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## **AN ANTI-COMMUNIST CONSENSUS: *THE BLACK BOOK OF COMMUNISM* IN PAN-EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE**

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**ABSTRACT** - *The Black Book of Communism (1997) has served as evidence that communism was a criminal ideology as “evil” as Nazism. To understand the book’s remarkable impact throughout Europe, the article situates its production and circulation in a transnational history of anti-communism. We focus on the previously neglected yet constitutive period in-between the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the enlargement of the European Union. On the basis of a biographical approach centred on the actors engaged in the production and promotion of the volume in five countries (France, Poland, Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic), we argue that the book was a turning point in the emergence of a consensual historical narrative across the former East-West divide as it enabled the formation of a revamped pan-European anti-communist movement.*

**RÉSUMÉ** - *Le Livre noir du communisme (1997) a fait office de preuve irréfutable dans de nombreux pays que le communisme était une idéologie criminelle aussi « néfaste » que le nazisme. Afin de comprendre l’impact remarquable de cet ouvrage à travers l’Europe, nous replaçons sa production et sa circulation dans l’histoire transnationale de l’anticommunisme en nous focalisant sur la période souvent négligée entre la chute du bloc soviétique et l’élargissement de l’Union européenne. Une approche biographique centrée sur les acteurs engagés dans la production et la diffusion du livre dans cinq pays (France, Pologne, Roumanie, Hongrie et République tchèque) démontre que le Livre noir a constitué une étape charnière dans la formation d’un mouvement anticommuniste restructuré par-delà l’ancien clivage Est-Ouest.*

**KEYWORDS** - *Black Book of Communism; Totalitarianism; anti-communism; Czech Republic; Hungary; Poland; Romania.*

**MOTS-CLÉS** - *Livre noir du communisme; totalitarisme; anticommunisme; République tchèque; Hongrie; Pologne; Roumanie.*

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*The Black Book of Communism* (Courtois et al., 1997, hereafter the *BB*) has become a remarkable bestseller: it has sold more than a million copies worldwide and been translated into twenty-seven languages. In post-communist countries, it was published in translation, discussed at conferences and referenced in public debates. Stéphane Courtois's introduction (in particular his controversial comparison between the alleged 100 million victims of communism and the twenty-five million victims of Nazism [1997, p. 25]) is often cited – omitting the debate it triggered in France and among the international scholarship – as rock-solid historical evidence of communism's criminal character. Courtois's thesis, as well as his participation in European assemblies and transnational advocacy networks, has become an influential component in the representation of communism, particularly in post-socialist Europe.

The *BB* has contributed not only to the historical legitimization of communism and Nazism's equal culpability, but also to the identification of the former, in line with the volume's subtitle, with crime, terror and repression. By juxtaposing communism and Nazism, the book reflected an interpretation of the concept of totalitarianism inspired by 1970s French leftist intellectuals who had criticised the politics of the French Communist Party (FCP) and its silence concerning Stalinist crimes (Christofferson, 2004; Traverso, 1998). Its novelty in relation to previous forms of anti-communism came from its memorial nature: it performed a memory claim about communism in relation to the Holocaust. The book must therefore be considered in relation to parallel projects challenging the uniqueness of the Holocaust put forward by other victims of gross violations of human rights such as Native Americans, African Americans, Armenians, as well as sexual minorities and women (Chaumont, 1997; Novick, 1999).

The *BB*'s performative potential derives from *reclaiming the memory of communism* from what its authors claimed was the “concealment” of its crimes. Unlike victims of Nazism, Courtois argued, victims of communism are not acknowledged, and their human dignity is not respected. He condemned this inequality as normatively unacceptable, arguing that victims of communism were even more numerous than those of Nazism. The legitimate, moral obligation to bow to the suffering of innocent victims, however, is distorted by this line of argumentation, leading to the historically untenable notion of the equal criminality of the two systems (Rousso, 2004, p. 4). The strategy for reclaiming the memory of communism thus began to emulate mnemonic practices found in Holocaust remembrance: stating the moral imperative of “Never again!”; making appeals to restore the dignity of the victims; and commemorating past suffering as a means of avoiding the repetition of this trauma. As our article will show, this discursive alchemy has turned a particular interpretation of communism into an ostensibly eternal, historical truth and a moral admonition addressed to the European continent as a whole. In addition, the *BB* had a crucial defining characteristic: it pioneered a pan-European cooperation between different anti-communist circles which could easily be perceived as a consensual cooperation across the East-West divide. This undoubtedly increased the legitimacy of the book's ideological claim.

Although the political and academic controversies sparked in France by the *BB* have been analysed by several authors (Traverso, 2001; Rigoulot, 1998; Aronson, 2003; Reid, 2005; Morgan, 2010), a transnational analysis of its production, circulation and political and

historiographical impact throughout Europe is however still missing, more than twenty years after its publication. To understand the book's remarkable influence, this article situates its production and circulation in the transnational history of anti-communism since the 1990s. It focuses on the often-forgotten period in-between the collapse of Soviet-style regimes and the enlargement of the European Union, when anti-communist activists in the former Eastern bloc were able to influence domestic politics but not yet allowed access to pan-European political arenas such as the European Parliament to lobby directly for their cause. The transnational connections enabled by the book turned a global narrative about the crimes of communism into a specific, regionally focused story about communism as a constitutive element of a common European memory. While the *BB* presented communism as a global phenomenon, a universally homogeneous ideology equally applicable to the Pol Pot regime and the FCP, its reception in post-Communist states changed its geographical focus, narrowing in on communism as a primarily Eastern European phenomenon.

Analysing the birth of this particular form of “anti-communist memory of communism” contributes to an important discussion about the ways in which paradigms of criminalisation of the past have been internationalised in Europe since the 1990s (Assmann & Conrad, 2010). Unlike studies that focus on cultural aspects of a “global memory” (Erl, 2011) or posit the existence of a deterritorialised “cosmopolitan memory” (Levy & Sznajder, 2002), the focus here is on a sociological perspective that centres on the actors promoting public accounts of the past (Gensburger, 2016; Zombory, 2017; Neumayer, 2019). We do not intend to assess the legitimacy of demands for the equal condemnation of communism and Nazism or to denounce either the often emphasised “instrumentalisation of suffering” or the supposed cynicism of the individuals involved in the retrospective appraisal of socialist regimes. Instead, our aim is to reconstruct the mobilisation of those historians and memory entrepreneurs who produced and/or promoted the *BB*<sup>1</sup> and to analyse the contributions of these actors to the transnational circulation of an anti-communist narrative. Our biographical approach examines the extent to which social positions and personal trajectories contributed to structuring individual understandings of communism as an evil ideology and commitments to the inclusion of a totalitarian interpretation of state socialism in a new, pan-European historical narrative. It also allows us to highlight the resources that these activists were able to mobilise in order to bring the *BB* to their respective countries and ensure its appropriation by academics and the general public.

This article first examines the creation of the *BB* by a pan-European anti-communist network structured around a handful of French historians. The second section analyses its reception in five national contexts (France, Romania, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic). We argue that the *BB* was a turning point in the emergence of a consensually agreed-upon anti-communist view of history throughout the continent because it provided a medium for a variety of memory entrepreneurs to connect with each other at a time when Eastern European activists were structurally dominated in the European political field.<sup>2</sup> The *BB* not only created a common ground between liberal and conservative anti-communists in Eastern and Western Europe, but also served as a powerful tool for a revamped pan-European anti-communist movement across the former Cold War divide.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of memory entrepreneurs was developed by Michaël Pollak in reference to both the “moral entrepreneurs” studied by Howard Becker and the “political entrepreneurs” analysed by Pierre Bourdieu. It refers to the actors interested in bringing the past to public attention. For Pollak, those are “divided into two categories: those who create common references and those who make sure they are respected. These entrepreneurs are convinced to be on a holy mission and to draw inspiration from an intransigent ethics by establishing an equivalence between the memory they are defending and the truth” (Pollak, 1993, p. 30).

<sup>2</sup> Although anti-communist politicians such as Vytautas Landsbergis and Tunne Kelam began to raise awareness about Soviet-era crimes at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) as early as 1992, their mobilisation reached its peak after the EU's Eastern enlargement in 2004 (Neumayer, 2019).

## THE PRODUCTION OF THE *BB*: A PAN-EUROPEAN COOPERATION

The *BB* was written by a loose pan-European network whose members have successfully presented their joint work as a blend of Western and Eastern European experiences of communism – the result of an activation of interpersonal links, sometimes dating back to the socialist period, between specialists of communism from France and Eastern Europe who shared an interpretation of communism as a totalitarian ideology.

The concept of totalitarianism, coined in the 1920s to describe Italian fascism and subsequently redefined by a wide range of scholars (Traverso, 1998), has experienced a paradoxical circulation between Eastern and Western Europe. Before 1989, a narrative critical of state socialism, that made more or less explicit use of the totalitarian paradigm, was popular within intellectual circles in Communist Europe (see for instance Havel, 1978; Shore, 2006; O’Sullivan, 2012). Authors such as Czesław Miłosz, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn or Milovan Djilas viewed totalitarianism as an extreme form of despotism in Stalinist countries (Rupnik, 1984, p. 48). Beyond the imported works of Hannah Arendt and Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzeziński, local dissidents and intellectuals forged their own interpretations of the totalitarian paradigm in underground publications or in texts edited by exile communities, like the *Kultura* review produced by Polish émigrés in France (Brier, 2011; Kind-Kovacs & Labov, 2013).

The concept of totalitarianism, ironically, became increasingly popular among Eastern European dissidents after 1968, just as most Western scholars and intellectuals began to discard it due to its analytical shortcomings and political bias (Rupnik, 1984; Brier, 2011).<sup>3</sup> In France however, it was still a reference point for the “anti-totalitarian left” in the 1970s, including contributors to the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the “nouveaux philosophes” (Traverso, 1998; Christofferson, 2004; Popa, 2018). Beginning as an analytical tool, the concept of totalitarianism became a quasi-scholarly framework in which it became possible to claim an equivalence between communism and Nazism – despite the fact that this equation was famously discredited during the West German *Historikerstreit* in the late 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Against this backdrop, the French historiographical context of the mid-1990s was decisive in the decision to publish the *BB* and in the constitution of the team that produced it. The book resulted from the interaction between proponents of different anti-communisms that, due to the ideological features of “end-of-history” Europe, could be presented as a consensually agreed-upon combination of the Western and Eastern European experience of communism. In fact, major figures of the liberal anti-communist movement, which supported the central role of Holocaust memory in the European identity narrative, cooperated with conservative revisionist anti-communists who challenged the uniqueness of the Holocaust by integrating the criminalised image of communism into that identity narrative.

### The French historiographical context

Despite the disputes over its heuristic value and normative assumptions, the concept of totalitarianism made a significant comeback within French politics and academia at the end of the Cold War. Its resurgence was partly in response to the loss of legitimacy of Marxist theory

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<sup>3</sup> A few Western intellectuals have continued to revisit the notion of totalitarianism from a fresh perspective: see for instance Pomian, 1995; *Le Débat* round table “Autour de *A l’épreuve des totalitarismes* de Marcel Gauchet” (Dossier, 2011). Moreover, the Hannah Arendt Institute for Research on Totalitarianism (HAIT) in Dresden, Germany, is engaged in empirical research and a series of theoretical reflections on the concepts of totalitarianism, autocracy, and ideocracy, focusing on the historical relationship between dictatorships and democracies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

<sup>4</sup> The *Historikerstreit* brought liberal intellectuals into conflict with conservative historians, such as Ernst Nolte, on the subject of the integration of Nazism into German history. It raised the issue of the uniqueness of the Holocaust compared to the gross violations of human rights committed by communist regimes (Traverso, 1998).

and the weakening of anti-fascism, henceforth presented as a communist propaganda tool (Hobsbawm, 1996), and partly due to the change in historiographic paradigms that came about in the second half of the 1980s, when different forms of anti-communism emerged as keys to interpretations of the twentieth century. Traverso (2001) coined the first version, which he attributed to Ernst Nolte, as “national-conservative resentment.” This historical-genetic vision of totalitarianism portrayed Nazism not only as a regime similar to Bolshevism, but also as a reaction to the latter.<sup>5</sup> A second, “liberal version of anti-communism,” promoted by François Furet in his volume *Le passé d'une illusion* (Furet, 1995), posited an equivalence between capitalism and democracy and considered fascism and communism as parentheses in the inexorable development of liberal democracy. Other publications, such as Tony Judt’s analysis of French intellectuals in the aftermath of the Second World War (Judt, 1992), contributed to a “vituperative anti-Marxism among French intellectuals” (Shatz quoted in Ghodsee, 2014, p. 122). The intellectual skirmish between historians Eric Hobsbawm and Pierre Nora – who refused to publish a French translation of Hobsbawm’s volume *The Age of Extremes: The Short Century 1914-1991* in 1997 because of “budgetary constraints and ideological reservations” (Ghodsee, 2014, p. 122) – is illustrative of the intellectual atmosphere in France at the time. More generally, the 1990s were a period of intense academic debate about the nature of the Soviet system, and several books on the topic were published in France at the time. Next to Furet and Hobsbawm, it is worth mentioning the publications by François Fejtö (1992) and Georges Mink (1997).

After the success of *Le passé d'une illusion*, the publishing house Robert Laffont initiated a publication geared toward satisfying the market’s demand for anti-communist material. In 1995, editor Claude Ronsac,<sup>6</sup> who had already overseen the publication of *Le passé d'une illusion*, commissioned a volume to be published on 7 November 1997, to mark the eightieth anniversary of the October Revolution. Two French historians were tasked with putting together a team of authors. The first was Stéphane Courtois, a specialist on the FCP and director of the journal *Communisme* since its founding in 1981.<sup>7</sup>

### **Stéphane Courtois – from Maoist ideologist to anti-communist historian**

Born in Dreux, France, in 1947 to schoolteachers belonging to “the republican left,” Stéphane Courtois joined the University of Nanterre in 1967, where he became a supporter of the Maoist group “Vive la Révolution!” (Courtois, 2011). The group, founded by a few young Parisian intellectuals during the May 1968 movement, criticised the FCP for having betrayed its “revolutionary ideals” (Christofferson, 2004). It disbanded in 1971 and Courtois resumed his studies.

After obtaining an MA in history, he began a dissertation on the FCP, which gave him the opportunity to convert his political criticism into an object of analysis. Courtois wrote his

<sup>5</sup> Nolte turned a longstanding inquiry on the interdependence between Bolshevism and Nazism into a causal reflection. He depicted the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis as a reaction to the ‘class genocide’ implemented by the Bolsheviks, demonstrating that the trauma caused by the October Revolution was the primal cause for the extermination of Jews in Europe. This apologetic interpretation was vociferously criticised for turning a general feature of communism into an ostensibly single explanatory model for mass violence in the twentieth century.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Ronsac was born to Polish Jewish émigrés in Paris in 1908. In the 1920s, he became a communist and then a Trotskyist activist and befriended the founder of the Third International, Boris Souvarine. In 1934, he joined the publishing house Opera Mundi and changed his name to Charles Ronsac. After the Second World War, Ronsac worked as a journalist and then as an editor at Robert Laffont. In addition to Furet’s book, Ronsac oversaw the publication in 1995 of *Jugement à Moscou. Un dissident dans les archives du Kremlin* by the Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky.

<sup>7</sup> The journal published multidisciplinary studies on the history of the Communist regimes and societies, primarily in Central and Eastern Europe. It also focused on the ideological and doctrinal aspects of communism.

dissertation under the supervision of Annie Kriegel, a well-known anti-fascist, former member of the FCP and an important historian of French communism. Courtois joined the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) in 1983 as a member of the Center for the Study of History and Sociology of Communism (CEHSC) in Nanterre, where he worked as a researcher until 2009. He then transferred to the Institute for European Cultures and Societies, a lesser-known CNRS institute in Strasbourg specialising in sociology.

In 1997, the editorial team of *Communisme* disbanded when Nicolas Werth, Karel Bartošek and Denis Peschanski resigned as a result of both the so-called “Moulin affair”<sup>8</sup> and the publication of the *BB*. Historian Denis Peschanski later stated that “the breaking-up of the team started with the revival of a historiography of the FCP akin to a police inquiry and an obsession with the scoop” (Peschanski, 2000). The *BB* was a remarkable commercial success but it was severely criticised by French academics, marginalising Courtois (Boca 2003, p. 205). In 2003, Courtois began teaching at a small private establishment, the Catholic Institute of Higher Studies in La Roche-sur-Yon (Amalvi, 2004).

The second historian was Jean-Louis Panné, who had ties to Ronsac through an intellectual circle organised around Boris Souvarine (1895-1984).<sup>9</sup> The Institute of Social History, founded by Souvarine in 1935 to fight Soviet influence in France, had become an important right-wing anti-communist centre after Souvarine stepped down in 1976. In addition to Panné, it had nurtured Pierre Rigoulot<sup>10</sup> and Ilios Yannalakis,<sup>11</sup> who actively defended the *BB* from severe academic criticism after its publication in France (*see below*).

### **A pan-European team of authors**

Courtois and Panné put together a team of specialists based on their personal connections. Courtois contacted Karel Bartošek and Nicolas Werth, who were both members of the CNRS Institut d’Histoire du Temps Présent (IHTP) and had been contributors to the journal *Communisme*. Panné had known Andrzej Paczkowski since the 1980s, when he was secretary of the French support network for *Solidarność* called “Solidarité avec Solidarité.”

#### **The co-authors of the *BB***

**Stéphane Courtois:** see above. Author of the introductory chapter “The crimes of communism” and of the conclusion “Why?”

**Jean-Louis Panné:** born in 1953 in France, historian by training, degree unknown. Worked with Furet on *Le passé d’une illusion*, librarian at the Institut Souvarine, editor at Gallimard. No academic position. Author (with Courtois and Rémi Kauffer) of the chapter “World revolution, civil war and terror.”

<sup>8</sup> In 1997, journalist Gérard Chauvy published a study (*Aubrac, Lyon 1943*, Paris: Albin Michel) accusing the French resistance fighter Jean Moulin (1899-1943) of being a secret agent for the USSR. Stéphane Courtois supported this claim.

<sup>9</sup> Boris Souvarine (born Boris Lifschitz) was a Russian/French journalist, historian and activist. He joined the FCP in 1920 but was excluded from the party in 1924 because of his Trotskyist views. In 1935, Souvarine published the book *Staline. Aperçu historique du bolchevisme* (Paris, Plon).

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Rigoulot, born in 1944, is a political scientist specialising in Communist regimes. A Maoist in the 1960s, he too turned conservative.

<sup>11</sup> Ilios Yannalakis (1931-2017) was a member of the Greek Communist Party. After taking part in the Greek civil war, he went into exile in communist Czechoslovakia. Due to his involvement in the 1968 Prague Spring, he left the country and emigrated to France. As a historian, he specialised in the history of communism.

**Nicolas Werth:** born in 1950 in France, doctor in history, researcher at CNRS since 1989, specialising in Soviet history. Author of the chapter “A state against its people. Violence, repression, terror in the Soviet Union.”

**Andrzej Paczkowski:** born in 1938 in Poland, doctor in history, specialising in Polish history. Former member of *Solidarność*, professor at the Institute of Political Studies (Polish Academy of Sciences), member of the Scientific Council of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (1999-2016). Author of the chapters “Poland, the ‘enemy nation’” and (with Bartošek) “The other Europe, victim of communism.”

**Karel Bartošek (1930-2004):** born in Czechoslovakia, member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party until 1968, dissident, exiled in France in 1982. Doctor in history, specialising in Czechoslovak history, senior researcher at CNRS.

**Jean-Louis Margolin:** born in 1952 in France, doctor in history, assistant professor at Aix-Marseille University, specialising in Asian history. Author of the chapter “Asian communism: between ‘reeducation’ and massacre. China, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.”

Even though the *BB* thematically dealt with communism as a world phenomenon, all its authors were Europeans. They presented their cooperation as an intellectual “reunification” of the two parts of the continent marked by different experiences of communism. According to Werth, the authors met every three to four months in Paris to discuss the overall structure of the volume, although Paczkowski, who lived in Warsaw, was able to attend these meetings only sporadically. However, both Bartošek and Paczkowski were involved in the creation of the book, of which they are considered co-authors and not just contributors.<sup>12</sup> A telling illustration of Paczkowski’s importance can be seen in Courtois’s attempts to include a specific chapter on the Katyń massacre, to be written by Alexandra Viatteau, who had published a book on the subject in 1982. Paczkowski insisted that this event should be dealt with in his chapter and not isolated from it (Pleskot, 2019, p. 402).

A conflict arose between the co-authors in 1997 concerning the introduction. Courtois was supposed to write the conclusion, Furet the introduction. After Furet’s unexpected demise in July 1997, Courtois offered to also write the introduction. When he sent the text to his co-authors at the end of August 1997, Werth and Margolin objected to certain parts. Acting as mediator, Bartošek rewrote the most controversial sections of the text, while also deleting phrases that suggested an equivalence between the “class genocide” perpetrated by the Soviets and the “race genocide” of the Nazis. For his part, Paczkowski encouraged Courtois to clarify the concept of “class genocide” (Pleskot, 2019, p. 403), although he tacitly agreed with Courtois’s position (Paczkowski, 2001). Courtois refused the changes and this particular assertion remained in the text. Werth and Margolin subsequently decided to withdraw from the project and even contacted a lawyer who told them that it was too late to quit. Werth met to discuss the volume with the chairman of Robert Laffont, who told him that “this book [would] stick the final nail in the coffin of the FCP.”<sup>13</sup>

The title of the volume would also become a source of conflict: Ronsac had suggested *The Book of Communist Crimes*, but Jean-Louis Margolin opposed it. He suggested instead *The*

<sup>12</sup> Five people are mentioned as “contributors,” as opposed to “co-authors” of the *BB* because they wrote or co-wrote a chapter without being involved in discussions about the overall content of the book: Pascal Fontaine, Yves Santamaria and Sylvain Boulouque wrote the chapter on “The third world”; Pierre Rigoulot wrote the chapter on “North Korea”; and Rémi Kauffer co-authored the chapter on “World revolution” with Courtois and Panné.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Nicolas Werth conducted by Valentin Behr, Paris, 23 February 2019.



*Black Book of Communism* with the subtitle *Crimes, Terror, Repression*. This title echoes Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman's *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry* (2003), a collection of eyewitness testimonies, letters, diaries and other documents on the activities of the Nazis against Jewish individuals in the camps, ghettos, and towns of Eastern Europe, which was initially published in 1947. The powerful title "Black Book of..." later became a formula used by French scholars and activists who opposed capitalism (Perraut, 1999) or aimed to shed light on other dark chapters of history, such as colonialism (Ferro, 2003).

These inner conflicts during the compilation of the *BB* clearly show that the fault lines between the authors were not formed by differing interpretations, let alone experiences of communism, but by the moral assessment of a univocal condemnation of communism in relation to Nazism.

### **The translations of the *BB* in Eastern Europe**

The *BB* came out in autumn 1997 in France; within a year, it had already been translated into Romanian and German; other translations would follow soon thereafter.

#### **Translations of the *BB* in Eastern Europe**

##### **France**

1997: *Le livre noir du communisme. Crimes, terreur, répression*, Paris: Robert Laffont (original version).

##### **Romania**

1998: *Cartea neagra a comunismului. Crime, teroare, represiune* [The Black Book of Communism: Crime, Terror, Repression], Bucharest: Humanitas.

##### **Germany**

1998: *Das Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus – Unterdrückung, Verbrechen und Terror* [The Black Book of Communism: Oppression, Crime and Terror], Munich: Piper Verlag.

##### **Czech Republic**

1999: *Černá kniha komunismu: zločiny, teror, represe* [The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression], Prague: Paseka.

##### **Poland**

1999: *Czarna księga komunizmu. Zbrodnie, teror, prześladowania* [The Black Book of Communism. Crimes, Terror, Persecution], Warsaw: Prószyński i S-ka.

##### **Russia**

1999: *Čěrnaja kniga kommunizma* [The Black Book of Communism], Moscow: Tri Veka Istorii.

##### **Hungary**

2000: *A kommunizmus fekete könyve: Bűntény, teror, megtorlás* [The Black Book of Communism: Crime, Terror, Retribution], Budapest: Nagyvilág Kiadó.

##### **Estonia**

2000: *Kommunisti must raamat* [The Black Book of Communism], Tallin: Varrak.

In the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, the book was a genuine success, although not a bestseller as it was in France. While it sold fewer than 3,500 copies in Romania, around 20,000 copies were sold in the Czech Republic and nearly 40,000 in Poland.<sup>14</sup> In transitional economies, the price of the publication was often cited as an obstacle to purchase.<sup>15</sup>

The *BB*'s European dissemination was, similarly to its creation, an anti-communist collaboration. In Romania, for instance, it circulated through the channels established by Eastern European dissident exiles in Paris in connection with local anti-communist networks. It was translated as a result of a meeting between Courtois and former refugees in Paris who had mobilised against Ceaușescu's dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s. They invited Courtois to participate in several roundtables in Romania and introduced him to the founders of the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of Resistance, a new institution sponsored by the influential Civic Academy Foundation.<sup>16</sup> This foundation, along with the centre-right government in power, ultimately sponsored the Romanian publication of the *BB* with Humanitas (cimec.ro), a private publishing house that promotes distinctly anti-communist as well as liberal views. In Hungary, the book came out with a literary publishing house which had just recently been saved from bankruptcy by the national-conservative government of Viktor Orbán (1998-2002). In some cases, the authors themselves were involved in the translation and/or publication: in the Czech Republic, the owner of the publishing house Paseka, a long-time anti-communist at heart, was a personal friend of Bartošek's (Malušková, 2015).

## THE RECEPTION OF THE *BB*: THE EAST-WEST DIVIDE REVISITED

The *BB* came into existence in large part due to the specificities of the French intellectual field and the cooperation of a small pan-European network of anti-communist scholars. Both the recruitment of authors and the foreign dissemination were defined by "weak ties," i.e., interpersonal relations. This network was burdened by huge conflicts which arose between Courtois and some of his co-authors about the ideological versus academic nature of their work. As a result, the volume evinces a powerful combination of ideological anti-communism and a totalitarian academic approach, which proved to be decisive in its reception. In France, book sales pointed to a strong interest in this specific narrative of communism on the part of the general public, despite heavy criticism of the *BB* in academic circles. In Eastern Europe, even though the volume was mostly disseminated by private publishing houses, it was more of an ideological than a commercial endeavour. It mostly reached a narrow segment<sup>17</sup> of former dissidents, communist history specialists and interested parties (former victims and virulent anti-communists) who turned it into an undisputed academic reference work.

### Heated debates in France

In France, the publication of the *BB* resulted in a political and intellectual uproar, leading Donald Reid (2005) to claim that France was experiencing a "communist syndrome" akin to the "Vichy syndrome" famously coined by Henry Rousso (Rousso, 1987). For Reid, this syndrome was "fed by the obsessive accusations of those who feel free of taint, or freed of taint,

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Andrzej Paczkowski conducted by Valentin Behr, Warsaw, 18 October 2018.

<sup>15</sup> The volume is said to have cost almost 20 per cent of a typical reader's pension in the Czech Republic (Kubešová, 1999, p. 10). Another journalist remarked on the high price (750 Czech crowns) that rendered the book "unaffordable to pensioners and students" and called on both the publishers to provide a paperback edition, and on the Ministry of Culture to subsidise the book (Pacner, 1999, p. 21).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Stéphane Courtois conducted by Anemona Constantin, Paris, 2 November 2009.

<sup>17</sup> In the Czech Republic (population: 10.5 million), for instance, the book sold 20,000 copies, whereas in France (population: 65 million), it sold almost a million copies, i.e., approximately eight times more per capita.

but are driven by a need to reveal what they come to believe can never be fully revealed” (Reid, 2005, p. 296).<sup>18</sup>

With the *BB*, Courtois’s goal was indeed to reach an audience beyond academia through a “historical synthesis aimed at reflecting one of the dimensions of communism, the criminal dimension” (Courtois, 2002, p. 35). His intention was not to compare the histories of the two regimes but to pair the memory of communism with that of Nazism. In the introductory chapter, he thus states that his claim that these regimes had an equally criminal character is underpinned by a moral principle, that of equal respect for the human dignity of victims; that the Nuremberg trials provide a suitable model for prosecuting communism for crimes against humanity and genocide; that the great task of constructing a new, common post-Cold War memory of Europe consists of integrating into it the memory of communism; and that the historian’s role is to act as spokesperson for the victims, observing not only a “duty to history” but a “duty to memory” (Courtois et al., 1997). This introduction – especially its pitting of 25 million dead at the hands of the Nazis against an alleged 100 million dead under communism – proved highly controversial.

The totalitarian paradigm was not unknown in France; in the 1970s, many disappointed leftists had used it as a tool to criticise the FCP by arguing that communism in general, and its revolutionary programme in particular, inevitably led to terror and violence (Christofferson, 2004; Popa, 2018). Several co-authors of the *BB* had actually been members of radical left organisations in their youth. Karel Bartošek had been a virulent young Stalinist, while Courtois had been a Maoist. As for Nicolas Werth, his youthful Trotskyist commitment and membership in the FCP (1968-1973) were notorious in France despite his subsequent career as one of the best analysts of Soviet history. Although the *BB* was presented as an academic work, some readers thus saw it as an assault carried out by individuals who were, in fact, settling accounts with old comrades (Sturdza, 1998).

The volume was the subject of violent controversy amongst historians of communism, including some of the authors themselves. Werth and Margolin publicly distanced themselves from the introduction (Werth, 1997; Werth & Margolin, 1997; Chemin, 1997), while Bartošek and Werth resigned from the editorial board of *Communisme*. The detractors of the *BB* criticised its lack of methodological rigour, its conception of historical work as one of “justice and memory” and the ideological dimensions of its approach (Dreyfus et al., 2000; Traverso, 2001; Morgan, 2010). As early as 1998, Ronsac supervised the publication of the volume *Un pavé dans l’histoire! Le débat français sur le livre noir du communisme*, authored by Yannakakis and Rigoulot, in order to defend the *BB*. In 2000, a group of social scientists published a massive volume entitled *The Century of Communisms* (Dreyfus et al., 2000) conceived as a refutation of both Furet’s and Courtois’s works. They adopted a sociological perspective to demonstrate that communism was a multi-faceted phenomenon that could not be reduced to an allegedly criminal nature.

Adding to the controversy, the publication of the *BB* coincided with renewed debates in France on the Vichy period. In 1995, President Jacques Chirac had given a speech acknowledging for the first time the role of French authorities in the persecution and deportation of Jews during the Second World War. Paul Touvier, chief of police in Lyon under the Vichy administration, had been sentenced to life imprisonment in 1994 for crimes against humanity. In 1997, when the *BB* came out, the trial of another former Vichy official, Maurice Papon, for crimes against humanity, was still pending; Papon’s lawyer asked for a copy of the *BB* to be

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<sup>18</sup> Courtois repeatedly expressed his feeling that the book broke a taboo no longer evident to others. In 2002, he thus wrote that the *BB* had “put an end to a taboo” and that “the most intense and unexpected moment of the reevaluation of communism, caused by the concomitant change in the intellectual climate and by the documentary revolution, was the publication of the *BB* on 7 November 1997, eighty years to the day after the October Revolution” (Courtois, 2002, p. 35).

placed in his trial dossier. The volume also triggered a wide range of reactions in the media and political field, including in the FCP.<sup>19</sup> In 1997, a conservative member of the National Assembly created an uproar by accusing three communist cabinet members of complicity with communism's crimes and demanding their resignation. Then-Prime Minister Lionel Jospin was forced to defend their positions in his government, claiming that he was "proud" to have them (Reid, 2005).

Against this backdrop, the 800-page long *BB* became an unexpected bestseller in France, where 700,000 copies were sold within the first three years. In 2002, Robert Laffont published another volume edited by Courtois, entitled *Du passé faisons table rase! Histoire et mémoire du communisme en Europe*, with the sensationalist banner "*The Black Book* did not tell the whole story." Courtois analysed the conflict spurred by the *BB* in France and defended his position on communist history. The volume featured chapters on countries not covered by the *BB* but that had been added as forewords or supplementary chapters in its German, Romanian, Estonian, Russian and Greek translations. Further, Ronsac, who was once again in charge, allowed Courtois to add two new chapters on Bulgaria and Italy. *Du passé faisons table rase!* was translated into German, Bulgarian and Italian and was sold as "the second volume of the *BB*" in these countries.

The translations of the *BB* and the publication of *Du passé faisons table rase!* enabled Courtois to reinvent himself as an international expert on the indictment of communism, despite his academic marginalisation in France. He established valuable connections with important figures in the anti-communist movement such as the former Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky<sup>20</sup> and former members of *Solidarność*, like Alicja Wancerz-Gluza and Roman Wyborski. Courtois became a regular guest at different institutions specialising in the criminalisation of communism, such as the Sighet Memorial in Romania and the House of Terror in Budapest. He also joined a network of activists promoting the memory of the Gulag in European institutions.<sup>21</sup> His subsequent volumes were translated in the former Soviet Bloc. In return, Courtois contributed to the international promotion of previously unknown Central and Eastern European historians and memory entrepreneurs (Constantin, 2018).

## **A differentiated reception in Eastern Europe**

Contrary to the French case, the *BB*'s reception was generally very positive in the post-communist world. If the general public expressed unequal interest in its revelations, several public intellectuals and some influential historians saw in the volume a milestone in historical knowledge on communism and in the recognition of its victims. Three main reasons explain the volume's success in the four Eastern European countries under study (Poland, Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic).

First, an important feature of the book's reception was its almost exclusively ideological character. As in France, the main argument presented in the introduction was used in domestic political struggles to discredit the post-Communist left. The depiction of communism as a criminal ideology equivalent to Nazism had been widespread in most post-communist countries since the early 1990s. Political fields were deeply polarised with respect to the former

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<sup>19</sup> See for example the popular TV show *La marche du siècle* on 3 December 1997, which featured Courtois and the then-First Secretary of the FCP Robert Hue.

<sup>20</sup> Courtois initiated a cycle of conferences, "Memento Gulag," with Bukovsky. Interview with Stéphane Courtois conducted by Anemona Constantin, Paris, 2 November 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Courtois took part in a Parliamentary hearing on communism at PACE in 2003 and is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience (see the article by Laure Neumayer in this special issue).

Communist parties, communist ideology and a broadly defined “left.”<sup>22</sup> When the *BB*’s translations came out, each of the four countries under study was led by a conservative government, while the former ruling parties that had converted to social democracy were stigmatised as the ideological continuation of the socialist state. Only in the Czech Republic was the former Communist Party still in existence as such and represented in Parliament. The *BB*, with its call for a “Nuremberg trial of communism,” served as an important foundation for claims that the Communist Party elites had evaded justice and continued to maintain comfortable positions in society after 1989, and that a strong moral, political and legal condemnation of communism was necessary for the consolidation of these nascent democracies.

Central European anti-communism in the 1990s was above all a political tool from which decommunisation policies and the consecration of state-sponsored totalitarian historiography derived. Except in its memorial claim, the *BB* did not bring anything new to the substance of anti-communism, but provided it with a broader international legitimacy and a moral status equal to that of anti-fascism. The volume also expanded the argument by including anti-communism in a global history of tyranny and the struggle for freedom. Its publication in the late 1990s coincided with the intensification of decommunisation efforts epitomized by the creation of the first institutes of national memory (Mark, 2011; Stola, 2012; Mink, 2017; Behr, 2017) and several museums of communism (Zombory, 2017), after various attempts at the adoption of lustration laws.<sup>23</sup> In Poland, for instance, the law that established the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, passed in December 1998, encompasses both “communist crimes” and “Nazi crimes.”<sup>24</sup> This act also prohibits the denial of both categories of crimes.

In the Czech Republic, the claim concerning the criminality of communism was not new. In July 1993, the Czech Parliament had adopted an “Act on the Illegality of the Communist Regime and on Resistance Against It” that qualified the Communist regime as “criminal, illegitimate and worthy of contempt” and described the Communist Party as a “criminal organisation.”<sup>25</sup> The year after the *BB*’s publication, in 2000, a new article was introduced into the criminal code punishing the crime of “denial of the Nazi and of the Communist genocides,” without geographical specification, punishable by six months to three years in prison.<sup>26</sup> Pundits such as the influential historian and journalist Petr Zídek were harshly critical of this article on the grounds that it was politically motivated. Zídek commented that *The BB* had only presented “one extreme of the genocidal character of the Stalinist regimes” (thereby explicitly linking the criminal code amendment to the *BB*) and that the new article would restrain the freedom of expression of historians who did not see in the Czechoslovak Communist regimes any traces of genocide or crimes against humanity (Zídek, 2000).

In Hungary, this operation took a more complex turn. From 1998 to 2002, Viktor Orbán’s government created and supported an institutional infrastructure of historical knowledge production and dissemination through the Public Foundation for the Research on Central and East European History and Society (*Kelet- és Közép-európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Közalapítvány*, KKTTKK), the Twentieth Century Institute, the

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<sup>22</sup> For example, Polish historian Tomasz Wituch stated in his “assessment of the twentieth century” that “we must radically deny and reject all the left-wing tradition, starting with Jacobinism. Because this tradition contradicts the fundamentals of our identity – Catholic, Christian, Polish and national” (Wituch, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> With the notable exception of Czechoslovakia, where a lustration law had been adopted as early as 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Communist crimes are defined in article 2 of the Act as follows: “Communist crimes are actions performed by the officers of the communist state between 8 November 1917 and 31 July 1990 which consisted in applying reprisals or other forms of violating human rights in relation to individuals or groups of people or which as such constituted crimes according to the Polish penal act in force at the time of their perpetration.”

<sup>25</sup> Act No. 198/1993 of 9 July 1993 “On the Illegality of the Communist Regime and on Resistance against it.”

<sup>26</sup> See Czech criminal code, section 405.

Twenty-First Century Institute and the House of Terror Museum (Laczó & Zombory, 2012). This infrastructure, created outside of the traditional academic field without any connection to the ministry responsible for higher education and research, was financed by the state instead of two former research institutes, the 1956 Institute and the Institute of Political History, whose public support was withdrawn.<sup>27</sup> This was justified ideologically by the need to break through an alleged liberal-left academic and media hegemony. The publication of the *BB* was inscribed into this ideological enterprise. As historian Mária Schmidt<sup>28</sup> put it in her opening address at the international book launch organised in Budapest in 2000, Hungary was characterised by an “intellectual terror” imposed by former officials of the Communist regime and “1968ers,” who had “joined forces in the defence of Communism and of the past.” Fortunately, Schmidt added, “in Western Europe excellent intellectuals have studied the genocidal policy of communist systems in a series of important works, and they stand against this hypocritical double morality” (Schmidt, 2000, p. 8). Furthermore, she highlighted the contributions of Alain Besançon,<sup>29</sup> Stéphane Courtois and Anne Applebaum<sup>30</sup> – the first two of whom were present at the event, together with Werth, Paczkowski, Panné, and activist Vladimir Bukovsky.

In Romania, the *BB* not only buttressed anti-communism as an ideology that served to criticise the past, but also reinforced anti-communism as an electoral tool for the liberal parties and former dissidents to use against their political opponents. After 1989, former members of the nomenklatura had remained in power through a new political formation called the Party of Social Democracy of Romania (PDSR). In 1996, the Democratic Romanian Convention (CDR), a coalition of liberal parties, won the general election and formed a government. The PDSR, which was the second largest parliamentary group until 2000, was accused by the governing parties of being a “neo-communist” party that represented a dangerous continuity with the previous regime (Pavel & Huiu, 2003). It is no coincidence that the Civic Academy Foundation and the Sighet Memorial, which initiated the translation of the *BB* into Romanian, had very close ties to the CDR and to Emil Constantinescu, the newly elected president of Romania.

Second, the *BB* was not considered to be an ordinary intellectual product, but was “made in France” and thus originated from a field of symbolic production that was able to set rules and principles at the European level (Sapiro, 2009). This provided a veneer of legitimacy to Courtois’s theses on the authority of the totalitarian paradigm, on the necessity for a moral reasoning that reflected the equal dignity of victims of any dictatorship, and on the equal criminality of fascism and communism. Nonetheless, the debate differed slightly from country to country, depending on the domestic context.

After a few negative reactions, contemporary pundits in the Czech Republic mostly took from the *BB* that people had suffered under communism and that there had been terrible repression. The volume appeared with an original afterword by Patrik Ouředník, a Czech poet

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<sup>27</sup> While the 1956 Institute was related to the former democratic opposition, the Institute of Political History was linked to the Hungarian Socialist Party, successor to the former ruling party.

<sup>28</sup> Born in 1953, Schmidt is a historian of the Holocaust in Hungary. Between 1998 and 2002, under the first Orbán government, she was the prime minister’s chief advisor on historical policy. Since its inception, she has been a member of the Board of Trustees of the House of Terror in Budapest and has directed its two affiliated research institutions. Since Viktor Orbán returned to power in 2010, she has led the Hungarian policy on history and memory.

<sup>29</sup> Alain Besançon, born in 1932, is a French historian and researcher at the CNRS. A former member of the FCP (1951-1956), he became an influential author within the conservative anti-communist historiography. Besançon is a former member of the International Advisory Board of the foundation of the House of Terror (Budapest).

<sup>30</sup> Anne Applebaum, born in 1964, is an American journalist who has published extensively on communism and Central and Eastern European history. She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize (2004) for her book *Gulag: A History*. Her other history books include *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956* (2012) and *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine* (2017). Like Courtois, Applebaum is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Platform for European Memory and Conscience.

and writer who had lived in exile in Paris since 1984. Ouředník emphasised the academic qualifications of the authors, approved of Courtois's call for a "Nuremberg trial of Communism," and emphasised the ideological proximity between socialism and National Socialism, which he described as "biologically speaking two branches of the same family." He later carried this representation of communism and Nazism as the two sides of the same coin further in a hugely popular essay, *Europeana: A Short History of the Twentieth Century* (Ouředník, 2005), the Czech version of which was published by the same publisher as the *Black Book*. According to Ouředník, "Jews" and "the bourgeois" were assigned the same social roles under Nazism and communism, those of "plutocrats" and "parasites." Both regimes were thus equally criminogenic, he concluded.<sup>31</sup>

As opposed to a predominantly domestic perspective in Hungary and the Czech Republic, the volume's significance was discussed in Poland and Romania in relation to the debates it raised amongst the Western European left. The stormy debates in France were closely followed in both countries, which turned the *BB* into an already famous product, filtered through the lens of its local context. In this regard, the *BB*'s case provides fresh nuances to Pierre Bourdieu's remark that "the sense and function of a foreign work are determined by the field of destination at least as much as by the field of origin" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 4): the reception of the *BB* was heavily influenced in both countries by the first impression the work had left in its original environment. For instance, when he promoted the American translation of the book in the United States, Paczkowski claimed that the controversy about the *BB* was of little historiographical interest. He portrayed Courtois's critics as Western European, former communist activists who disliked the volume mainly because it upended "leftist stereotypes" (Paczkowski, 2001).

In Poland, the *BB* appeared with an original foreword by Krystyna Kersten, a prominent historian of communism.<sup>32</sup> Her position within the dissident historiography was quite specific, as she was sceptical about using the concept of totalitarianism to describe the Polish People's Republic. The fact that such a figure of scholarly authority had authored the foreword to the Polish edition of the *BB* undoubtedly legitimised the book as academically sound. According to Kersten, the *BB* was not only part and parcel of a "memory war" between the left and the right, but also a relevant piece of historiography insofar as it raised the issue of the equivalence between Nazism and communism. The *BB* was reviewed almost exclusively in the daily and weekly press, although some reviews were written by scholars. Most of them described the book and the discussion it sparked in France as important in the Western European context, but did not specifically discuss Paczkowski's thesis or the book's potential contribution to Polish historiography (Machcewicz, 1999). In any case, the comparison between the Holocaust and the Gulag was not questioned: due to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the double occupation experienced between 1939 and 1941, the similarities between fascism and communism were widely accepted by the general public.

The reception of the book in Poland presents a sharp contrast to the situation in Romania, where the translation of the *BB* was published at a time of fierce debates about the ostensible equivalence between Nazism and communism. In order to join NATO and the EU, Romanian

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<sup>31</sup> He is also the author of the sentence "Communism is an expression of sado-masochism in its infantile phase." Ouředník escaped communist Czechoslovakia out of a "feeling of boredom and intellectual vacuum" (Ouředník, 2012). His anti-communist orientation and presence in Paris as a Czech exile and co-editor of the academic journal *L'autre Europe* meant he was in contact with Bartošek. He described his relationship with him as "friendly but heated" (email correspondence with Muriel Blaive, 11 October 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Kersten (1931-2008) is still considered a pioneer of the Polish historiography of communism. A member of the ruling party from 1956 to 1968, she then moved closer to the democratic opposition, delivered lectures to students' and workers' committees and published in *Tygodnik Solidarność* [Solidarność's Weekly]. Her historical research matched her political trajectory: after following the official Party line, she switched to underground publications in the mid-1970s and authored the first major work on the history of communist Poland.

authorities were required to take steps regarding the restitution of Jewish property and the condemnation of Holocaust denial. Unlike Poland, Romania had been an ally of the Third Reich during the Second World War, and hundreds of thousands of Jews and Roma were killed in Transnistria, after being deported there in 1941-1942 by local authorities (CISHR, 2004). When the *BB* was published in 1998, these facts were the subject of a hefty public debate that cast a shadow over some of the former dissidents who felt their status threatened. Some of them, including several important intellectuals such as Gabriel Liiceanu, the publisher of the *BB*, derived their legitimacy from the proximity to Constantin Noica, one of the most important Romanian philosophers, who had been a sympathiser of the Iron Guard in his youth.<sup>33</sup> The recognition of the Holocaust was potentially harmful to their reputations and even risked presenting the extermination of European Jews as a bigger tragedy than the communist repression endured by the former dissidents. Intellectual elites engaged in the process of Gulag recognition – especially those close to the Sighet Memorial, who had criticised attempts to impose on Romania an allegedly foreign cultural framework based on the memory of the Holocaust – thus saw Courtois’s statements as a strong argument in their favour (Laignel-Lavastine, 2004). The *BB* allowed these memory entrepreneurs to challenge not only the uniqueness of the Holocaust, but also the supposed attempt of Western elites to “cover up” the violence of the Gulag (Lovinescu, 2000).

Third, the success of the *BB* in Central Europe was – paradoxically – due to its limited reception in the academic field. The volume was considered a major contribution to the history of communism without ever being submitted to a substantive review which could have exposed its methodological and even factual failures. Though widely reviewed in the press, as well as in cultural journals dominated by anti-communist intellectuals, the *BB* failed to spark much debate in academia. The volume reactivated the many and long-standing roots of the anti-totalitarian paradigm in Eastern Europe. This regional intellectual context provided favourable preconditions for the relatively positive adoption of the *BB* among academics in the four post-Communist countries under study. In the public sphere (“the secondary market”), the book increasingly became a reference point for former dissidents, memory entrepreneurs and young historians; within academia (“the primary market”), scholars remained rather quiet and turned the volume into a canonical reference work without discussing it further (Hauchecorne, 2009). The *BB* was more frequently quoted than read, but this sufficed to preserve its academic status and to allow for its wide circulation as an unquestioned milestone in the analysis of communism.

In Poland, for instance, the *BB* was barely reviewed in academic journals. Nonetheless, it became generally accepted that the Polish People’s Republic had been a totalitarian regime – the only issue up for debate was whether this qualification applied only to the Stalinist period or to the entire forty-year history of state socialism (Górny, 2007). Kersten claimed that the post-1956 period did not deserve the qualification of “totalitarian” and argued in her introduction for a “moderate repression,” whereas Paczkowski’s chapter presented the previous regime as one of the harshest in the whole Eastern Bloc and considered the period from 1945 to 1956 as the basis for a totalitarian regime that lasted until 1989.<sup>34</sup> Despite these opposing

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<sup>33</sup> Gabriel Liiceanu is a disciple of Constantine Noica, who supported the fascist Iron Guard in his youth and was a political prisoner under the Communist regime (Laignel-Lavastine, 1998). Noica is also a close friend of Mircea Eliade, a well-known historian of religions and specialist of philosopher E.M. Cioran, both of whom also supported the Iron Guard during the 1930s (Laignel-Lavastine, 2002). Since 1989, Humanitas Publishing has held exclusive copyrights to the works of these authors and has promoted them as markers of intellectual excellence (Runceanu, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Paczkowski somehow prevailed as the leading figure in the political history of communism. From the early 1990s onwards, Kersten was less active in publishing due to illness. Paczkowski had never joined the Party and



views, the *BB* did not trigger any new debates about the totalitarian nature of the Polish People's Republic, in part because major scholarly discussion on the subject had already taken place in the early 1990s (Fik, 1996). Paczkowski's thesis was understood as fact by most Polish historians, even though an emerging school of social history was already in the process of challenging the totalitarian paradigm (Behr, 2017). As a result, the publication of the *BB* did not lead to a broader discussion of Polish communism.

Similarly, the Romanian translation was not submitted to strict academic critique. It also failed to become a scholarly reference, even though major publications such as the Final Report for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania mentioned it as one of the main sources to the history of Communist regimes (CPADCR, 2006). The *BB* appeared in Romanian with an additional chapter on the local communist regime written by a team of professional and amateur historians from the Sighet Memorial. This chapter was added mainly to prove the extent of communist repression and to shed light on the armed resistance in the 1950s. Given that the original version of the *BB* presented most of the local partisans who fought against the communist regime as members of the fascist Iron Guard, the purpose of the additional chapter was to reclaim the democratic nature of Romanian anti-communism.

In Hungary, where a few academic reviews had been published in response to the original French version of the *BB* released in 1997, the reception of the volume was boosted by an international conference organised in 2000 at the Hotel Gellért in Budapest to promote the Hungarian translation. The public controversy around the *BB* was not centred on the nature of communism itself but on the country's relationship to communism: what was at stake was the very authenticity of anti-communism. In the competition for the status of "genuine anti-communist," the liberal position of the 1990s was challenged by a Europeanised memory discourse of conservative anti-communism embodied by the *BB*.

## **CONCLUSION: THE EUROPEANISATION OF ANTI-COMMUNISM BEFORE EU ACCESSION**

Although the French context was decisive for its inception, the *BB* was for the most part the product of a loose, pan-European anti-communist network that had already emerged in the 1970s-1980s and was reactivated in the 1990s. Beyond the shared desire to use the *BB* as a tool to delegitimise the left, its reception was not only characterised by a sharp differentiation between Eastern and Western Europe, but also the book's appropriation in country-specific ways across Eastern Europe. In France, the *BB* enjoyed a twofold reception in both academic and political discourses; in the post-communist realm, the debate was predominantly political and unfolded mostly outside academia. Moreover, an important feature of the French debate was the existence of a strong communist counterpoint, embodied by the FCP, while such a position was either missing or much weaker within post-communist debates. The lack of serious academic discussions about the *BB* in the four Eastern European countries under study was due to multiple, and at times contradictory, factors: the volume did not contain any new insights on the history of local communist regimes; French academia was understood as a legitimate source of knowledge in some countries; intellectual elites maintained a predominantly anti-communist

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had begun his career at the Institute for Literary Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN). He began researching communist Poland in the 1980s and published in underground publications. He later authored a major synthesis of the 1939-1989 period (Paczkowski, 1995). In the early 1990s, he founded the main research centre dedicated to the history of communist Poland at the Institute for Political Studies at PAN. Being one of the authors of the *BB* might have boosted his international contacts: he contributed to many publications in English and received several international fellowships in the late 1990s/early 2000s, among others at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC.

orientation; and the narrative of the *BB* circulated mostly in newly created infrastructures outside of academia.

Through the national appropriation of the *BB* in Central Europe, the notion of communism has undergone a radical transformation. While the French debate presented communism as a world phenomenon, communism was locally situated in post-socialist states. Thus, communism emerged, in comparison to Nazism, not only as “the greatest evil” but also as a regional specificity, an “Eastern European phenomenon” in contrast to the Holocaust, now perceived and represented as “Western” (Zombory, 2017). This stemmed from the fact that the *BB* was published at a time of profound geopolitical restructuring triggered by the fall of Eastern European communist regimes. In the 1990s, both sides of the former Cold War strove to redefine their historical and geographical identities in an asymmetrical political space now defined by the process of EU and NATO enlargement. In connection with the EU’s implicit requirement for the recognition of Holocaust memory (Leggewie, 2010), anti-communist memory entrepreneurs attempted to build a comparable pan-European Gulag memory based on the totalitarian paradigm. As far as the former Eastern bloc countries were concerned, the hegemonic narrative of the early 1990s allowed for an understanding of their European identity as having been oppressed by Eastern/barbaric communism (Lagerspetz, 1999). By the end of the 1990s, this narrative was replaced by the Europeanised discourse of Holocaust memory, which resulted in the formulation of the “double legacy” of Nazism and communism, as anti-communist activists attempted to impose the official recognition of communism’s evil nature.

The controversies around the *BB* thus prefigured the political debates in pan-European assemblies about the “constitutive historical narratives” of Europe (Neumayer, 2019). The significance of the *BB* stems from its ambition to represent a pan-European social laboratory in which the rhetoric and argumentative repertoire of a Europeanised anti-communism could be experimented upon. Though the *BB* inevitably contributed to the rise of a national-conservative anti-communism, it also provided a legitimate common ground for a reluctant cooperation between two types of anti-communists: national-conservative revisionists and pro-European liberals. More precisely, because of its moral reasoning and European rhetoric, the argumentation of the *BB* could hardly be rebutted or criticised. As subsequent European Parliament debates about the criminal nature of communism clearly show, both sides became “rhetorically entrapped” (Schimmelfennig, 2001) – overdetermined by incontestable moral arguments. Opponents of the initiative to recognise communism as criminal, terroristic and totalitarian were silenced because its promoters referred to legitimate European norms of historical consciousness: shared values expressed in a historical narrative, the memory of the Holocaust, the need for reconciliation, the duty to remember, and the restoration of the dignity of victims. Conversely, proponents of the initiative were thus also silenced because, in order to champion their cause of communism-memory, they had previously been forced to adopt their opponents’ cause of Holocaust memory together with its representational regime. The price of this reluctant anti-communist consensus was thus the escalation of victimisation in Europe-wide historical debates.

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