratification and horizontal (e.g. linguistic or national) segmentation often existed side by side in the same social system. The cultural sphere is perhaps the most complex and the most difficult to come to grips with, in the context of European, colonial, and comparative world history. It relates to the ideological, religious, and 'mental' domains per se and to all sorts of socio-psychological phenomena including mutual group prejudices, stigmatisation of marginalised people, and the cultivation of all sorts of stereotypical images and ideas. These are old phenomena in

European history – from anti-Judaism to marginalisation of women to colonial racism – but they have taken on a new urgency and, perhaps, more articulated features in the twentieth century with its increasingly conscious reflection on cross-cultural and ‘multicultural’ problems. There is hardly an essay in this collection in which these issues do not figure in one way or another. Arguably, over the course of five or more centuries there was not only a European experience of political, socio-economic, and cultural change, but also a dimension of continuity in terms of the salience of multicultural questions in this overwhelmingly Christian yet simultaneously fragmented continent. Problems of inter-Christian, ethno-national, and political-ideological controversy shaped the history of Europe even if the terms of debate were partly modified over time.

After these general remarks, a brief introductory description of the eight essays seems useful. Essay no. 1 offers a concise overview of some of the major questions in Portuguese and Slovak history from the fifteenth to the early twenty-first century. It shows both historical differences and similarities between the two countries with the former being rather obvious (maritime and early independent Portugal vs. landlocked and long dependent Slovakia) and the latter proving quite significant. Above all, the dominant role of Catholicism (the initially successful Reformation among the Slovaks notwithstanding) had important consequences for Portugal and Slovakia. Their experience in the twentieth century included a political modernisation of conservative and authoritarian Catholicism, which is further analysed in essay no. 6.

Essay no. 2 examines and compares historical phenomena on the Iberian Peninsula and in Slovakia (Upper Hungary) relating to the position of women in the early modern period. Although it is clear that women were marginalised in many ways, it seems undeniable that not only the more educated but also some ‘ordinary’ or marginalised women were able to put up resistance against those who denounced them, or, paradoxically, to exploit threatening situations including witchcraft accusations to increase their prestige. In some cases, accusations of sorcery could be appropriated by the accused to ‘prove’ their magic powers and intimidate others – even though this usually resulted in permanent isolation and

exacerbated existing tensions and conflicts with the rest of the community. Interestingly, this issue of 'the power of the powerless' also emerges in the very different context of colonial Brazil (essay no. 5).

Essay no. 3 focuses on the involvement of 'Iberian' or 'Hispanic' actors and symbols in some of the military and political events of the Counter-Reformation in Central Europe. The personalities in question contributed to the emergence or confirmation of anti-Catholic images in the Czech lands and Slovakia, regions where Protestantism had become an influential cultural and political factor by the early seventeenth century. Through the 'mediation' of men from Spanish-ruled Naples and Milan, Czech, Slovak, and Magyar Protestants were directly confronted with what was seen as the uniquely brutal methods of oppression by the Iberian Catholic superpower. This could only amplify the negative images associated with the 'Black Legend' of Spanish cruelty.

Essay no. 4 on Komenský, Vieira, and 'messianism' argues that, despite all the differences between the leader of the Czech Brethren and the prominent Portuguese Jesuit, the similarities between them are remarkable and fascinating. Both men believed in the necessity of human action to improve the moral, religious, and political condition of the world. At the same time both of them were convinced that such human action could not succeed without divine help and intervention, or rather, that it could only bring the required and desired transformation when it fitted into the wider scheme of things, i.e. divine providence and the preordained course of salvation history. It becomes clear that this frame of thought was part of both the older Catholic and the new Protestant way of looking at the world. What united Christian thinkers and idealists like Komenský and Vieira was an established Christian pattern, which existed both in Iberia and Slavic Central Europe.

Essay no. 5 shows that the world of Western Christianity had come to comprise the American continent as well. But how does an essay on Brazil fit in with Portuguese-Slavic or Iberian-Slavic comparative studies? Clearly, the culture and identity of Portugal are difficult to understand without including its colonial experience and spectacular overseas extension. A man like António Vieira was active both in Brazil and in Portugal and his role in protecting

indigenous Brazilians is well known. Vieira, and others with similar critical and messianic ideas, attached a special significance to the Dutch invasion of seventeenth-century Brazil and the rule of Governor Johan Maurits of Nassau, known in Brazil as 'Maurício'. Both could be seen as a divine punishment for the sins of the Portuguese, as several Catholic friars including Vieira were arguing. An examination of colonial Brazil's multicultural complexity is also helpful from a heuristic and comparative point of view, viz. to help interpret some of Europe's social and cultural problems.

Essay no. 6 explores the thesis that twentieth-century political Catholicism in Portugal and Slovakia evolved into a conservative movement that can be interpreted as a secularised continuation of the Counter-Reformation. Of course, in both countries there were more progressive Catholics as well, but they were a minority that could not decisively influence the course of events leading to dictatorship and a semi-fascist ideological worldview. While in Portugal the right-wing dictatorship survived until 1974, in Slovakia (Czechoslovakia) it was succeeded by a left-wing dictatorship, i. e. Soviet-imposed communism, after 1945. It is a challenge for historians to compare the two anti-democratic systems and their crises, and to do so by taking national historical contexts into account while simultaneously looking at authoritarian parallels.

Essay no. 7 takes on this challenge, even though on the 'Slavic side' the subject of comparison is socialist Czechoslovakia rather than Slovakia. The year 1968 was a fateful one for both countries, and, quite apart from international dynamics, an examination of the political conditions prevailing in Portugal and Czechoslovakia can explain why. Factors like elite disunity, declining fear among the population, weakening of ideological legitimacy, and reformist efforts to make the authoritarian system less rigid and more viable shaped a process of change through which it eventually collapsed.

Essay no. 8 examines what happened to the communist movements in Portugal and Slovakia after 1989. Although there were strong post-authoritarian and democratic tendencies in Czechoslovak communism and even in the rather doctrinaire and semi-Stalinist Portuguese Communist Party, a group of more rigid and conservative communists survived in the 1990s as well. This was

almost inevitable in Portugal, given the leading role of hardliner Cunhal. But old-fashioned communism – rather surprisingly – also remained a factor of some significance in Slovakia. Looking at the memoirs of an old Slovak communist (and natural scientist) provides some insight into the communist way of thinking. Both the latter and the right-wing authoritarian mind-set have by no means disappeared from Europe, whose democratic political culture can never be taken for granted.

Thus, we present eight essays with four of them focusing mainly on the seventeenth century, three on the twentieth century, and essay number 1 on a more general comparative overview. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are examined as well – especially in essays number 1, 2 and 6, as already noted. We hope that other historians will be interested to help fill the many gaps that remain.