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Neither help nor pardon? Communist pasts in Western Europe

Kevin Morgan¹

‘History to the defeated’, the British poet W.H. Auden ended his poem *Spain* in 1937:

May say Alas but cannot help nor pardon.²

Auden’s sentiments are worth revisiting in the context of communism and the politics of remembrance, and his poem exemplifies the compulsion felt by many in the 1930s to ‘take sides’ in what seemed a battle of epic simplicity. Spain, of course, was the crucible: Europe’s front line between progress and reaction, democracy and fascism, culture and barbarism – every human value with its antithesis. Its international resonance was symbolised by the 32,000 volunteers of the International Brigades, whose cause Eric Hobsbawm described sixty years later as the only one ‘which, even in retrospect, appears as pure and compelling as it did in 1936’.³ This was not the collective memory of communists like Hobsbawm alone. What this memory of Spain symbolised was rather the identification of the communism with a broader movement of anti-fascism which in one register has been foundational in the modern idea of Europe. In countries like France or Denmark, with their own experience of occupation, its moral was to some extent subsumed in a national memory of resistance to which communists could justifiably stake their own claim.⁴ In Hobsbawm’s Britain, on the other hand, almost the only public memorials to communists are those dedicated, usually by Labour-controlled local authorities, to volunteers who fought in Spain. Embedded in the collective memory of the left, communism in this context represents a combative commitment to a cause that now seems vindicated by history. François Furet, acknowledging this as part, but only part, of the picture, characterised it as a ‘democratic form of heroism’ moved by what he conceded was a genuine ‘passion for liberty’.⁵

Spain, however, has also been accorded a very different place in the European memory of communism: as marking the closest that western Europe came to the establishment of an authentic Soviet police state. In part, this may be traced to a left-wing counter-narrative of disillusionment in the Spanish republic. Epitomised by Orwell’s contemporaneous *Homage to Catalonia*, and latterly by Ken Loach’s film *Land and Freedom*, this was perhaps most authoritatively voiced in the account of the veteran Spanish marxist, Julien Gorkin, *Les Communistes contre la révolution espagnole*.⁶ However, where Orwell rather discountenanced the bogey of a ‘Russian dictatorship’ in Spain, in the wider pathology of stalinism that has since developed the possibility is taken altogether more seriously.⁷ In *Le Livre noir du communisme*, published in 1997 and providing in Stéphane Courtois’ introduction a classic text of remembrance as indictment, this is precisely how Spain is remembered. If a passion for liberty played any part in the the Moscow-instigated International Brigades, it does not register here. Certainly, it is not identified with the communism professed by so many of the volunteers and the vast majority of their organisers. Spain instead points once more a starker moral: that of ‘the impossibility of separating the legal and criminal enterprises of the Communists in their pursuit of their political objectives.’⁸ In *Le Livre noir du communisme*, Spain provides the one sustained attempt to catalogue communist misdeeds in Western Europe.⁹

Here, in the shape of anti-fascism and totalitarianism, are two very different perspectives within which one might locate Europe's communist past. The issue, in terms of a Europeanisation of commemorative practices, is not just whether these two perspectives can be reconciled, or whether one can be extended a legitimacy that is denied the other. If both the heroic and anti-heroic view have ample foundation, this does not mean that the experience is the same everywhere; and within the context of a Europeanisation of remembrance an obvious issue is the congruence of east and west. In particular, if Spain in all its ambiguity remains the closest to a West European experience of communism as delivery or repression, this only underlines how different this experience is from that of the East. In recent discussions of the communist past, and certainly in recent historical scholarship, the significance or otherwise of this difference has been a central issue. Either communism represented a single, indivisible phenomenon, whose primary function everywhere was as the client or instrument of communism in power; or else it was more complex, diverse and even contradictory in its values and its practices, and thus implicitly in the forms of remembrance which are now appropriate to it. Translated into nearly thirty languages, *Le Livre noir* has been the most provocative and internationally successful expression of the first view. Providing a sort of counter-narrative acknowledging social and political complexity, another French production, *Le siècle des communismes*, provides in the very plural form of its title a riposte to Courtois' perceived reductionism.¹⁰ Whether it lends itself so readily to conventional forms of commemoration is another matter.

Variations of this debate can be traced throughout western Europe. However, the French case more than any other has been of genuinely European scope. On the one hand, books like *Le Livre noir* and Furet's *Le passé d'une illusion* have had a remarkable resonance internationally, and writers like Furet and Alain Besançon have provided a reference point for discussions of the communist past in countries like Poland and Romania.¹¹ By the same token, the prestige of France's many intellectual sympathisers with communism has again attracted wide attention internationally.¹² At the same time, emigrés like Tzvetan Todorov and Jorge Semprun have made influential interventions in the discussion of memory and totalitarianism in France itself.¹³ In respect of the communist past, Paris thus remains a sort of capital of Europeanisation, while at the same time France has its own historical memory of communism, with which only Italy and, more remotely, Germany can be compared in Western Europe. Not only was the French communist party (PCF) a notable player in the pre-war popular front and the French resistance; in the early post-war period, it was actually the largest political party in France and had the largest communist electorate in western Europe. Since the late 1970s in particular, it has suffered a precipitate decline. Nevertheless, unlike the majority of its west European counterparts, it continues to describe itself as a communist party and self-consciously deploys a sense of the past as a source of political capital.¹⁴ For all these reasons, it is the French case that provides the basis for the present discussion

A communist *Historikerstreit*

In discussions around these rival perspectives of anti-fascism and totalitarianism, probably the central issue has been the alleged equivalence, or alternatively antagonism, of communism and fascism.¹⁵ The idea of such equivalence was strongly asserted in early expositions of the concept of totalitarianism, by writers like Hannah

Arendt. As cold war anxieties then abated during the post-Stalin era, the stronger variants of totalitarian theory prevalent in the 1950s came in for increasing academic criticism. Nevertheless, it was intrinsic to the terms of the debate that fascist and communist regimes at least made appropriate comparators.¹⁶ Differences should not be overlooked, not only between these types of regime, but between the different manifestations of communism in power. Retrospectively too, remembrances of communist rule can range from outright repudiation to considerably more ambivalent responses – to say nothing of the singular case of Germany, where the former GDR was reabsorbed into a unitary state that both culturally and ideologically was firmly located in the West. Nevertheless, common to all these cases communism primarily represents a delimitable past, a discrete period of government, a particular phase in the national history – or else its interruption or appropriation. With the possible exceptions of Czechoslovakia and the GDR, where Weimar-era communists enjoyed considerable real and symbolic authority,¹⁷ communism in Eastern Europe had little prehistory as an oppositional movement. As Andrzej Paczkowski writes of Poland, its ‘real experience’ began only with its establishment as a system of government.¹⁸ If its memory is thus coterminous with the divisions of the cold war, its crimes and achievements alike can be traced through the relatively clear lines of accountability, if only to the past, of a party in power. Whether sites like the Berlin wall, or Budapest’s House of Terror, tell the whole story of this past can be left for others to debate. What is undeniable is that they lend themselves to, and perhaps demand, relatively conventional forms of commemoration in which victim and perpetrator are clearly delineated.

Viewed in Paczkowski’s terms, communism in the West was a real experience that never actually happened. Its memory is one, not of the past, but of a contested present, an unrealised future, and of the much debated connections to the ‘actually existing’ socialism of the East. Practices of remembrance have inevitably reflected this. It has become a commonplace to refer to the asymmetrical character of the European memory of totalitarianism. Alain Besançon has even alleged a sort of ‘amnesia’ regarding communist crimes which he contrasts with the ‘hypermnnesia’ respecting those of nazism. Overlooking the element of exaggeration that might be forgiven in such a statement, within a west European context it would be grotesque to liken the victims of communism to those of fascism. Essentially, there are no sites lending themselves to the sacralisation of the system’s victims, nor obvious counterparts to the resistance and anti-fascist museums that can be found in western Europe. Communist power, however it is judged, was more like colonialism than the First World War or Holocaust, in that its sites and symbols of oppression were located elsewhere. Unlike colonialism, so were its centres of power and decision-making. There is not even the direct material legacy which can be, and increasingly is, linked to the proceeds of colonialism and African slavery. The asymmetry of remembrance is thus in part a refraction of the asymmetry of lived experience. Its prevailing practices have been those involving the vaulting of geographical distance through the mobility of film crew, artefact or text. Amnesia and hypermnnesia – exactly as in the case of African slavery – is partly a question of location.¹⁹

There has also been a sort of *Historikerstreit*, but of a distinctive kind. Marc Lazar, a frequent collaborator of Courtois, has noted that critics of the *Livre noir* approach have not by and large sought to deny or minimise the crimes of communist regimes.²⁰ In the *Livre noir* itself, the longest, most powerful and arguably most authoritative section is Nicolas Werth’s meticulous documentation of Soviet political violence, ‘A state against its people’. Nevertheless, it was not this section that gave

rise to controversy, but Courtois' slighter and more polemical observations seeking to assimilate the experience of western communists to this wider experience of repression. 'Revisionist' accounts of the origins and extent of the Soviet terror are therefore not the principal issue here. Rather, it is the validity of a sort of counter-memory, epitomised by Spain and 'anti-fascism', but extending to communists' oppositional activities on issues ranging from anti-colonialism to social and economic rights.

The idea of coming to terms with Europe's communist past is thus spatially as well as politically ambiguous. The centrality of the Holocaust to European remembrance lies precisely in this: not just its moral enormity, but the fact that it took place within and across Europe. Extended more generally to the victims of fascism, one remains confronted with a pan-European experience which with certain exceptions – notably Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia – was confined within Europe's borders. Communism, on the other hand, as represented in the *Livre noir*, was not an exclusively or even predominantly European phenomenon. According to Courtois' calculations, only one per cent of its victims fell within Europe outside of the former USSR; and only one per cent of *this* figure – Courtois suggests some ten thousand deaths – through 'the international communist movement and communist parties not in power'. Though Courtois says little regarding his methods of calculation, it appears that this includes the deaths of foreign communists and sympathisers in the USSR, which certainly ran into several thousand and should not be minimised.²¹ Nevertheless, adopting the crude statistical measures by which Courtois provoked such controversy, the figure is a fraction of that of a single conflict like the Algerian war or the current war in Iraq. In Courtois' international inventory of such losses, western Europe is not an item.

The same is true of north America, Australasia, south Asia and (if we exclude Afghanistan) the Middle East. Nevertheless, the paradox of the European memory of communism is that communism is seen as representing a development of European ideas and aspirations in a way that was not true of its other secondary theatres of action. 'Europe, mother of Communism, was also its principle arena', Furet wrote justifying his own exclusively European focus. It was 'the cradle and the heart' of communist history, and in the view of its inventors it was in western Europe specifically that its destiny would be decided.²² The focus of the *Livre noir* was geographically wider, and less concerned with the idea (or illusion) of communism that can be traced back to the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, Courtois too wrote within an avowedly west European context. If Europe, as he put it, had 'set itself the task of reconstructing popular memory', then a memorial to communism's victims was necessary as part of this enterprise.²³ Citing Todorov, Courtois urged this as a way for west Europeans in particular to move beyond preoccupations with their 'own' national misfortunes. Superficially calling forth an expansive regard for human suffering, the injunction was at the same time circumscribed in an intensely political way. Not only were the examples he provided of European misfortunes exclusively ones of right-wing dictatorship; the device of the black book – one borrowed, be it noted, from the communists²⁴ – meant that other regions like Latin America and Africa. were depicted as if principally afflicted by dictatorships and insurgency from the left.

Though global in its frame of reference, the argument thus derives from political divisions within western Europe itself. Courtois, significantly, is an established historian of the French communist party. Furet acquired his international scholarly reputation through his work on the French revolution. Both wrote out of

their own experience as supporters of communist systems, Courtois as an ex-maoist and Furet as a former PCF member. In this, they may be grouped with an influential roll-call of ex-communists – Annie Kriegel, Edgar Morin, Philippe Robrieux and Pierre Daix are others – whose literature of disillusionment had such an influence in French intellectual circles in the 1980s and 1990s. Seeking a reckoning with a communist past, which was also their own personal past, stalinist crimes provided material for the indictment. Nevertheless, its primary target was that of the complicity and extenuation of those crimes by sections of the European left. Against the positive associations of communism with anti-fascism and other grassroots mobilisations, these were anti-anti-fascists who argued for the indivisibility of communism as a political phenomenon, linked, as Courtois put it, by a ‘sort of genetic code’ rooted in 1917.²⁵ How, he argued on another occasion, should one concede any positive aspects to the PCF’s history ‘when these were established on 15 million zek corpses, deaths from famine and victims of the Great Terror in the USSR, or the extermination of a fifth of the Cambodian population’?²⁶ This ‘established on’ suggests a certain imprecision in such writing: as when Courtois simultaneously suggests that Europe ‘played host to the twentieth century’s many tragedies’ while producing figures suggesting that more were killed under Mao than under Stalin and Hitler combined.²⁷ Even so, it is the character of this relationship between Europe – and more specifically the European left – and the acknowledged tragedies of stalinism that is the crux of the debate regarding the communist past.

Complicity and teleology

The argument of communism’s indivisibility rests on two foundations: that of complicity, or its international character; and that of teleology, or the unrealised communist future. The notion of complicity was based on the strong codes of discipline that united the world’s communist parties, and the acceptance of a political command system centred on Moscow. The close, continuous and unequal character of the relations between ruling and non-ruling communist parties was a central theme in popular studies deriving from hitherto closed archives. French examples of a voluminous literature include Karl Bartošek’s *Les aveux des archives, Prague-Paris-Prague, 1948-1968*; a documentation of financial links introduced by the veteran Comintern historian Branko Lazitch, *L’argent de Moscou*; and *Hôtel Lux*, a translation of the exposé of the Russian journalist Arkadi Vaksberg.²⁸ Western communists from this perspective lay somewhere between the categories of perpetrator and bystander familiar from discussions of nazism; and it was on this basis that Courtois invoked the Canadian legal code to include as crimes against humanity ‘*providing encouragement for de facto complicity*’ or ‘*being an accessory after the fact*’.²⁹ It is true that few went this far. Werth, Courtois’ most important contributor, publicly dissociated himself from the reduction of communism to criminality.³⁰ Jean-Louis Margolin, who in the *Livre noir* urged prosecution of crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge, took care to distinguish between different communist parties and even regimes. In Finland, home of a relatively successful communist party, but also of a far larger number of victims of stalinism than Italy or France, proposals for the trial of communist crimes provoked considerable public discussion. Here too, however, no serious suggestion was made that such a process should extend to mere accessories after the fact.³¹

Linked with the notion of a genetic code, the argument of teleology was that every communist movement represented a different stage of advance along what was fundamentally a common line of development. This, for example, was the significance of the Spanish republic, seen as ‘pretotalitarian’ and a laboratory for the methods of rule elsewhere under the direct protection of the Red Army.³² Following Annie Kriegel, communist parties themselves were also seen as displaying the classic features of totalitarian movements; and the PCF’s own codes of discipline and denunciation were seen as lacking only the death penalty.³³ Through this teleology two distinct views of the communist past were rejected. One was that of dissenting communist currents positing an earlier period of revolutionary principle that was to be betrayed by Stalin. In Martin Amis’s *Koba the Dread*, a vulgarised Anglo-Saxon variant of the *Livre noir*, caustic assessments of Stalin were thus incongruously intermingled with a sort of score-settling with Amis’s Trotskyist student acquaintances – who, whatever their shortcomings, can have had very little time for Stalin.³⁴ By the same token, idealisation or even recognition of communists’ oppositional activities was vitiated by their latent totalitarianism. If communists had sometimes defended democracy, Lazar suggested, it was simply the better to destroy it in due course.³⁵ Memory was thus not only actively constructed but teleological and even prophetic. According to Mao’s most chilling adage, it was on the blank page that the most beautiful poems were written. According to this teleological view of the communist past, every page was already written and it was only a question of how far the story was allowed to unfold.

While communism retained some credibility as a possible future, both positive and negative readings were identified with their realisation under communist regimes. As Lazar again points out, however, communism no longer represents this future and the PCF’s retention of an overt communist identity is based on a powerful sense of collective memory.³⁶ Even in their heyday, communists in countries like France and Britain saw the past as a field of struggle in which they made some of their most effective intellectual interventions.³⁷ What, however, became apparent with the marginalisation of communism was an increasing preoccupation with the historical memory of communism itself.³⁸ The belief and insistence that a positive legacy remained extricable from the memory of communism in power, was not confined to communists themselves. The sentiments of socialist premier Lionel Jospin, who in 1997 was reliant on the support of the communists, are often cited in this connection; and Lazar expresses unease at how its status as a party of opposition lent the PCF an appearance of innocence and incorruptibility.³⁹ In fact the emphasis was more on the irreducibility of communism simply to its negative features, and its characterisation essentially as thwarted totalitarianism.⁴⁰ Neither innocence nor incorruptibility in any absolute sense were usually claimed; and yet the counter-suggestion of responsibility for crimes committed only counterfactually again serves in a west European context to problematise the notion of a simple equivalence between communism and fascism. Quite plausibly regarding communism in power, Alain Besançon, who has written extensively on the Gulag, asks how much it really matters if a victim is killed with good intentions or with evil ones.⁴¹ But where only the intentions existed, and not the killings, the distinction is a basic one.

Memory and amnesia

Rather than the issue of memory or amnesia, communism's intensely politicised character raises issues of what should be remembered, by whom, and in particular by what public or semi-public agencies of Europeanisation. In the Furet-Lazar presentation communism itself is pre-eminently a *lieu de mémoire*, while amnesia, as Furet once observed, was a virtue of democracies.⁴² It is true that there is often a defensive and introspective aspect to communist forms of remembrance. Chastened by seemingly definitive setbacks, communists in a country like Italy used the memory of Spain to reaffirm the movement's humanitarian credentials, while extensive media coverage of the fiftieth and sixtieth anniversaries of the Soviet repression in Hungary was counterbalanced in communist circles by celebrations of the International Brigade.⁴³ More than just a private affair, however, such efforts could also provide a counter-narrative to orthodox national histories containing their own blank spots. Simplified accounts of wartime resistance, for example, have tended to write out or play down the communists' involvement exactly as they have the extent of quiescence or collaboration on the part of other political movements and the state itself.⁴⁴ Within a domestic political context, episodes like the popular front could also be reclaimed as part of this radical counter-narrative. In France, one of the first publications to receive the imprimatur of the new Fondation Gabriel-Péri – named after a famous communist resistance martyr – was devoted to the reclamation and vindication of this legacy on its seventieth anniversary.⁴⁵

The issue of colonialism and colonial wars is especially significant as introducing crimes in exactly the sense used in texts like the *Livre noir*, but perpetrated by or on behalf of liberal democracies. One might imagine that Besançon's universalist categories might equally be extended to these conflicts. In practice, however, influential treatments like Tony Judt's discussion of French leftist intellectuals seem to refute any possible equivalence between these acts of killing or torture and those committed under stalinism. Indeed, it is characteristic of the ideological interdependence of remembrance and amnesia that Judt simply passes by these former crimes as if irrelevant to his subject.⁴⁶ In the work of Tzvetan Todorov, which is least of all vitiated by mere point-scoring or body-counting, the possibility of such extensions is clearly indicated.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, in the contemporary politics of memory, it is those most indulgent to the memory of the French left, notably communists themselves, who are often those most committed to remembering the victims of French colonialism. At the same time, in so seemingly comprehensive an exploration of the national memory as Nora's *Lieux de mémoire*, scathingly described by Perry Anderson as an *Union sucrée*, Algeria and Indochina barely even figure.⁴⁸

Where communism has had a significant political and intellectual presence, its memory therefore represents, not just an unrealised vision of the future, or the compromising associations of a sometime communist present, but an alternative version of the national past. Even in Britain, historians emerging from the communist party exercised an influence unrivalled by communist intellectuals in other fields. In France, where the revolutionary origins of the republic offered more than just the radical counterpoint of history from below, communism embodied an affirmation of the Jacobin legacy whose plausibility or otherwise is central to the very identity of the nation. That these issues are interconnected is especially evident in Furet's work. Leaving the PCF in 1956, Furet's whole professional career was to be founded on the attempted wresting of France's revolutionary legacy from a Jacobin-socialist reading of which communists had become the recognised standard-bearers. Furet was not concerned to challenge the communists' credentials to carry this legacy; rather the reverse. Unlike a good deal of international communist historiography, he had no

desire to extricate a purer ideal of the left from its entanglement with bolshevism or stalinism.⁴⁹ Instead, rather after the fashion of J.L. Talmon's *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952), communism provided the sequel which could be used to bury or delegitimise a much longer radical or republican tradition. Seen in this context, *Le passé d'une illusion* was Furet's final exorcism of the ghosts of '93. Perhaps it can be linked with the anti-marxist revisionism of works like his *Penser la Révolution française* (1978). More certainly, it provides a sort of sequel to the co-authored *La République du centre* (1988) in which Furet depicted the fate of communism and of the republican tradition in France as if almost inextricable. In announcing the simultaneous ending of the 'long' cycle of revolution commencing in 1789, the shorter cycle of Bolshevism commencing in 1917, and the shorter ascendancy still of the recent 'union of the left', Furet dispatched all at once the idea of the left, of socialism and of the revolutionary republic. All that remained was the *République du centre* itself; and though Furet took care to distinguish this from pure neo-liberalism or the end of ideology, it was clear that the passing of this twentieth-century illusion meant the passing of what he called the 'French exception' and thus a whole package of ideas linking egalitarian values with the activist state.⁵⁰

This was also the message of Lazar's *Le Communisme: une passion française*. A nuanced example of history as autopsy, on its first publication in 2002 the book dismissed the illusion of an egalitarian modernity, at least as something capable of generating the economic benefits of capitalism. Reissuing the book with a new foreword in 2005, Lazar did not retract that position, but did acknowledge the resilience of what he saw as communist values and mentalities as transmuted by a new generation of anti-liberal and anti-globalisation activists.⁵¹ With the French rejection of the draft European constitution, in large part for a 'social' Europe, *la République du centre* seemed more fragile than had once appeared; perhaps by extension *l'Europe du centre* suffered a setback too. Ironically, it is 'capitalist modernity' which is now taken to represent a sort of historical inevitability to which politics are seen as representing a necessary form of accommodation.⁵² Embedded in and legitimised by the past, it is the alternative social agendas of the left which serve as a reminder of values and culture as profoundly rooted in European history as the notions of pluralism, diversity and contestation on which they depend and to which they give expression.

The idea of a Europeanisation of the politics of remembrance is in this respect ambiguous. As representing a wider frame of reference for these debates, and in particular as an antidote to the amnesia that supports collective memory on both sides of the ideological divide, it is both salutary and necessary. However, Europeanisation can also suggest a parallel with the forms of economic or institutional harmonisation with which the concept has hitherto largely been identified. It can also recall an earlier wave of nation building, including the selective national myths whose potential proved so destructive, and which today require, not 'enlargement', but critique and transcendence.

Tzvetan Todorov has wisely counselled: 'Memory ... should not be used only to celebrate one's own heroes, to mourn one's own dead, and to stigmatise the wrongs committed by others.'⁵³ More than that, it should prompt reflection on the very notion of one's 'own' and the 'others', whose uncritical acceptance lay behind so many twentieth-century tragedies. While the European remembrance of the Holocaust obviously meets Todorov's criteria, even this depends on not so constructing these wrongs that they are always committed by others. Britons need to remember the Holocaust as a European phenomenon; elsewhere collaboration and collusion may

need most to be remembered; but for a German historian like Ernst Nolte – whose *European Civil War* appeared in France with a preface by Courtois – the Europeanisation of the Holocaust at the expense of its German character amounts to moral and political apologia. Memory, like every other relationship – in this case that between ourselves and the past – depends on position. Remembering Europe’s civil war through wrongs that are always committed by others is simply memory as a tool for forgetting.

Amis suggests that Robert Conquest, pioneering historian of the Soviet terror, should have entitled his memoirs *I Told You So, You Fucking Fools*.⁵⁴ Furet, for all his sophistication, elaborated the same basic theme; Courtois was missing only the expletives. There are three possible dangers with this. The first is that the example of communism may be used to delegitimise a wider oppositional politics of the left which has played and continues to play an important role in the development of a democratic political culture. As Geoff Eley puts it in recovering this legacy in his *Forging Democracy*: ‘During the 1990s new amnesias brought some essential histories under erasure.’⁵⁵ A second danger is that this amnesia extends, not only to the oppositional movements with which Eley is concerned, but to the unheroic attributes of our ‘own’ heroes, be these the European empires or the authoritarian or collaborationist regimes which predated communism in many parts of eastern Europe. The third danger, perhaps cutting deepest, is that the dichotomous construction of one’s ‘own’ and the ‘other’ is left undisturbed: exactly as in Amis’s recent fiction, where the theme of the Soviet labour camp is addressed almost interchangeably with the contemporary threat of Islam.⁵⁶

Remembrance of the victims of communism is a moral and political imperative. In the spirit of Todorov’s dictum, I have suggested that this responsibility falls particularly on those who identify with the socialist project in whose name these crimes were perpetrated and condoned.⁵⁷ In an imperfect world, they – which in this case means we – cannot simply be left to get on with it. On the other hand, the institutionalisation of a particular, generalised memory of communism, whose role in European history is as complex as is that history itself, may well appear as an instrumentalisation of history in the name of remembrance. Neither help nor extenuation are so much the issue as the question of who gets to play the role of History.

¹ Thanks to Constantin Davidescu, Stephen Hopkins, Steve Parsons and Tauno Saarela for comments and/or information. The usual caveats regarding responsibility apply.

² W.H. Auden, *Spain*, London: Faber & Faber, 1937, p. 12.

³ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: the short twentieth century, 1914-1991*, London: Michael Joseph, 1994, p. 160.

⁴ See Rémi Skoutelsky, ‘Militants et militaires: les volontaires des Brigades internationales’ in José Gotovitch and Anne Morelli, eds, *Militantisme et militants*, Brussels: EVO, 2000, pp. 51-2.

⁵ François Furet, trans. Deborah Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: the idea of communism in the twentieth century*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 261, 264.

⁶ Julien Gorkin, *Les Communistes contre la révolution espagnole*, Paris: Belfond, 1978. Gorkin was a partisan of the the POUM.

⁷ For Orwell’s assessment see his ‘Looking back on the Spanish Civil War’ (1943) in George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Harmondsworth: Penguin edn, 1966, pp. 225-47.

⁸ Stéphane Courtois and Jean-Louis Panné, ‘The shadow of the NKVD in Spain’ in Stéphane Courtois et al, *The Black Book of Communism: crimes, terror, repression*, Cambridge Mass. & London, Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 33-52.

- ⁹ See also for example Ronald Radosh et al, eds, *Spain Betrayed: the Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- ¹⁰ Michel Dreyfus et al, eds, *Le siècle des communismes*, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2000.
- ¹¹ See for example Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, 'Fascism and communism in Romania: the comparative stakes and uses' in Henry Rousso, ed., *Stalinism and Nazism. History and memory compared*, Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004, pp. 172 and 191, n. 66.
- ¹² Well-known studies include David Cauter, *Communism and the French Intellectuals*, London: Deutch, 1964; Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect. French intellectuals, 1944-1956*, Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1992.
- ¹³ See for example Tzvetan Todorov, trans. David Bellos, *Hope and Memory*, London: Atlantic Books, 2003.
- ¹⁴ See Marie-Claire Lavabre, *Le fil rouge. Sociologie de la mémoire communiste*, Paris: Presses de la FNSP, 1994.
- ¹⁵ Fascism is here used indiscriminately to include all its variants, including Nazism.
- ¹⁶ See for example the broadly anti-totalitarian interpretations presented in Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, eds, *Stalinism and Nazism: dictatorships in comparison*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- ¹⁷ Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries. German communists and their century*, Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 262.
- ¹⁸ Andrzej Paczkowski, 'Nazism and communism in Polish experience and memory' in Rousso, *Stalinism and Nazism*, p. 253.
- ¹⁹ From the author's perspective of a British schooling of the 1970s, there was no obvious amnesia regarding stalinism, which was studied both as history and through literary texts like *Animal Farm* and *Ivan Denisovich*. Regarding African slavery, for which Britain bears a somewhat more direct responsibility, it was an altogether different matter.
- ²⁰ Lazar, *Le Communisme: une passion française*, Paris: Perrin, 2005 edn, pp. 13-14.
- ²¹ See for example the estimates provided in Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern. A history of international communism from Lenin to Stalin*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996, pp. 148-9; Mikhail Panteleiev, 'La terreur stalinienne au Komintern en 1937-1938: les chiffres et les causes', *Communisme*, 40-1, 1994-5, pp. 37-53. Even where relatively tiny numbers of individuals were involved, their fate has naturally attracted wide attention; see for example Francis Beckett, *Stalin's British Victims*, Stroud: Sutton, 2004; Ole Sohn, *Fra Folketinget til celle 290: Arne Munch-Petersens skæbne* Copenhagen: Vindrose, 2000 edn.
- ²² Furet, *Passing of an Illusion*, p. x.
- ²³ Courtois, 'Introduction' in Courtois, *Black Book*, p. 28.
- ²⁴ Probably the first example, aimed at 'keeping alive the memory of the criminal acts of the Nazi Government, was *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag*, prepared by Otto Katz for the World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism in 1933.
- ²⁵ Courtois, 'Conclusion: why?' in Courtois et al, *Black Book*, p. 754.
- ²⁶ See for example Courtois' review of Marie-Claire Lavabre and François Platon, *Que reste-t-il du PCF?* in *Communisme*, 76-7, 2003-4, pp. 252-7.
- ²⁷ Courtois, 'Introduction', p. 28. One may also note the almost casual variation between 15 million Soviet victims and the 20 million claimed in *Le Livre Noir*.
- ²⁸ Victor Loupan and Pierre Lorrain, *L'argent de Moscou. L'histoire la plus secrète du PCF*, Paris: Plon, 1994.
- ²⁹ Courtois, 'Introduction', p. 11.
- ³⁰ For Werth see 'Le communisme, entre analyse scientifique et vision policière de l'histoire', *Le Monde*, 21 September 2000.
- ³¹ Thanks to Tauno Saarela for information about the debate in Finland.
- ³² Furet, *Passing*, pp. 256-7; Courtois and Panné, 'Shadow of the NKVD', pp. 335-6.
- ³³ Lazar, *Le Communisme*, pp. 106, 108ff, 116.
- ³⁴ Martin Amis, *Koba the Dread. Laughter and the Twenty Million*, London: Vintage edn, 2003.
- ³⁵ Lazar, *Le Communisme*, p. 106.
- ³⁶ Lazar, *Le Communisme*, p. 210.
- ³⁷ See for example Bill Schwartz, "'The people in history": the Communist Party Historians' Group, 1945-56' in Richard Johnson et al, eds, *Making Histories. Studies in history-writing and politics*, University of Minnesota Press, 1982.
- ³⁸ See for example Julian Mischi, 'La révolution au nom de la tradition: mise en scène historique de l'implantation communiste dans l'Allier' in Maryline Crivello et al, eds, *Concurrence des passés*.

Usages politiques du passé dans la France contemporaine, Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence: 2006, pp. 119-29.

³⁹ Lazar, *Le communisme*, pp. 10-16.

⁴⁰ Jean Vigreux and Serge Wolikow, 'Introduction' in idem, eds, *Cultures communistes au xx^e siècle. Entre guerre et modernité*, Paris: La Dispute, 2003, pp. 9-10.

⁴¹ As cited, for example, by Martin Malia in the foreword to Courtois, *Black Book*, p. xv.

⁴² Furet, 'La France unie ...' in Furet, Jacques Julliard and Pierre Rosanvallon, *La République du centre. La fin de l'exception française*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, p. 19.

⁴³ See Skoutelsky, 'Militants et militaires'; Gavin Bowd, *L'interminable enterrement. Le communisme et les intellectuels français depuis 1956*, Paris: Biographe, 1999, pp. 199-200.

⁴⁴ See Pieter Lagrou, 'Victims of genocide and national memory: Belgium, France and the Netherlands 1945-65', *Past and Present*, 154, 1997.

⁴⁵ Xavier Vigna, Jean Vigreux and Serge Wolikow, *Le pain, la paix, la liberté: expériences et territoires du front populaire*, Paris: Éditions Sociales, 2006.

⁴⁶ See for example Judt, *Past Imperfect*, p. 173, where he refers to 'the crude "distributive justice" which placed on an equal footing mass murder and wage labor, political trials and the contradictions of liberalism'. Had Judt borne in mind the injunctions of Orwell's 'Politics and the English language' he might have been less inclined to write of the 'contradictions of liberalism' and readier to refer, for example, to 'torture in Algeria' or 'the use of napalm'.

⁴⁷ See for example Todorov, *Hope and Memory*, ch. 6.

⁴⁸ *London Review of Books*, 23 September 2004.

⁴⁹ Classic examples are Hermann Weber, *Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus. Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, Frankfurt/M, 1969; Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969 and more recently Pierre Broué, *Communistes contre Staline: massacre d'une génération*, Paris: Fayard, 2003.

⁵⁰ Furet et al, *La République du centre*, 'Avant-propos', pp. 9-12.

⁵¹ See Gilles Ivaldi, 'Beyond France's 2005 referendum on the European constitutional treaty: second-order model, anti-establishment attitudes and the end of the alternative European utopia', *West European Politics*, 29, 1, 2006, pp. 47-69. Ivaldi describes the PCF as the 'linchpin' of the left-wing campaign against the treaty.

⁵² On this issue, see my 'Rummaging in Trotsky's dustbin or What does the left need with history?', *Soundings*, 23, pp. 132-41.

⁵³ Todorov, *Hope and Memory*, preface to the English edition, p. xxi.

⁵⁴ Amis, *Koba the Dread*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy. The history of the left in Europe, 1850-2000*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. xi.

⁵⁶ See Daniel Soar, 'Bile, blood, bilge, mulch', *London Review of Books*, 4 January 2007.

⁵⁷ Kevin Morgan, 'Parts of people and communist lives' in John McIlroy, Kevin Morgan and Alan Campbell, eds, *Party People, Communist Lives. Explorations in biography*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2001.