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TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM AND THE GLOBALISATION OF ANTI-COMMUNISM AFTER 1989

INTRODUCTION

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In June 2007, a Memorial to the Victims of Communism was inaugurated in Washington, DC, in the presence of anti-communist activists from North America, Central Eastern Europe, Cuba, China and Vietnam. Two years later, the European Parliament adopted a resolution that condemned the crimes committed by the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century, including – among others – the communist regimes. Starting in 2010, the international tribunal for Cambodia convicted various former Khmer Rouge leaders for crimes against humanity committed during Pol Pot’s violent regime (1975–1979). These two events reflect a process of both international and transnational advocacy and memory activism at a global level. They underscore the degree to which, in recent decades, discourses of condemning and criminalising communism have gained momentum in political and judicial arenas across the world.

With this special issue, we seek to investigate how these discourses evolved as they circulated across national borders and continents and were promoted by various actors. More specifically, the contributions explore how a variety of memory entrepreneurs from Central Eastern Europe (CEE) mobilised transnationally and created strategic alliances in order to forge, legitimise and consolidate an international ethos that criminalised former and current communist regimes. The collection contributes to two distinct bodies of literature: memory studies and global anti-communism studies.

First, it puts the spotlight on the transnational dimensions of memory politics in CEE, a region where practices of reckoning with communist violence have generally been analysed within national borders or – at best – in connection with struggles for recognition within European institutions. In contrast to most of the existing literature, this special issue depicts a variety of transnational interactions between CEE anti-communist memory entrepreneurs and actors involved in dealing with political violence in other parts of the world (e.g. Western Europe, the United States, Latin America, and North Africa). These exchanges shed light on the construction of anti-communism as a global cause that is shaped by and, in turn, influences discourses confronting dictatorial pasts in other political and geographical contexts. Second, the collection proposes new insights into the history of anti-communism by retracing how current efforts to criminalise former socialist regimes in CEE have built upon and transformed transnational networks and initiatives that denounced human rights violations in the Eastern bloc during the Cold War.

The literature on post-communist memory and transitional justice in CEE has traditionally focused on national case studies or comparative accounts of countries as discrete units (Calhoun, 2004; Stan, 2008; Nalepa, 2010; Popovski & Serrano, 2012). Transnational and transregional entanglements have largely been overlooked, with scholars paying scant attention to the role of exogenous factors and explaining transitional justice dynamics by means of domestic variables. This approach often underestimates the impact of the globalisation of memory cultures on national settings and the multiplicity of cross-border and cross-regional interconnections that have framed memory politics since the 1970s.

Over the course of the last decade, however, new perspectives have begun to shed light on the transnational dimensions of dealing with the communist past. This literature has primarily focused on both the nexus (and competition) between the memory of the Holocaust and the memory of the Gulag (Zombory, 2017; Radonić, 2018; Subotić, 2019) and the mobilisation of various CEE actors advocating for the equal treatment of Nazi and communist crimes at the European level (Litzo-Monnet, 2012; Mälksoo, 2014; Perchoc, 2018). For instance, Neumayer has retraced the anti-communist mobilisations of CEE representatives at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and at the European Parliament since the early 1990s in their quest for a collective remembrance and legal accountability for communist crimes (Neumayer, 2019). Büttner & Delius, as well as Neumayer, have examined transnational NGOs, such as the European Network for Remembrance and Solidarity and the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, in their struggle to impose an interpretation of European history based on the equivalence of the two “totalitarianisms,” Stalinism and Nazism (Büttner & Delius, 2015; Neumayer, 2017).

Another approach has traced the circulation of various transitional justice instruments within CEE itself. Mink has analysed the proliferation of “national memory institutes,” and Welsh the diffusion of different models of lustration and public access to state security archives (Mink, 2013; Welsh, 2015). They have identified the Stasi Records Agency and the Polish Institute of National Remembrance as major sources of inspiration across the region. However, with very few exceptions (Jones, 2017), these works have failed to examine the actors behind such transfers or the political, epistemic and professional interests that underpinned them. Finally, several works have integrated national case studies within European and global perspectives. Gledhill has shown how various CEE actors used the political, financial and judicial weight of European institutions to promote their own agendas when reckoning with the communist past (Gledhill, 2011). Grosescu has demonstrated how the emergence of a new international normative framework upholding the duty to prosecute gross human rights violations impacted Romanian jurisprudence on communist crimes (Grosescu, 2017). Likewise, Pettai & Pettai have shown how international legal norms provided the basis for prosecuting

former Soviet Security Police members for genocide and crimes against humanity in the Baltic countries, but also how national legal frameworks and jurisdiction were influenced by European-level court rulings (Pettai & Pettai, 2015).

Although rare, these studies have demonstrated that – far from emerging only in relation to national legacies and contemporary political power constellations – CEE justice and memory processes are also shaped by external influences as part of broader (international) flows of ideas. The cross-border cooperation between justice activists and epistemic communities and the transnational mobilisation of memory and justice entrepreneurs at the European and global level have been key elements in the development of local narratives and practices of dealing with the past. Nonetheless, more research is still needed on the active dissemination of ideas from the former Eastern bloc in their confrontation with political violence in other world regions. These investigations would contribute not only to the literature on reckoning with authoritarianism in CEE but also to the scholarship on the globalisation of memory politics and transitional justice, which has thus far focused on Latin America and Africa (Roht-Arriaza, 2005; Dube, 2015; Baer & Sznajder, 2017; Grosescu, Baby & Neumayer, 2019; Baby, Neumayer & Zalewski, 2019).

Anti-communism – as a global phenomenon, an ideology and a set of political practices that originated in the interwar period – has been the focus of numerous historical studies with various geographical delimitations, but an emphasis on North America and Europe (Ruotsila, 2001; Berghahn, 2002; Ceplair, 2011; Brier, 2013). Stone & Chamedes, for instance, have focused on government-led campaigns and repression from the Philippines to Colonial India, the United States and Madagascar to demonstrate that anti-communism had already acquired a transnational dimension and a global reach by the 1920s – predating the Cold War (Stone & Chamedes, 2018). Van Dongen et al. have adopted a transnational historical approach to study anti-communism by focusing on the role of non-state actors and their interactions, both among themselves and with elements of the state (Van Dongen et al., 2014). This has provided insights into the continuities and ruptures in anti-communist activism after 1945, as well as the transfer and circulation, in time and space, of people, practices, means and influence. A transnational perspective on anti-communism and the rise of the human rights paradigm has also provided an alternative to the narrative of a complete break in contact between East and West during the Cold War (Snyder, 2011; Kind-Kovacs & Labov, 2013; Mikkonen & Koivunen, 2015; Stökker, 2017; Villaume, Mariager & Porsdam, 2015). After the Cold War, some of these organisations ceased to exist while others successfully adapted to the demise of the Soviet bloc and promoted the broader cause of democratic freedoms in a post-Soviet, post-Maoist world. Yet, most of these studies end with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar world order (with the exception of Guilhot, 2005).

The current collection goes beyond the watershed moment of 1991 and innovates the historiography of both memory studies and anti-communism by analysing the transformation of anti-communism after the Cold War from a transnational perspective. Combining political sociology and transnational history, the articles provide an ideal vantage point through which to consider how narratives and practices of reckoning with former (and current) communist regimes proliferated over the past three decades not only across CEE, but also on a global level. By focusing on transnational activism, transfers of knowledge and expertise at the bilateral, regional and international levels, the collection demonstrates both the impact of legal, historical and mnemonic narratives outside of their countries of origin, and the role of international organisations and NGOs in dealing with mass violence perpetrated during the socialist period.

We thus bring an original perspective to four areas: First, the collection addresses the transnational dimensions of anti-communism by tracing the construction and circulation of criminalisation discourses across Europe. Whether they discuss the transnational social field of remembrance in which a variety of European actors positioned themselves after 1989

(Máté Zombory), analyse the transnational production and dissemination of the *Black Book of Communism* across the continent (Valentin Behr et al.), examine the links between the Historical Commissions in Romania and Moldova (Bogdan Iacob) or discuss transnational activism for built heritage preservation as part of human rights protection in Romania (Laura Demeter), the articles in this collection underline how CEE memory and justice entrepreneurs work across borders in order to advance their interests in the struggle for symbolic recognition, justice, and political power. They show how, through the transnationalisation of their cause, CEE actors seek to acquire global acknowledgement of the criminal nature of communist regimes, to enhance their political and professional legitimacy – at the national and international level – and to secure funding from international organisations and global NGOs.

Second, the volume goes beyond the dominant Eurocentric approach to anti-communist memory politics, which emphasises the struggles over how to relate narratives and memories of Nazism and communism in national and European arenas. While the competition between the memory of the Holocaust and the memory of the Gulag has been of major importance for CEE anti-communist rhetoric, interactions and influences outside this axis have also played an important role in shaping memory politics in the region. Thus, the authors investigate Latin American influences on dealing with the past in CEE (Bogdan Iacob), the entanglements between US-based and EU-based anti-communist mobilisations (Laure Neumayer), and the transfer of knowledge and expertise on dealing with the past from CEE to both North Africa (Sara Jones) and Cuban exiles in Miami (Marie-Laure Geoffray). They thus highlight how CEE actors sought to de-peripheralise their activism, and how they strove to overcome uneven power relations within European memory struggles through outreach to non-European “memory regions.” Conversely, these actors also perpetuated a certain type of epistemic coloniality, both in terms of the German export of memory expertise to other CEE countries and to North Africa (Sara Jones), and in terms of a Romanian transfer of knowledge to the Republic of Moldova (Bogdan Iacob).

Third, the special issue integrates the post-Cold War condemnation of state socialism into the longer history of anti-communism. In her analysis of the transatlantic entanglements between anti-communist advocacy groups, Laure Neumayer highlights the complexity of a multi-faceted ideology that has successfully morphed in response to changes in global politics, while continuing to rely on tropes, transnational networks and repertoires of contention from the Cold War. Coming from different angles, Máté Zombory, Bogdan Iacob, and Valentin Behr et al. also show how the hegemonic nature of this narrative was the result of historiographical, geopolitical and generational evolutions in CEE that led to a deep restructuring of the transnational field of remembrance, wherein anti-communism serves as common ground for individual and collective actors with different worldviews and a variety of political values. The articles also bridge the gap between contemporary anti-communist mobilisations and a variety of earlier narratives critical of communism as an ideology or as a matrix of state socialism in a range of social spheres – human rights NGOs, academia, heritage preservation organisations, dissident movements, exiled and diasporic communities, among others (see the contributions by Marie-Laure Geoffray, Laura Demeter).

Fourth, we examine a previously understudied aspect of CEE memory politics, namely its future-oriented goal to topple existing communist regimes and promote transitional justice and democracy worldwide. Going beyond backward-looking issues of remembering and righting the wrongs of the past, criminalising communism is thus constructed as a key element in the fight against contemporary political oppression and in the creation of an ostensibly “universalised” culture of human rights. This is most vividly described by Marie-Laure Geoffray, who analyses the interactions and knowledge transfer between former CEE dissidents and Cubans on the island and in Miami (United States) on the subject of civil society building and transition from communist rule. Moreover, by engaging with issues of democratisation in

the former Soviet Union, Asia and Africa, CEE memory entrepreneurs seek to overcome the internalised notion of their countries as peripheral outposts of a Western civilising project and to legitimise themselves as global promoters of liberal democracy (see the contributions by Bogdan Iacob, Laure Neumayer). In particular, the study by Sara Jones on trans-regional interactions between German memory actors and their counterparts in both post-communist Europe and the Maghreb reveals the rather unequal power relations within global activism between various world regions, as well as the mismatches created by applying solutions from specific political settings to other social and cultural contexts.

The articles in this special issue provide new conceptual and empirical elements that can be applied to theorise broader analytical frameworks in memory studies. They argue for a longer historical horizon that traces the origins and evolutions of meaning within memory and justice paradigms at a global level. They also emphasise different dimensions of transnationalism and their influence on both national and international memory politics: the role of indirect exogenous factors in country-specific processes of dealing with the past; the impact of transnational activism in the legitimisation of political ideas and professional interests at the domestic level and in international organisations; the use of transnational networks and channels of communication in the deperipheralisation of regional memory regimes.

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