CLUSTER: NATIONALISM, (ANTI-)COMMUNISM, AND VIOLENCE IN THE EUROPEAN COLD WAR

Researching the European Cold War: Nationalism, (Anti-)Communism and Violence

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John Lewis Gaddis, a doyen of US Cold War diplomatic history, observed twenty-five years ago that the end of the Cold War "revealed how durable national, cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic particularities really are; but that is only to acknowledge that they must have been present throughout the Cold War itself as they had been for decades, even centuries, preceding it."[1] His observation has rarely been followed up on in research on the history of the European Cold War. The subsequent proliferation of nationalism since the 1990s was rarely predicted during the short-lived, triumphant western euphoria of the early 1990s.

Addressing this gap in Cold War scholarship, the contributors to this thematic cluster explore how the national idea and nationalist ideology and practices were woven into Cold War societies. Spanning the timeline from the 1940s to the 1980s, the authors focus on the nexus between nationalism and violence in legitimatory politics in Greece, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria. The central question that binds the case studies together is how the national idea was a powerful force in Europe during the era of binary ideological thinking, when the world was "divided into two separate paths of political modernity and economic development."[2] Physical violence serves as the analytical prism to make the workings of nationalism in the service of both communism and anti-communism empirically visible. Physical violence was exercised, but it was also a symbol and a reference point: it was represented, reminisced, prevented, and instrumentalized in the Bourdieuian sense of the subtle exercise of power that co-opted the dominated into becoming the coproducers of their own submission.[3]

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[1] John L. Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford, 1997), 190.
[2] Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York, 2010), 1.
[3] Pierre Bourdieu, *Méditations pascaliennes* (Paris, 1997), 245.

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In civil-war Greece, the association between paramilitary violence and nation-building triggered social processes that would mark the postwar state for decades: Spyros Tsoutsoumpis analyzes in detail how the population was mobilized politically; how local authorities were militarized; how local political economies were fragmented. Focusing on the multiethnic region of Epirus in northwestern Greece, he shows how the presence of non-state armed groups enabled the Greek state to take hold even in its aloof border areas: among the peasants who had never trusted the state and ethnic minorities who had never been a more meaningful part of the Greek polity.

A scarce year-and-a-half after the junta usurped power in Greece in April 1967, Czechoslovakia was invaded by Warsaw Pact forces. By then, de-Stalinization had initiated a process of repluralization of Czechoslovak society, as Natali Stegmann forcefully argues in her analysis of the veterans' Association of Antifascist Fighters. By 1968, de-Stalinization had reached into the lower social strata as part of the communist reappropriation of the national body, which now was to be defended against Soviet, Stalinist violation. This included a re-interpretation of the early postwar decades. When the late-coming process of de-Stalinization was enforced, it grew into a conflict between Stalinist- and Marxist-oriented communist ideas and practices that were deeply entangled with nationalist ideas and aspirations.

If in Greece anti-communist forces successfully aligned violence against the left with violence against ethnic minorities during the civil war, Bulgaria in the mid-1980s saw a state-led attempt to "unify" the nation by curtailing minority rights and negating Turkish and Muslim identities. Nadège Ragaru examines how, between December 1984 and March 1985, about 800,000 Turks were forced to replace their names with Bulgarian ones and Muslim religious and cultural practices were forbidden. Resistance to this policy was brutally crushed. Ragaru focuses on an unusual analytical angle: The Bulgarian state heavily instrumentalized the cinematic industry to legitimize its anti-Muslim policies. She reflects on the interplay between physical and symbolic violence in late communist Bulgaria's efforts to "nationalize" its multiethnic citizenry, as mediated by the cinema.

The thematic cluster argues, with reference to Heonik Kwon's work, that east central and southeast European Cold War history, in analogy to other world regions, needs to be freed from the "mistaken uniform notion of the cold war."[4] The contributors show how nationalism—both in its Bourdieuian "innate" form and as a consciously employed political instrument—was connected to physical and symbolical violence in the complex field of tension between communist(-leaning) and anti-communist(-leaning) historical actors.

How rarely this has been accomplished is illustrated by the first sentence in a recent collective volume on *Writing the History of Nationalism*. The editors write that "*even* most of the Communist regimes, for as long as they existed, *developed* nationalist sentiment and ideas."[5] The reference literature accompanying this statement is more than twenty years old and thus indicative of the persistent need to methodologically *normalize* the nexus between the two major ideologies of the twentieth century for the post-1945 era. Highlighting, possibly unwittingly, the editors' outdated take, John Breuilly in the same volume explains that when he published his book *Nationalism and the State* in 1982, he, as many others, "had only been dimly aware of 'something in the air' which did not fit with assumptions that class mattered more than race, gender, ethnicity, or nationality, and that international relations primarily revolved around the supranational interests and values of the Cold War."[6]

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[4] Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, 8.

[5] Stefan Berger and Eric Storm, "Introduction: Writing the History of Nationalism—in What Way, for Whom and by Which Means?," in Stefan Berger and Eric Storm, eds., *Writing the History of Nationalism* (London, 2019), 1 (my emphasis).

Instead, nationalism was a forceful tool of both communists and anti-communists. This was true as much in Greece as it was true in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, where communist regimes emerged as a result of the Second World War. The point is to explore how exactly communists and anti-communists envisioned national identities, nationhood/statehood, and national policies. Even today, debates about the meaning of the twentieth century and of the Second World War and communism in particular, tend to be characterized by antagonisms strongly reminiscent of Cold War ideological imprint.[7]

What made appeals to the nation effective when ideologically bound to acts in favor or in defiance of communism? The authors answer this question analyzing the national idea both as a political ideology and as a discursive and imaginary pattern of everyday life.[8] Cold War statehoods, and by no means only those subjected to state communism, were characterized by binary patterns of thought. The features that went with it, such as nation and class, state and society, production and consumption, culture and ideology, could be profoundly contradictory.[9] If nationalism remained the ideological matrix that spanned Cold War divides, it is only logical that "communist regimes did not burn their national flags but emblazoned them with communist symbols."[10]

Nationalism proved to be a variably contingent force. Tchavdar Marinov and Alexander Vezenkov aptly note that "'communist nationalism' and 'nationalism after communism' were very different from the nationalisms that existed before communist rule."[11] By insisting on these differences,

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[6] John Breuilly, "Modernism and Writing the History of Nationalism," in Stefan Berger and Eric Storm, eds., *Writing the History of Nationalism* (London, 2019), 69; see also John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (New York, 1982).

[7] Sabine Rutar, "(Re-)Scaling the Second World War: Regimes of Historicity and the Legacies of the Cold War in Europe," in Xavier Bougarel, Hannes Grandits, and Marija Vulesica, eds., *Local Dimensions of the Second World War in Southeastern Europe* (Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019), 263–81.

[8] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, 1995); Yves Déloye, "National Identity and Everyday Life," in John Breuilly, ed., *The Oxford Handbook on the History of Nationalism* (Oxford, 2013), 614–31.

[9] Pavel Kolař, "Communism in Eastern Europe," in Stephen A. Smith, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* (Oxford, 2014), 203–19.

[10] Martin Mevius, *The Communist Quest for National Legitimacy in Europe, 1918–1989* (London, 2011), 14.

[11] Tchavdar Marinov and Alexander Vezenkov, "Communism and Nationalism in the Balkans: Marriage of Convenience or Mutual Attraction?," in Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova, eds., *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 2, *Transfers of Political Ideologies and Institutions* (Leiden, Netherlands, 2014), 470.

the authors to this thematic cluster clarify nationalism's contingent capacities: communist nationalisms during the Cold War harbored a Promethean dimension in that they professed an extraordinary ambition and diversity of means to mobilize entire segments of society, and to erase differences. *Anti*-communist nationalisms were coopted in similarly radical ways: Greece's civil war over what political format to install in the country was a particularly bloody expression of this.

Violence, as a regular tool of any ideologically inflected power exercise, is connected as much to nationalism as to communism.[12] If the state communist period has been treated by many as "not a period of history but rather an ideological condition of the mind," this is true for Greece's civil war as well.[13] Binary analytical epistemes that mirror the Cold War ideological divide have remained effective on many levels, and the distinction between "communism" and "anti-communism" still is applied in a normative manner.[14] Using violence as the prism through which to explore how nationalism was interlinked with (anti-)communism is thus an exercise in overcoming epistemic thresholds while addressing the complexities of power relations.

After 1945, the nation-state remained the normal state format.[15] As the authors show, nationalism could be put to a diversity of uses: it was used to counteract the Soviet superstructure in Czechoslovakia (Stegmann), to justify aggression towards national minorities in Greece and Bulgaria (Tsoutsoumpis and Ragaru), to (re-)define institutions and identities (in all three cases) and, not lastly, to empower anti-communism (also in all three cases). In Greece, where no communist state was established, the violent radicalization between the two sides led to a marriage between anti-communist paramilitary forces and the state, which was to characterize Greece as enduringly as state communism has characterized Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, as well as the latter's successor states. Nationalism was "the ultimate source of political legitimacy, . . . a readily available cognitive and discursive frame, . . . the taken-for-granted context of everyday life . . . the natural framework for all political interaction."[16]

Importantly, the three cases' geographical focus makes the Soviet Union, as actor and prime reference point, one player among others. In no way does it suffice to sum the three countries up as "satellites" and treat them as "smaller versions" of the USSR. Greece is no exception—rather, resorting to civil war over its post-world-war societal order, it proves the point. The specific historical trajectories of the three cases account for the differences in national policies and identity frames. They cover the period from the 1940s to the 1980s, thereby encapsulating the evolution between the immediate postwar era and the late socialist one. As a set, they disprove the notion of teleological development from "hard core" regimes to "softer" ones. They show the subtle changes within societies both in the workings of (anti-)communism and nationalism, and in the use or avoidance of violence. Rather than evolving in any linear way, these terms remained entangled throughout the Cold War, much as the specific nature of the ties between them changed.

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[12] Charles King, *Extreme Politics: Essays on Nationalism, Violence, and Eastern Europe* (Oxford, 2009); Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth, eds., *Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Eng., 2011).

[13] Gregor Feindt, "Making and Unmaking of Socialist Modernities: Seven Interventions into the Writing of Contemporary History on Central and Eastern Europe," in Petra Terhoeven, ed., *Victimhood and Acknowledgment: The Other Side of Terrorism* (Berlin, 2018): 134–6, quote 136.

[14] Rutar, "(Re-)Scaling the Second World War."

[15] See Parts II and IV in John Breuilly, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, aptly titled "Nationalism in a World of Nation States."

[16] Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, 3rd ed. (London, 2017), 2.

Albeit being "innate" to all societies, the national idea was used differently by the various actors under scrutiny. The binary ideological superstructure was painfully palpable everywhere and forcefully contributed to creating the grounds for nationalism's Promethean dimensions and for stark black-and-white world views, be they communist or anti-communist. Importantly, symbolic and physical violence need to be considered together in assessing these processes, as they were in continuous interplay. At times, there was a temporal coincidence, as symbolic violence could prepare the ground for physical violence. At other times, the looming threat of violence sufficed to actually *prevent* its exercise. The authors emphasize the heterogeneity of the interplay between symbolic and physical violence. Their contributions have been put in chronological order precisely to bring attention to the non-linear evolution of things throughout the Cold War.

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