BRILL

East Central Europe 40 (2013) 1–35

brill.com/eceu

Introduction

Studying Communist Dictatorships: From Comparative to Transnational History

Abstract

The downfall of the communist system and the end of the Cold War, the liberalization of historical discourses in Central and Eastern Europe, the opening up of new archival collections for scientific research, the intensification of academic exchange and interaction between local and foreign scholars, and the increasing globalization of the world have challenged scholars to experiment with new transnational approaches to the study of communist regimes, such as shared/entangled history, history of transfers, and *histoire croisée*. Against this background, the current thematic issue aims to evaluate the potential impact of transnational approaches on the field of communist studies, within the broader frameworks of European and world history. In this introduction, we provide a reappraisal of the history, legacy, and prospects of comparative communist studies, highlighting the potential heuristic advantages posed by the applications of new approaches to the "cross-history" of communist regimes. We argue that transnational research perspectives can fertilize communist studies, leading not only to novel insights but to the transformation of the field itself, by setting it on new foundations. By employing transnational perspectives, scholars are able to challenge the traditional understanding of communist regimes as quasi-isolated national entities, highlighting instead the long-term impact of cross-border linkages and transfers on sociopolitical developments within the Soviet camp. It is our conviction that the entangled history of communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe can function as a laboratory for experimenting with new transnational perspectives, leading to innovative interdisciplinary approaches in a joint effort of scholars from various disciplines and historiographical traditions.

Keywords

communism, comparative history, transnational history, Sovietization, totalitarianism, dictatorship, postcommunism, shared/entangled history, history of transfers, *histoire croisée*, microhistory, urban history, oral history, everyday life history

In a pioneering article published back in 1967, Robert C. Tucker argued that the field of communist studies had finally reached a stage of academic maturation. The post-1945 establishment of communist regimes in Eastern

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Europe, South-East Asia, and Latin America, as well as the worldwide political consolidation of Communist parties, on the one hand, challenged scholars to overcome their previous concentration on Russian and Soviet studies in favor of wider, regional, and global research frameworks. On the other hand, communist studies managed to transcend both theoretically and methodologically the narrow research agenda of area studies, promoting instead interdisciplinary social science approaches to the study of Communist-type societies and "civilization." For Tucker, the future of communist studies revolved around a more systematic implementation of the comparative method: thus, if in 1959 the approach of comparative communism had been "a mere gleam in the scholarship" (Mosely 1959), less than a decade later it already grew into a rather vigorous trend (Tucker 1967: 242). In tune with similar contemporary calls and research endeavors (e.g., Skilling 1979), Tucker's pioneering agenda led to a change of paradigm in the field of communist studies, from Soviet studies toward *comparative politics*, best exemplified at the time by the work of his Planning Group on Comparative Communist Studies[1] and the research agenda of the journal *Studies in Comparative Communism*, established in 1971.[2]

Over forty years after the publication of Tucker's programmatic article, and more than twenty years after the downfall of communist regimes, the field of communist studies has suffered profound transformations. First, the application of new research methods and perspectives has led to an increasing diversity in the field, but also to fragmentation into interrelated yet distinct subfields of research. Second, the heuristic role of the comparative method as the foundation of communist studies has been recently called into question. The downfall of the communist system and the end of

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1) Hosted by the American Council of Learned Societies and sponsored by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, the Planning Group on Comparative Communist Studies was chaired by Robert C. Tucker from 1969 to 1974. On the Planning Group's activity, see its *Newsletter on Comparative Studies of Communism*, edited from 1970 to 1975 by Frederic J. Fleron Jr. at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

2) This journal's "metamorphoses" testified to the multiples changes that occurred in the field itself. Currently titled *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, the journal aims "to provide comparative foci on a given subject" related to communist "ideology, economy and society." Equally important, the journal invites contributions from a multitude of disciplines, such as history, political science, economics, and international relations but also from cultural anthropology, education, geography, religion, and sociology. See http://www.journals.elsevier.com/communist-and-post-communist-studies. For a journal closer to the tradition of area studies, see the *Journal of Communist Studies* (1985–1993), later known as the *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* (1994–2011), and currently as *East European Politics* (2012–).

the Cold War, the liberalization of historical discourses in Central and Eastern Europe, the opening up of archives, the intensification of exchange and interaction between local and foreign scholars, and the increasing globalization of the world have challenged scholars to experiment with new transnational approaches to the study of communist regimes.[3]

The current thematic issue aims to evaluate the potential impact of newly emerging transnational approaches on the field of communist studies within the broader frameworks of European and world history. As it is well known, the study of Eastern European Communist regimes is essentially an exercise in comparative history. After 1945, countries in the region were occupied by the Red Army and forcefully included in the Soviet sphere of influence. Not only were these countries' foreign policies fully subordinated to the Soviet Union's interests, but their internal organization and sociopolitical systems were violently reshaped following the Stalinist model. In order to grasp the similarities and differences in these countries' social-political organization, scholars imperiously need to employ the comparative method and to insert these case studies into a common analytical framework. Several forms of comparison are possible in this respect, as a function of the researchers' aims. Thus, scholars can employ a diachronic perspective, by comparing the building of the Soviet interwar Stalinist type of societal organization with the postwar reorganization of Eastern European societies; or a synchronic perspective, by comparing contemporaneous Eastern European societies with the Soviet Union or with each other, in order to understand similarities and differences in their organization at a given point in time. They can engage in large-scale holistic comparisons or in narrower, issue-oriented investigations; they can look at the entire region, as a whole, or select various comparative units (e.g., neighboring countries) that can better illustrate the phenomena under scrutiny.

Yet the study of East European dictatorships is not solely a matter of comparative history. The communist regimes established in post-1945 Eastern Europe were not isolated entities; as integral parts of the larger and increasingly integrated Soviet camp, their evolution was directly shaped by

[3] On comparative history, see Haupt 2001, 2004; Haupt and Kocka 2004; Kocka 1999; Cohen and O'Connor 2004. On transnational history, see Keohane 1971a, 1971b; Paulmann 1998; Robinson 1998; Elkana 2002; Lepenies 2003; Saunier 2009. On transnationalism and its impact on communist studies, see Calvin 2005. On the debate between comparative and transnational history in the German context, see Paulmann 1998; Haupt 2006; Kaelble 1999, 2003; Middel 2000; Osterhammel 2001; Kocka 2003.

political developments in Moscow, and heavily influenced by their interaction with the other socialist countries and by East-West relations. To account for this complicated web of dynamic entanglements, scholars need to go beyond a mechanical juxtaposition of national case studies in terms of similarities and differences among isolated, neatly differentiated, and internally stable national units; instead, they need to employ a complex set of research angles and perspectives for emphasizing the multiple entanglements and reciprocal influences among various actors operating within socialist nation-states.

In their efforts to embrace more fully cross-border perspectives, students of communist studies might find inspiration in recent approaches to transnational history. The composite term "transnational" was first coined by the German philologist and linguist Georg Curtius as early as 1862 (Saunier 2009: 1047); since then, the concept has been increasingly employed in social sciences and humanities, its meaning varying greatly according to the historical age and disciplinary context to which it refers. Due to the heterogeneous and variegated phenomena covered under this generic label, some scholars use the term in its plural form and advance various typologies of economic, political, and sociocultural "transnationalisms," each studied by way of distinct, discipline-specific approaches (Yeoh, Charney, and Kiong 2003). In social sciences, *explicit* transnational approaches first emerged in the 1970s in the field of international relations and, more recently, in world and global history. According to a pioneering definition advanced by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, "transnational relations" describe "contacts, coalitions and interactions across state boundaries that are not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of government" (1971a: 331). In humanities, transnational history is generally employed as an umbrella term that stands for a wide range of related and even overlapping approaches such as comparative, international, world, and global history. Notwithstanding the significant differences between these approaches, they are all characterized "by a desire to break out of the nation-state … as the category of analysis, and especially to eschew the ethnocentrism that once characterized the writing of history in the West," as an editor of the *American Historical Review* argued (*AHR* Conversation, 2006: 1441–1442). Transnational approaches enable researchers to transcend the "national paradigm" by highlighting the nation-state's connections and interdependence to regional or global developments (Robinson 1998). To uncover these transnational connections, historians need to focus on "the movement of groups, goods, technology, or people across national

borders" (*AHR* Conversation, Seed 2006: 1443) and on the "networks, institutions, ideas, and processes [that] constitute these connections" (*AHR* Conversation, Beckert 2006: 1446). Transnational history thus lays the analytical emphasis on what Arjun Appadurai named the "space of the flows"; historians explore the constitution of these spaces across national borders, but they "do not claim to embrace the whole world," as global historians do (*AHR* Conversation, Hofmeyr 2006: 1444). In doing so, transnational history does not simply advance a new research agenda, but also new methodologies for studying cross-border exchanges and interactions. First, as Isabel Hofmeyr pointed out, "[t]he key claim of any transnational approach is its central concern with movements, flows, and circulation, not simply as a theme or motif but as an analytic set of methods which defines the endeavor itself" (*AHR* Conversation, Hofmeyr 2006: 1444). Second, in exploring these phenomena, transnational approaches tend to focus on "localized" human agency and actors rather than on "impersonal" global phenomena (Yeoh, Charney, and Kiong 2003).

Despite their potential importance for the study of communist regimes, the newly emerging transnational approaches have not been systematically applied to the contemporary history of Eastern Europe. In the field of Russian and Soviet studies, for example, the transnational approach is surprisingly new. Michael David-Fox (2011) has drawn attention to the fact that a special issue of the journal *Kritika* published in 2001—ten years after the fall of the Soviet regime—did not even mention transnational history or international and comparative approaches among the most notable postcommunist historiographical trends. It is only recently that transnational approaches have been applied more systematically to the field of communist studies. Most often, however, these approaches have been only applied to the study of the Soviet Union's international ramifications, neglecting the history of communist regimes in post-1945 Eastern Europe. It is our conviction that the entangled history of communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe can function as a laboratory for experimenting with new transnational perspectives, leading to innovative interdisciplinary approaches, in a joint effort of scholars from various disciplines and historiographical traditions. In the first part of this introduction we provide a reappraisal of the history, legacy, and prospects of comparative communist studies, highlighting the potential heuristic advantages posed by the applications of new approaches to the "cross-history" of communist regimes in Eastern Europe; in the second part, we briefly present the main findings of the research dossier included in the volume.

Comparative Communist Studies and Ideal-Type Models of Totalitarianism

Ever since the establishment of "popular democracies" in Eastern Europe in the late 1940s, scholars have been searching for overarching theoretical frameworks that could facilitate their understanding of the imposition of Soviet-style societies in the region. In the first postwar decades, scholarship on Eastern Europe was, by and large, dominated by political science approaches, centered on the concept of totalitarianism. As it is well known, the concept of totalitarianism was coined by Italian antifascist thinkers and activists in the early 1920, and then soon appropriated by the Italian Fascist propaganda, as well as, rather briefly, by Nazi ideologues (Gleason 1995: 14). In the 1930s, the concept of totalitarianism was transferred from the political to the academic realm, being increasingly employed by scholars in the United Kingdom and the United States, in particular, as an overarching conceptual framework highlighting the similarities between Italian Fascism, German Nazism, and also Stalinism (Halberstam 1998), the latter being often labeled—in a controversial manner—"Red Fascism" (Adler and Paterson 1970). This perspective gave birth to the theory of "unitotalitarianism," based on the assertion that totalitarian regimes share fundamental similarities in their sociopolitical organization and should therefore be placed in a common taxonomic category, regardless of major differences in their ideologies or political practices. After World War II, the "unitotalitarian thesis" was further elaborated into fully-fledged ideal-type models and gained a position of hegemony as an explanatory paradigm of fascist and communist regimes. Two main works stand out in this respect, both with long-term impact on the evolution of comparative studies of communism: Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski's *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956; 2nd rev. ed. by Friedrich in 1965; see also Friedrich 1964). Both books defined totalitarianism as a novel form of autocracy of the twentieth century characterized by widespread violence, terror, and repression at the hand of the secret political police. The two books are, however, different in their focus: Arendt explored mainly the "origins of totalitarianism" as an ideology and the relationship between totalitarian movements and the regimes they generated, while Friedrich and Brzezinski focused mainly on the organization and "functioning" of established totalitarian regimes. Friedrich and Brzezinski identified six main features of what they called the "totalitarian syndrome" or "model": "1) an official ideology; 2) a single

mass party; 3) a state monopoly over all means of armed combat; 4) a state monopoly of all means of mass communication; 5) a system of terrorist police control; and 6) a centrally directed economy" (1956: 10–11). In the spirit of the unitotalitarian theory, Friedrich and Brzezinski argued that these traits characterized all fascist as well as communist regimes, which were all "basically alike," not "wholly alike," yet "sufficiently alike to class them together" (1965: 21).

Unfortunately, these influential models of interpretation centered on the concept of totalitarianism did not stimulate the development of comparative studies of communist regimes *per se*. In line with the ideological agenda of the Cold War, post-1945 Western political scientists were not simply concerned with the nature of communist political regimes, but put forward broad schemes of interpretation which applied to fascist as well as communist regimes. In the Cold War context, the unitotalitarian thesis had the advantage of linking, in a single interpretative model, the two main themes of post-1945 Western ideological legitimization, mainly antifascism and anticommunism. By discussing fascist and communist regimes under a common theoretical framework, Arendt, and Friedrich and Brzezinski, provided a novel and more powerful rearticulation of the interwar theory of unitotalitarianism. To substantiate this thesis, in the first postwar decades scholars focused predominantly on the comparison between Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany, two case studies that arguably provided the closest historical incarnations of the ideal-type model of totalitarian regimes (for more recent perspectives that relativize this comparison, see Kershaw and Lewin 1997; Geyer and Fitzpatrick 2009; Gerlach and Werth 2009). At the same time, the history of the post-1945 dictatorships established in Eastern Europe figured rather marginal in the new literature on totalitarianism. Political interdictions to free scholarship in Eastern Europe and the external scholars' lack of access to archival materials or to reliable sources of information hampered the evolution of this field of studies, long time dominated by political refugees from these countries or by diaspora intellectuals living in the West. Given these limitations, postwar comparative analyses of totalitarian regimes were largely uneven in their geographical coverage: It is telling in this respect that Arendt's model of totalitarianism is heavily tailored to the history of Nazi Germany, of which she had direct experience and extensive scholarly knowledge. Her view on the nature of communist regimes was unavoidably less informed, due to the conspicuous lack of access to archival sources, but also to the fact that, at the time of her writing (1948), the Soviet-type regimes in Eastern Europe and South-East

Asia were still "in the making" and thus difficult to classify. These limitations explain Arendt's hesitation in classifying communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe: The second, 1958 edition of the *Origins of Totalitarianism* included a short epilogue on Stalinization in Eastern Europe and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, which was removed from the third edition (1966) on the argument that it had become "obsolete." More importantly, however, Arendt was not convinced that Eastern European postwar dictatorships could be fruitfully analyzed from the perspective of the totalitarian model, which she suggested was more suited for tackling modern forms of "Oriental despotism." To support this assertion, Arendt advanced the controversial argument that, since totalitarian movements depend on "the sheer force of numbers," the establishment of successful totalitarian regimes "seems impossible … in countries with relatively small populations" (1973: 308). Due to the relative lack of human potential in communist Eastern Europe, totalitarianism appeared to Arendt as "too ambitious an aim" in such (relatively) small countries, genuinely totalitarian movements failing into one-party dictatorships. In her view this was also true, to a certain extent, for Nazi Germany as well, where the establishment of a fully-fledged totalitarian regime was in fact dependent on the final victory in World War II. In contrast, the availability of massive human resources explained the success of totalitarianism in Russia and the great potential for totalitarian regimes in India and China, (uncritically) essentialized by Arendt as "the lands of traditional Oriental despotism" (1973: 311). Brzezinski and Friedrich did not share Arendt's view; instead, they went a step further in the direction of comparative communist studies by unambiguously including Eastern European dictatorships into the realm of totalitarian regimes. At the same time, however, they exponentially enlarged the comparative scope of their endeavor, by also including in the same typological category the newly emerging authoritarian-nationalist regimes in postcolonial Africa and Asia.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet and communist studies were gradually transformed by new generations of social scientists, who advanced alternative research perspectives and methodological tools. On the one hand, political scientists attempted to overcome the limitations of the "classical" models of totalitarianism by inserting communist studies more firmly into the larger field of comparative politics (see Tucker 1967, discussed above; Linz 1975 [also 2000]; Skilling 1979; on the wider agenda of comparative politics emerging at the time, see Lijphart 1971; for a recent perspective on comparative politics, see Brainard 1998). On the other hand, the dominant ideal-type models of totalitarianism (such as the ones discussed above) were being challenged by a new cohort of social historians who had the chance to travel to the Soviet

Union and used the insights they thus gained for promoting a more informed and less ideologized view of the Soviet realities (for reflections on this historiographical trend and its implications, see Case 1987; Suny 1994). These "revisionist" social historians—as they came to be referred to in the debate with "traditional" Sovietologists—rejected simplistic accounts of communist societies as fully polarized between a "monolithic" ruling communist elite and an "undifferentiated" working people. Instead, social historians emphasized the complexity of communist societies characterized by rivalry among elite factions or bureaucratic agencies (Lewin 1985), the emergence and manifestation of various interest groups in society, and the survival or rearticulation of alternative social networks and relationships.[4] Rejecting a top-down approach to the study of Soviet society, social historians underscored the fact that communist parties and regimes were not almighty, fully centralized and perfectly disciplined machineries of control and repression, but rather fluid systems often shaped by contingent and arbitrary decisions (Getty 1985; Rittersporn 1991; Fitzpatrick 1994). In order to capture the complexity of social structures that characterized totalitarian societal contexts and the multitude of social strata and interest groups who vied for political power and influence, social historians employed new research perspectives to the study of Soviet society, such as the "interest group approach" and the "institutional pluralist model" (e.g., Hough 1969; Skilling and Griffiths 1971; Hough and Fainsod 1979; on the ensuing "grand debate," on the role of groups in Soviet politics, see Langsam and Paul 1972). Social historians also evidenced instances of social support for totalitarian rule in the Soviet Union (and, by extension, also in Eastern Europe), and the resulting "social pacts" between the ruling elites and various strata of the population who benefited from new opportunities of social mobility. "Revisionist" social historians underlined mechanisms of constructing class identity and solidarity under communist rule and the political logic behind the seemingly irrational repressive campaigns, portraying the Stalinist great terror as a social revolution "from below" as well as "from above" (on the 1917 revolution as social history, see Suny 1994; for a discussion of the Stalinist purges from the prism of social history, see Cohen 1986; on the link between Stalinist purges, education, and the massive upward mobility of the so-called "Brezhnev generation" in the 1930s, see Fitzpatrick 1979 and her concept of the Stalinist "Cultural Revolution").

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4) For a relevant example, see Kideckel's 1982 application of the anthropological concept of "complex society" to the study of the process of collectivization in communist Romania.

In the 1980s and 1990s, communist studies were further transformed by a new cohort of cultural historians and anthropologists who conducted fieldwork in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe (on field research in communist societies and its implications, see Halpern and Kideckel 1983; Turner and Hadley 1989; Suny and Kennedy 1999). Equipped with innovative theories and methods, cultural historians and anthropologists promoted a new interdisciplinary research agenda centered on the overarching concept of culture and focusing on, among other themes, the study of ideology and its impact on social, gender, and political relations, and on education, urbanization, the rise of nationalism, and the articulation of dissident visions of national identity (Kligman 1981, 1988; Verdery 1991; Fitzpatrick, Rabinowitch, and Stites 1991; Fitzpatrick 1992, 1994; Kotkin 1995; for a comprehensive presentation of this wave of culturalist scholarship in Russian/Soviet studies in the first postcommunist "decade of breakthrough," with a focus on Stalinism, see Fitzpatrick 2000). In so doing, cultural historians and anthropologists criticized the rigid, top-down political science models of totalitarianism elaborated in the 1950s as an "analytical cul-de-sac" (Kotkin 1995: 3); but they also distance themselves from some of the claims of the "revisionist" social historians who, in their attempt to "normalize" and "de-ideologize" the perception of Soviet society tended to neglect the paramount role played by the Marxist-Leninist ideology in shaping social realities (Kotkin 1995: 151; but also Fitzpatrick 2000, a scholar who was herself part of both the social and cultural turns in Soviet studies). To overcome these limitations, cultural historians and anthropologists studied ideological productions in their original societal locus, emphasizing the paramount role played by political discourses and "languages," practices, and rituals in forging new social and political identities and loyalties. Although this type of culturally-oriented research was mostly centered on the Soviet Union and tended to favor case study methodologies over large-scale comparatively-oriented investigations, the insights gained in small-scale research were often inserted in regional theoretical frameworks of interpretation, thus paving the way toward relational transnational approaches.

Totalitarianism *redivivus*? The End of the Cold War and New Comparative Directions in the Study of Communism

The collapse of communist regimes and the end of the Cold War have set into motion profound mutations in the field of Eastern European

communist studies. The liberalization of historical discourses allowed local historians to tackle topics that had previously been considered *taboo*, such as, most notably, the history of communist regimes in the region. At the same time, the gradual opening of archives and the more systematic collection of oral testimonies allowed local as well as external scholars to illuminate hidden sides of the communist regimes' policies. Equally important, the end of the Cold War provided conditions for an unprecedented level of interactions between local and foreign scholars, making possible fruitful academic exchanges and collaboration. Overall, these developments have led to a slow but gradual shift in the research agenda of comparative communist studies from political to sociocultural history, and from national to comparative and transnational history. Needless to say, a comprehensive overview of the multiple and variegated post-1989 directions of research on communist studies would be too ambitious an aim for this short overview. In the following, we limit ourselves to briefly discussing several main research directions in the study of comparative communism: theories of modernization; theories of (uni)totalitarianism; and the history of everyday life/*Alltagsgeschichte*. Our main aim is to evaluate the potential impact of new transnational approaches on the reconsideration of traditional research themes in communist studies.

First, in the early 1990s, Western comparative studies of communism were dominated by large-scale schemes of interpretation which strove to understand the historical legacy of communist regimes and their impact on Eastern Europe's postcommunist developments by placing them in a long-term historical perspective. In many ways, this brand of scholarship followed on the path of earlier comparative investigations on the social origins of democracy, which posited the existence of divergent regional, "Western" and "Eastern," social-political paths to modernity (Moore 1966; Black 1966; Mitrany 1973). In the well-established tradition of modernization theories, historians tended to insert the history of communist dictatorships in the broader master narrative of European modernity, exploring the way in which Eastern European nation-states responded to the challenges of modernity (Rothschild 1989; Swain and Swain 1993; Crampton 1994; Janos 2000 [for an earlier perspective on Hungary, see 1982]; and Puttkamer 2010).

Such "external" interpretations of the legacy of communist regimes in Eastern Europe were not very different from indigenous narratives. Local historians had also employed modernization or dependency theories to account for Eastern Europe's distinct historical development in terms of core-periphery relationships. It is telling in this respect that Iván T. Berend,

one of the most representative East European scholars who approached the history of Eastern societies from a *long durée* perspective, formulated his research theses during the 1970s and 1980s inside late socialist Hungarian academia and yet managed to easily integrate himself in the US academic environments after 1990 (for an autobiographical account, see Berend 2009). Framed in Marxist categories and largely influenced by Wallerstein's world-system theory, Berend's comparative historical analysis of the socialist dictatorships was centered on economic and social history. His main argument was that the state-socialist modernization of Eastern Europe was yet another strategy to overcome the region's historical development, marked by the belated development of capitalism (1996). In so arguing, Berend was in fact part of a larger group of local social historians and economists—like Witold Kula, Marian Małowist, Zsigmond Pál Pach, and György Ránki—who explored from various perspectives the long-term historical causes of the "derailment" of modernity in Eastern Europe. While adding important elements to our understanding of Eastern Europe's evolution in the modern period, these regional applications of modernization theories tended nevertheless to reproduce Orientalist views on patterns of "underdevelopment" in non-Western European areas (on Orientalism, see Said 1978; on Orientalist perspectives on Eastern Europe, see Wolff 1994; on the Balkans, see Todorova 1997; on "internal" Orientalist attitudes within the Balkans, see Hayden and Hayden 1992;). Within this deterministic scheme of interpretation, the history of communist Eastern Europe was mainly approached through the prism of the region's long-term political, social, or technological "backwardness" (for an early critique of this tendency, see Geyer 1989). More recently, new approaches regard Eastern European "experiments" in communist modernization as compatible if peculiar responses to a common, European-wide set of challenges posed by the advent of modernity (e.g., Chirot 1991; on the Soviet Union, see Kotkin 1995). Such non-normative perspectives on modernization facilitate the integration of Eastern Europe's communist development within the broader history of Europe.

The second main research direction in communist studies focused on the history of communist regimes as experiments in total domination. As shown above, in the late 1940s and 1950s, in the context of the Cold War, American-based social scientists, many of them emigrating from Germany or Eastern Europe, produced political-science models of totalitarianism and applied them, primarily, to the case study of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Since 1960 the concept of totalitarianism was heavily contested

by the new generations of social historians who contested the analytical usefulness of the concept for describing developments within Eastern European socialist regimes. The two decades that passed since the collapse of the communist system have nevertheless witnessed an academic rejuvenation of Cold War totalitarian models of interpretation, in Western as well as in Eastern Europe. Thus, recent works on East European societies have reassessed the relevance of the concept of totalitarianism for understanding the communist past. One can identify several research traditions on totalitarianism: a first one developing in the field of Soviet studies in the Anglophone world, mostly in the US; a second one advanced by dissident thinkers in communist Eastern Europe; and the local scholarship on this topic emerging in postcommunist countries. First, benefiting from the gradual opening of historical archives for research, consecrated Western Sovietologists attempted to reassess the analytical validity of the totalitarian approach and to document the Stalinist terror (mostly by recounting the victims) in the light of novel evidence previously inaccessible to researchers (see Pipes 1990; Conquest 1998, 1990; Siegel 1998). Second, during the late communist rule, dissident intellectuals living at home or in diaspora advanced a critique of communism as a form of totalitarianism;[5] to the official communist ideology, they opposed a normative concept of civil society, presented as an alternative form of democratic civic community (see Tismăneanu 1990, 1992; Rau 1991; Cirtautas 1997; Falk 2003; see also the debate included in this special issue). Third, after decades of political interdictions, scholars in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are now actively engaging with the vast literature on totalitarianism, adapting existing theoretical offers to the study of their own societies. Unfortunately, many local scholars have uncritically embraced classical models of totalitarianism as employed during the Cold War, ignoring the lessons learned and the insights gained after decades of sociocultural research in the field. The acute politicization of the history and memory of communist regimes in Eastern Europe have further undermined the adoption of critical perspectives on the region's recent past: At a time when the legacy of communist regimes in Eastern Europe has become a matter of political dispute, unreflective and simplified models of totalitarianism have invaded public

[5] For the application of the concept of totalitarianism to Soviet studies, see for example Zaslavsky 2003. Born in 1937 in Leningrad, Zaslavsky emigrated from the Soviet Union to Canada and pursued an academic career abroad in the field of Soviet studies. On his life and scholarly legacy, see Piffer and Zubok 2011.

discourses as well, being used as a tool for legitimizing new political elites, who capitalized on their anti-communist (yet not always democratic) agenda.[6]

It is only recently that new approaches to the history of communist regimes attempt to depart from rigid political science regime models by either abandoning the concept of totalitarianism (e.g., by "going beyond" it, as in Geyer and Fitzpatrick 2009) or by rescuing it from the blind alley of "modelmania" (Sartori 1993), trying instead to recast its meaning by focusing on new modes of social action and party organization which aimed to create a new type of human being (for a critical review, see Roberts 2009). To substantiate this view, researchers do not emphasize only technologies of domination based on repression and violence but also mechanisms of mass mobilization and consensus building under the communist rule. Under the impact of the linguistic, cultural, and anthropological turns, students of communist regimes explore these issue by focusing on new research themes, such as: ideologies, political languages, and political cultures; the circulation of political ideas and printed artifacts; demographic, eugenic, racial, or biopolitical policies; official rites and rituals and their role in the establishment of new forms of political religions, etc.

The New Sociocultural History, *Alltagsgeschichte,* and the Transnational Study of Socialist Dictatorships

There has recently been a disenchantment with the all-encompassing concept of culture and a renewed interest in the interplay between social and cultural history (Iordachi 2007-2008) resulting in studies of microhistory, everyday life, and forms of education and socialization in Eastern Europe under the communist rule. New social and cultural approaches to the history of communist regimes challenge mainstream research paradigms, which typically focus from a top-down perspective on state and elite agencies, by redirecting historical research toward the study of everyday life. To this end, New works have deconstructed ways of life, living conditions, fashion and dress, leisure, tourism, consumption, sexual habits, and childcare under communist rule, illuminating thus the complex web of heavily ideologized everyday practices.

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6) For a paramount museal representation of the Cold War theory of "unitotalitarianism," applied to the history of Hungary, see the House of Terror Museum (Terror Háza Múzeum), website address: *www.terrorhaza.hu*.

Where does this drive for comprehending the history of everyday life in communist societies derive from? What are its historiographical implications? Three interrelated yet distinct theoretical-methodological schools have been crucial in helping new sociocultural histories of communist societies to go beyond the realm of elite politics: the German historical anthropological approach of *Alltagsgeschichte* (Lüdtke 1995), Italian-French approaches to microhistory (Certeau 1984; Muir and Ruggiero 1991; Revel and Hunt 1995; Revel 1996) and the Anglo-American new cultural history focusing on everyday practices (Hunt 1989; Bonnell and Hunt 1999).

First, a main laboratory of historiographical innovation in the field of the sociocultural and everyday life history has been represented by the German scholarship on the history of the GDR. The process of German unification, in particular, has posed pressing questions concerning the history of East German socialism, the "second German dictatorship": How can the relative stability and "longevity" of that regime be explained? What was the level of social mobilization and public participation in the regime's political agenda? Why and how did the Communist regime collapse? Such questions were subject to ample public and scholarly debates, and to answer them scholars turned increasingly their research focus toward various aspects in the daily life of ordinary people and their interaction with state institutions. In doing so, they have been able to provide a more detailed and nuanced picture of the history of the East German "modern" or "protective dictatorship" (Lüdtke 1982, 1994; Kaelble, Zwahr, and Kocka 1994; Jarausch 1999). These everyday life histories of the GDR were profoundly influenced by the theory and method of *Alltagsgeschichte*, which advanced an alternative model for studying modern dictatorships, different from the methods employed in the fields of political history, the history of ideas, "social scientific history" as practice by the so-called "Bielefeld school" of history, and sociology. Everyday life historians in Germany treat microanalysis as a tool to assess historical experiences and investigate the construction of meanings, patterns of behavior, and the symbolic orders of ordinary lifeworlds (Lüdtke 1982, 1994; Eley 1995). In their view, *Alltagsgeschichte* is more than an approach to the material living conditions of the past; it is rather a research perspective which enables scholars to reconstruct entire systems of historical experiences (Dehne 1995). Microanalysis thus becomes a key interpretive tool in the attempt of the historians of daily life to decenter the focus of investigation and to "interrupt" the flow of official narration. By lowering down the scale of investigation, scholars can thus illuminate patterns of individual and collective

behavior and gain deeper insights into the ways of life of ordinary people (Kaschuba 1995). It is important to note, however, that the methods and theory of *Alltagsgeschichte* were first developed with the aim of studying the history and legacy of the Nazi regime, focusing mainly on strategies of survival, accommodation, or resistance to the Nazi rule(Niethammer 1983; Lüdtke 1993). In this respect, *Alltagsgeschichte* was conceived as an alternative political history, which aimed at giving voice to the oppressed and the underrepresented in history following the model set by E.P. Thompson in studying the genesis of the English working class (1963). The German *Alltagsgeschichte* thus differs from Anglo-Saxon approaches to the history of everyday life. British and American studies have been mainly interested in how ordinary social practices are deeply intertwined with ideological discourses; to illuminate these phenomena, they focus on micro-strategies of power, illuminating the way in which political content and ideological meanings were created and recreated through micro-practices in everyday life (Crowley and Reid 2002; Kiaer and Naimark 2006).

Studies of East German socialism from the perspective of daily life have also had a deep impact outside Germany, influencing a new generation of social and cultural historians in East-Central and South-Eastern Europe, trained mostly abroad, who promoted interdisciplinary methods of research in close interaction with external scholarship. These scholars became gradually interested in the "small," the "mundane," and the "insignificant"; consequently, their attention shifted toward the study of various aspects of daily life, such as dachas, chatas, youth labor or pioneer camps, private apartments, pubs, markets, streets, factory halls, etc. These scholars of "provincialism," as they are often called, paid increasing attention to local communities and individual lives rather than to elite political figures. They devoted laborious research attention to the deconstruction of living conditions, fashion and dress, leisure, tourism, consumption, sexual habits, childcare, and ways of life (Marković 1996; Jarosz 2000; Kelly 2002; Duda 2005; Majtényi 2005; Mazurek 2005; Brzostek 2007; Tóth 2007).

The new scholarship focusing on daily life has to nevertheless tackle numerous methodological and theoretical questions in dealing with historical comparisons and transnational entanglements: What is the relationship between microhistory, on the one hand, and world history, transnational history, and regional history, on the other? What are the specific methods pertaining to transnational history? What is the role played by cultural history and everyday life in transnational approaches? These

questions are not easy to answer; whereas the large-scale comparisons of patterns of regional modernization have a long and well-established methodological tradition (see above), the methodological tool bag necessary for comparing small units is so far less articulated. For most scholars, the focus on small communities in reconstructing layers of sociocultural meaning is not, in itself, a form of transnational history; on the contrary, the need to contextualize the phenomena encountered in small research units may actually tempt scholars to place their investigation in the immediate local or national contexts, thus ignoring larger transnational linkages. Other researchers argue, however, that microhistory requires more than a zooming in and out of the scope of inquiry: in order to fully reconstruct the behavior of individuals or a small group of actors, researchers often have to explore the formation of sociocultural networks across national borders (Ginzburg 2005).

Three main transnational approaches have recently emerged to cope with these challenges in the field of communist studies. A first approach consists of in-depth *comparative* investigations of various sociocultural *milieus*, such as professional networks, family- or kinship-based networks, rural societies, urban housing districts, or specialized institutional settings in universities, schools, and factories (Brenner and Heumos 2005; Schuhmann 2008). Although this approach does not consist of a novel set of research methodologies, it poses at least two major heuristic advantages. First, it focuses on "manageable" research units, which scholars can feasibly "carve out" and analyze in existing social environments. Second, it draws on compatible and thus comparable transnational research units, since similar intellectual, social, or generational milieus emerged in Soviet-type societies across the region. John Connelly's comparison of university milieus in postwar Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR is an illustrative example of the heuristic potential of such an approach (2000; see also Connelly and Grüttner 2005). By providing a thorough description of the intellectual networks, cultures, and mentalities of university milieus in these three national contexts, Connelly was also able to identify broader if divergent trajectories of Eastern European ways of building socialist dictatorships. Likewise, the comparison of state institutions of culture or propaganda, such as, for example, the reorganization of academies of sciences under communist rule (David-Fox and Péteri 2000) and the politicization of history writing or the status of revisionist intellectuals under state socialism (Behrends 2006; Górny 2008, 2012; Kopeček 2009; Kolář 2012), provide valuable comparative insights into the similar structures of socialist states but also the

heterogeneous national cultures and historical legacies that communist policymaking had to tackle.

A second transnational approach is to focus on globally relevant events or trends that impacted various national contexts. Researchers employing such an approach regard important historical dates—such as 1918, 1945, 1968, and 1989—as transnational, European, or even global formative events. By adopting a transnational event-centered perspective, researchers can track down the cross-national circulation of ideas related to a specific event and assess the multifarious impact these ideas had on various groups or networks. Through the investigation of personal contacts and exchanges, scholars can reconstruct larger transnational networks, which in turn enable them to prove the porous nature of the seemingly rigid and impenetrable state borders or even of the Iron Curtain itself (see Péteri's concept of "nylon curtain," 2004). The social and political movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, in particular, were inherently global, having multiple linkages beyond the Iron Curtain. Recent works amply document the fact that activists within various official or non-official movements in Poland, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, or Hungary were able to develop and maintain important contacts with Western European and North American like-minded individuals (Bren 2004). The events of 1968, most notably, have recently emerged as a main "test" case study for the articulation of comparative narratives of contemporary European history, enabling scholars to identify multiple forms of interaction between East and West (Horn and Kenney 2004; Danyel 2008; Klessmann 2008; Gyáni 2008). Moreover, recent works on communist Eastern Europe have managed to move beyond the rather simple task of uncovering transnational linkages, instead directing their attention toward processes of forging transnational identities and the ways in which socialist citizens positioned themselves within an emerging pan-European political platform or in the wider global context of postcolonial struggles (Kenney 2010: 184–187). As a historical landmark, the events of 1968 have thus become a crucial topic by means of which to "Europeanize" contemporary history, on par with the previous grand comparison between fascism and communism or the comparisons of wartime (1914–1918, 1939–1945) and postwar (1945–1989/1991) periods.

A third transnational research trend combines novel social and cultural methodologies, such as shared/entangled history, history of transfers, and *histoire croisée* (Espagne and Werner 1988; Paulmann 1998; Zimmermann, Didry and Werner 1999; Middell 2000; Elkana 2002; Lepenies 2003; Ther 2003; Werner and Zimmermann 2004; te Velde 2005; Werner and

Zimmermann 2006) with an interest in the history of Eastern European socialist states. Although arguably still in a nascent phase, this trend exemplifies ways in which transnational research can generate novel perspectives on communist states. To illustrate the analytical potential of this trend for the study of communist societies, we focus on four main areas of investigation: new perspectives on Sovietization; studies of violence; generational history; and urban history.

One research field that is particularly prone to new transnational approaches, and thus deserves special treatment, is the Sovietization of Eastern Europe. Early works on Sovietization had a tendency to treat Eastern European "satellite" regimes as colonial "carbon copies" of the Soviet model in view of their quasi-complete dependency on Moscow (Raditsa 1950; Senn 1958; Fedynskyj 1953; Staar 1962). They also focused preponderantly on the Stalinist period, emphasizing almost exclusively the forms of political repression and physical violence that accompanied the forceful imposition of the Soviet model. Gradually, the assumption of a fully planned, monolithic and all-embracing implementation of a Soviet model "from above" has been modified to allow for a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted, open-ended, and even multidirectional nature of political transfers in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe.[7] Several novel comparative insights into the nature and dynamics of the process of Sovietization should be highlighted in particular. First, scholars tend to approach the Sovietization of post-1945 Eastern Europe from a diachronic perspective, by comparing it with similar campaigns that took place in interwar Soviet Union (e.g., in Central Asia, the Caucasus, etc.), or in the territories annexed during World War Two (the Baltic States, Western Ukraine, Poland, and Moldova). Second, although the Sovietization of Eastern Europe was, without doubt, a direct outcome of the military occupation of the region and its forceful incorporation into the Soviet camp, the new scholarship underscores the fact that the process did not consist solely of coercive but also consisted of voluntary forms of political emulation (note, for example, the self-Sovietization of Yugoslavia). Third, the process of Sovietization did not simply entail the adoption of an

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[7] For early Sovietization within Soviet Russia, see Borys 1980. For regional perspectives, see Jarausch and Siegrist 1996; Lemke 1999; Mertelsmann 2003; Apor, Apor, and Rees 2008; and Tismăneanu 2009. For a comparative perspective on Sovietization in education, see Connelly 2000; for the Sovietization of agriculture in post-1945 Eastern Europe, see Iordachi and Bauerkämper 2013.

ideologically driven legal-institutional model of societal organization based on the dual party-state structure, but was also conceived as an alternative strategy of economic modernization based mainly on collectivization, socialist industrialization, and urbanization. Fourth, in the sociocultural sphere, Sovietization entailed the adoption of a peculiar way of life and everyday practices leading to the creation of the "new man." Often, these practices were not simply handed down by authorities through official propaganda channels but were also the result of the intensive state-sponsored exchanges and interaction between Eastern European and Soviet activists or technocrats at lower echelons. Fifth, and equally important, while the power relations between Soviet Union and Eastern European countries remained highly unequal, one should not rule out the existence of practices of unequal negotiation, adaptation to local conditions, or even innovation in Marxist-Leninist practices in the "satellite" countries. From this perspective, new approaches to Sovietization no longer assume an unidirectional, preset transfer of ideas, institutions, and practices from the USSR to its satellites, but take into account a wide-scale convergence of policies between communist dictatorships, which allowed for a multilateral process of learning, alteration, and adaptation of the Soviet model, including also transfers from one satellite to another or from them back to the Soviet Union.

The study of various forms of violence and the institutional setting of physical violence is another important theme that stimulates cross-national research. The renewed interest in practices of violence in communist dictatorships is linked to the more general wave of sociological and historical studies on modern violence. The recent scholarship on violence has moved away from the traditional social science understanding which tended to focus on large-scale practices of physical, emotional, and verbal abuse in order to construct a comprehensive *structural* understanding of coercion in modern societies (Galtung 1969). New works on violence criticize the traditional "structural" approach to violence as being too vague and elusive. They argue that, while pretending to cover virtually each and every aspect of social life, structural approaches to violence in fact conceal the distinct modes of violence employed by various state institutions or sociocultural groups. In addition, the concept of "structural violence" also tends to refer to institutional and thus largely impersonal sociopolitical mechanisms of violence. In doing so, the structural approach often neglects issues of agency and the uneven distribution of violence, obscuring the question of which groups commit violence and which groups are

vulnerable to coercion. In contrast, building on research on the micro-technologies of power and corporeal practices (e.g., Laqueur 1990)— inspired by the work of Michel Foucault (1979, 1988–1990)—the recent scholarship on violence attempts to recast the concept by focusing on micro-practices of physical and psychological violence. To this end, scholars explore distinct modes of inflicting physical harm by various agents and the vulnerability of particular individuals and groups to organized or spontaneous violence. In doing so, they are able to underscore the multiple linkages between social and political practices of coercion and the structure of modern states and their repressive institutions (Lindenberger and Lüdtke 1995; Mazower 2002; Behrends 2013).

These works have established physical violence as a central research topic on the functioning of twentieth-century European societies; they have also inspired new microhistorical approaches to the topic of violence in communist societies. Until recently, works on violence in Eastern European communist dictatorships have mostly focused on large-scale campaigns, regarded as an indispensable means of institutionalizing postwar political dictatorships. Scholars have so far explored the manner in which mass killings, mass rapes, internments in labor camps, show trials, and political crimes *were embedded* in the social and political matrix of socialist dictatorships. In contrast to large-scale approaches to violence, new works on the topic posit that research on *micro-practices* of violence can better expose the hierarchical power structures in the everyday life of socialist dictatorships, illuminating the way in which "ordinary citizens" constructed or perceived schooling, family life, the military experience, or physical punishment and discipline through corporeal practices (Grift 2012).

Another emerging theme of sociocultural study is that of generational history, more broadly, and the socialization of the new generation, in particular (Nebřenský 2011a). Recent works on generational history argue that propaganda and indoctrination are not sufficient explanations for the cultural profile of youth under state socialism; instead, young people's strategies of societal integration are approached against the background of daily life under socialist dictatorships. The succession of different socialist generations is also problematized: whereas the first postwar generations seemed to be forged together by a common antifascist legacy, the bonds among members of subsequent age cohorts in socialist societies appear to be more complex (Yurchak 2006; Goltz 2011). New research on these topics focus on the relationship between postwar generations and the emerging

global movements and ideas, exploring in particular the impact of New Left theories, social Catholicism, lifestyle movements, and anti-technological or ecological ideologies (Gildea, Mark, and Warring 2013).

The growing field of urban history, focusing on towns and cities as comprehensible units of investigation, has also generated important comparative research results. Building upon earlier research in socialist cities (see the pioneering anthropological work by Kotkin 1995), recent transnational projects approach the history of cities as symbolic sites of communist urban planning and laboratories of the new society (Horváth 2004; Kladnik 2009; Nebřenský 2011b; Lebow 2013). Such approaches can potentially generate a fertile new field of comparative research on communist studies as they increasingly interact with an emerging new agenda of transnational urban studies, which promote a new understanding of urbanism and modern urban development as the conundrum of various transnational actors and processes, such as cross-border migration, transnational social and political activism, and the cross-fertilization of various subcultures coexisting side by side in modern metropolises (Smith 2000).

In sum, what is the impact and prospect of transnational history on comparative communist studies? Surely, as the participants to a 2006 *AHR* forum have pertinently pointed out, there is the growing danger that transnational history becomes a buzzword, "more a label than a practice, more expansive in its meaning than precise in its application, more a fashion of the moment than a durable approach to the serious study of history" (*AHR* Conversation 2006: 1441). Yet, as in other research fields, transnational approaches to communist studies would open up "a world of comparative possibility" (2006: 1444), enabling historians to revisit, with fresh eyes, old themes and topics of investigation. There are signs that this effort is under way. Socialist political cultures are explored, more and more, within the broader European context as laboratories which created genuine cultures of transnationalism and forged new types of identities and political subjectivities. Surely, due to the lack of Eastern Europeans' regular physical encounters with Western or Third World activists during the Cold War, these transnational identities and solidarities often remained "imagined" or "virtual"; yet they undeniably produced new understandings and concepts of political action, social activism, and cultural creation that contributed to the transformation of the cultures and politics of socialism. From these multiple perspectives, East European socialist dictatorships appear less isolated and more transnational in character than previously thought in terms of key issues such as the circulation of ideas, goods, and

technologies. On this basis, scholars are thus able to challenge the traditional understanding of communist states as isolated entities, highlighting instead the long-term impact of cross-border linkages and transfers on sociopolitical developments within the Soviet camp.

Although transnational approaches to the history of communist regimes in Eastern Europe are still in a nascent phase, we argue that recent historiographical trends open up multiple ways to study Eastern European history beyond the confines of national history. On the one hand, new studies on Eastern European communist societies relate domestic developments to wider phenomena taking place within the former Soviet bloc. On the other hand, they relocate the postwar history of the Soviet camp within the broader context of European and global history. In so doing, transnational research perspectives affect the way in which comparative communist studies relate to the general European history; this reassessment of the status of the field is intimately linked with Central Europe's re-positioning in the contemporary mental maps and symbolic geographies of Europe. As it is well-known, the concept of Central Europe has a long and highly disputed history, marked by a great number of rival geopolitical visions, from the Habsburg vision of Central Europe advanced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the Hungarian *Kárpát-medence* (Carpathian Basin), the German *Mitteleuropa* on the eve of the First World War, and the French-dominated *L'Europe Centrale* in the interwar period (Iordachi 2012). After 1945, following the Soviet occupation, the concept of Central Europe was de facto purged from the Cold War political vocabulary, the region being forcefully incorporated into the larger Soviet-dominated "Eastern Europe" (on the history of Eastern Europe as a regional label, see Wolff 1994; Neumann 1999). The concept of Central Europe was revived in the mid-1980s by anticommunist *émigré* intellectuals and dissidents (see Schöpflin and Wood 1989; Judt 1990; Le Rider 1994; Todorova 1997; Ash 1999; on the historical regions of Europe, see Halecki 1950; Szűcs 1988). In academia, the post-1989 reemergence of Central Europe as a distinct historical region led to the gradual detachment of Central European studies from the Cold War research framework of "Russian and East European studies" and their incorporation into the umbrella of European studies. From this perspective, the reaffirmation of Central Europe's distinct identity and historical legacy has undoubtedly had a positive impact on communist studies, since it facilitated the integration of the history of communist regimes in this region within the wider context of European history; yet it has also led to the gradual isolation of Central European communist studies from the

related field of Soviet studies, often accompanied by a parochial tendency to retreat to the national history (on Russia/Soviet Union as Central Europe's "constitutive other," see Neumann 1993; on the Balkans, see Todorova 1999). Against this background, transnational comparative perspectives are able to redress the balance between national, regional, and continental studies, by concomitantly re-linking the history of communist Central Europe with that of the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and with the general continental history, on the other. In line with recent calls for the "Europeanization" of the history of the twentieth century (Fulbrook 1993; Hirschhausen and Patel 2010), the firmer integration of the regional history of the former Socialist camp within the broader continental context can contribute to a more complete understanding of Europe's historical evolution and its legacy, by reconceptualizing it in terms of pan-continental experiences and linkages (Jarausch and Lindenberger 2007).

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The current journal issue groups together contributions delivered at the international seminar entitled "Comparative Studies of Communism: New Perspectives," organized by Pasts, Inc., Center for Historical Studies, Central European University, Budapest (27–29 May 2010),[8] and which counted as the Third Annual Conference of the OSI-CEU Comparative History Project.[9] Unlike other seminars on the topic, the conference did not focus on a particular event or aspect in the history of the communist regimes in East-Central Europe. Instead, it invited the participants to reflect on their uses of

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[8] For the full conference program, see http://pasts.ceu.hu/events/2010-05-27/comparative-studies-of-communism-new-perspectives. The Conference ended with a seminar focusing on "Teaching and Researching the Comparative Communism Studies in East-Central Europe: Challenges and Prospects," attended by students and researchers from Central and Eastern Europe.

[9] The Comparative History Project (2006–2010) was organized by the History Department and Pasts Inc., Center for Historical Studies, and sponsored by the Higher Education Support program of the Open Society Institute. The project aimed to contribute to the placing of the teaching of, and research in, comparative history firmly on the agenda and into the curriculum of universities in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. To this aim, the project assisted the development of a set of courses on comparative history within a set of target departments in Eastern Europe, with CEU acting as the core of this regional consortium, developing a set of teaching materials on comparative history, such as a textbook and syllabi on the theory and methodology of comparative history for the use of partners in the consortium, and, last but not least, developing a vibrant network of scholars working on comparative history by means of workshops and annual conferences.

the comparative method and other related approaches. At first, the variety of research perspectives and case studies represented at the conference seemed to have a "destabilizing" effect on the participants. Gradually, the contributors managed however to identify a common theoretical and methodological ground, in line with the main aims of the conference. Overall, the conference confirmed, yet again, that comparative history is indeed a difficult genre and that, in general, historians tend to use the comparative method implicitly rather than explicitly. But it has also highlighted the continued relevance of the comparative method for the field of communist studies and the heuristic advantages posed by the application of new transnational approaches to the "entangled history" of communist regimes.

The current special issue is made up of four articles and a debate on the downfall of communist dictatorships. The four articles focus on markedly different case studies and chronological periods, and are animated by different disciplinary fields and research methodologies; yet, they all explore new comparative approaches to the study of communist regimes and their legacies. In the first article, Jan C. Behrends places the discussion of communist regimes' campaigns of legitimization within the post-1945 framework of European *Staatswissenschaft*. Confronting the Soviet interwar state-building campaign with the post-1945 reconstitution of Central European states under Soviet hegemony, Behrends points out that Stalin gave up on the universalistic ambition of expanding the USSR in the post-WWII period and fostered instead the formation of subordinated yet autonomous *communist nation-states*. Exploring comparatively the case studies of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, and the GDR, Behrends argues that, despite its ideological emphasis on working class internationalism, communist statehood remained fundamentally tied to national traditions and the institutional framework of modern nation-states.

John Lampe applies new relational research perspectives to the well-established but arguably rather conservative field of diplomatic history, exploring external and domestic factors shaping Yugoslavia's foreign policy in the Cold War context. Lampe looks specifically at the interdependence between Yugoslavia's relations with the USA, the USSR, and the new Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during three key periods: the beginning of Yugoslavia's NAM policy in 1961–1963; NAM's lack of response to the Czechoslovak crisis in 1967–1971, and its implications; and Soviet efforts to control the NAM in 1976–79. Overall, Lampe argues that Yugoslavia's growing economic relations with the NAM members had long-lasting international but also domestic

consequences, obstructing Slovenia's and Croatia's ties to Western European partners, while also dividing Muslims from Serbs in Bosnia.

Muriel Blaive provides comparative microhistorical perspectives on patterns of remembering communism in two settlements, the Czech town of České Velenice at the border to Austria, and the Slovak town of Komárno at the border of Hungary. Using the tools of anthropology—most notably James Scott's analysis of domination practice—Blaive documents the gap between people's experiences of the communist régime, on the one hand, and official "history politics" centered, in the Czech context, on the "*totalita*" theory.

Bogdan Cristian Iacob offers an informative historiographical survey of recent transnational tendencies in the field of communist studies, analyzing their methodological implications and assessing their impact on the field. Special attention is devoted to several recent research projects which have introduced new transnational perspectives in the study of communist regimes. Iacob concludes that a transnational "rereading" of communist regimes might not change "radically" our historical picture of the communist era, but would certainly enrich and add nuance to our understanding of the multiple interactions between the former communist regimes and the outside world.

Overall, besides making significant contributions to their respective subfields of studies, these articles, and the accompanying debate on the downfall of communism, illustrate ways in which the comparative method and new approaches to transnational history can fertilize communist studies, leading not only to novel insights but to the transformation of the field itself.

Constantin Iordachi, Péter Apor
Editors of the Thematic Issue

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