

**Remarks on the Reception of *Le Livre Noir du Communisme*  
with special focus on Eastern Europe<sup>1</sup>**

Light may be shed on certain aspects of the presence of the communist past, essentially in Eastern Europe but also in France, if we look at the reception of a book that has created a considerable stir, as attested by both in the number of copies printed and the indignation, or, on the contrary, the enthusiastic support it has elicited: *Le Livre Noir du Communisme: Crimes, Terreur, Répression*<sup>2</sup>. The relations that the Eastern European countries have to their communist past vary greatly, as observable in their different ways of dealing with those responsible for acts of violence or human rights violations and members of the organized forces of repression. Germany on the one hand and Romania and Russia on the other represent extreme cases. In Germany, those responsible are treated in accordance with a legal code and institutions already in place, whereas in Romania and Russia former members of the state apparatus and forces of communist repression have benefited from a kind of immunity and continue their careers, in some cases all the way up to head of state. That situation is in turn radically different from the one to be found in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, where organized opposition to the communist power always existed, operating in such diverse ways as armed insurrection and mass political or union-based mobilization. The types of relation to the communist past, as expressed either in history books or, in some cases, the legal courts, may be seen as continuations of what the communist modes of functioning, and also of eroding and collapsing, were. In the case of Russia, we should not be deluded by the great number of dissidents active in the 1970s and 1980s: they in no way constituted a group with a shared ideological foundation (except for their hostility to the communist power in place) or a shadow political party with a program, and we must not imagine they were a real threat to the regime; moreover, their role in the disintegration of that regime was negligible. European communism died of its own contradictions, its inability to organize and control its own transformations, and Gorbachev's repeated decisions not to use massive physical violence to prevent the Germans, Hungarians, and later the Soviet republics from exiting the system.

In addition to presenting information about countries where local historians either had not worked or were prevented from working in depth, *Le Livre Noir du Communisme* provoked a series of debates on such questions as whether it was legitimate to speak of communist "crimes"--a question which in turn raises that of whether it is legitimate to prosecute members of a regime after its fall. But the disputes were especially intense on the book's drawing together of communism and Nazism, a parallel deliberately made by the the general editor,

<sup>1</sup> Ce texte est l'intervention prononcée lors d'un colloque organisé à l'Université de Cape Town par mon collègue de l'Université Laval, Bogumil Jewsiewcki, du 9 au 11 août 2000 : Memory and History : Remembering, Forgetting and Forgiving in the Life of the Nation and the Community. Les textes de ce colloque sont accessibles sur le site : <http://www.fl.laval.ca/cela/mémoire/histoire/confcapethm.htm>. Ont participé à cette conférence, notamment, Jacques Revel, Marie-Claire Lavabre, Achille Membe, Jeffrey Godfarb, Carol Gluck, Abherame Moussaoui, Olga Sezvena, Jeremy Cronin.

<sup>2</sup> Original in French. Published in English under the title *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Stéphane Courtois. Didn't denouncing communism as criminal and genocidal amount to relativizing Nazism? And yet could one refuse to grant the victims of communism the right to be heard and recognized as victims, independently of the groups they and their executioners respectively belonged to? Could the Shoah reasonably be made the reference for all twentieth-century crimes that seemed to resemble it? Before returning to these interrelated debates it is necessary to have some idea of the different ways the book was received in the countries of Eastern Europe.

First, a reminder. *Le Livre Noir du Communisme* is a collective work, edited, as mentioned, by the French historian Stéphane Courtois and published in 1997<sup>1</sup>. Its great success was accompanied with much highly contentious debate. Both the success and the debates may seem surprising, since most of the facts presented in the book are well known, though the opening of official archives starting in the mid-1980s had brought to light some new information. Moreover, the conflictual exchanges sparked by the work would seem to have already taken place. In developing their respective concepts of totalitarianism both Hanna Arendt's and Raymond Aron's fundamental move had been to link Nazism and Stalinism, not to mention Karl Kautsky, who long before had declared Mussolini to be aping Lenin.

Still, two important changes have intervened since the end of the cold war, when the Nazism-Stalinism link worked to disqualify Stalinism, namely its claim to legitimacy as the primary slayer of fascism. The first of these is the progressive affirmation by a number of authors--one of the most important being Claude Lanzman, French filmmaker and essayist, maker of the film "Shoah"--of the absolute singularity of the Nazi extermination of the Jews. If the Shoah as an event exceeds all historical explanation (without for all that making attempts at such explanation useless), because historical explanation is necessarily causal and establishes relations between things and is therefore, in this way of thinking, itself relativist, then the Shoah cannot be part of any larger group of events, a group "genocides" in the plural, or holocausts, or crimes against humanity. And if the Shoah is unique, then comparing it with the Russian Gulag or Pol Pot's massacres in Cambodia is more than an epistemological error; any such comparison becomes, whether deliberately or not, part of the same undertaking to annihilate the Jews.

The trial of the Nazi Klaus Barbie, followed by that of the Vichy official Maurice Papon, has tended to impose a new narrative of French history and of the intimacy of the Vichy regime's ties to the Nazi system. But the place occupied in official speeches and legal events by the Shoah have been of no political benefit to French communists, though they have long presented themselves as the fiercest opponents of Nazism--in what seems very like denial (in the psychoanalytic sense of the term) of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. Indeed, the collapse of the Soviet system upset the French communists' discursive strategy, making it possible to speak openly of the mechanisms of terror used in Eastern Europe and impossible, when Soviet leaders themselves were acknowledging it, not to recognize the violence committed by the communists. The blatant failure of the communist system has also completely drained such denial strategies of denial of any interest. Though throughout Western Europe the long decline of communism, has accelerated and been confirmed, in a few countries, such as France, the communists continue to play an important political role, precisely because of the institutional structure, which makes coalition alliances necessary. However, there is also a tradition of leftist anti-communism in France, which was in part what fueled the authors of the

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<sup>1</sup> Courtois' co-authors are N. Werth, F. Margolin, J.-L. Panné, S. Boulouque. Originally published by Robert Laffont in 1997, the book has been republished twice: first in the collection "Bouquins"; most recently in "Livre de Poche."

*Livre Noir*. The book has in turn been vehemently criticized by those who could be called anti-anti-communists.

In Eastern Europe the end of communism has not meant the end of communists and their ideology any more than in the West. Once again, the relation that inhabitants of the former communist countries have to their past is in no way homogeneous, any more than is the place occupied by former communists in these countries' ruling groups. Memory of communism is all the more complex in these countries for being linked to memory of the Second World War, German occupation, resistance and collaboration. It is worth noting that *Le Livre Noir du Communisme* was discussed in some of these countries as soon as it came out in French. Its publication had given rise to an intense debate in the French newspaper *Le Monde* and this debate was referred to in Eastern European review of the book. This in turn quickly led to its being translated--into Czech, Polish, Russian. The Russian edition includes as a subtitle on its printed cover a phrase that merely appeared on the detachable paper publicity announcement of the French edition: "85 million deaths."<sup>1</sup> Some Eastern European versions contain additions. Certain translations are preceded by a historical overview analyzing reception of the book in France and the countries where translations had already been published. Krystyna Kersten, for example, author of the preface to the work in Polish, applauds the French editor Courtois' intellectual courage but also makes clear what she sees as the limits of his approach. Her attitude may be qualified as ambiguous: the validity of the work is acknowledged but with restrictions, or rejected but with recognition of a certain legitimacy. The same kind of ambiguity may be found in another French collective work, edited by the French historian Henri Rousso: *Stalinisme et nazisme: Histoire et mémoire comparées* (Stalinism and nazism: comparative memory and history). This work is, among other things, a response to *Le Livre noir*'s move of likening the two systems. Rousso warns against historians who would be judges and rejects the way of thinking that has given rise to the call for a "Nuremberg trial for Communism"<sup>2</sup>. But Rousso also asked Pierre Hassner, a French politician in the line of Raymond Aron, to comment on *Le Livre Noir* as a whole, and Hassner expresses the view that Courtois' move was justified: "To situate crime at the center of Bolshevism, as *Le Livre noir du communisme* does, rather than at the center of communism in general or Stalinism in particular, [to situate it at the center of Bolshevism] as it is at the center of Nazism, seems fair to me on the condition that what we mean is not necessarily ordinary criminality ... but also the kind of transgression-induced intoxication in the name of what Hegel called "absolute freedom and terror."<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, in post-communist societies, memory of the past continues to be organized in large part around the battle against Nazism. While communism as a system benefited doubly in Europe from the Second World War--territorial expansion and increased legitimacy--these gains were paid for with vast numbers of human lives: the Soviets lost twenty million persons, more than twenty times the number of American losses. It is understandable that the Second World War is still highly visible in monuments, speeches, and images. While many of the ideological institutions and edifices aimed at imposing the single discourse of communism on the inhabitants have disappeared, that which concerns the Second World War has not been

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<sup>1</sup> The Russian translation was published in 1999, before the English version.

<sup>2</sup> Courtois does not, in fact, call for a Nuremberg trial for communism, but he does use the definition of the Nazis' crimes developed at this trial (see *Le Livre noir du communisme*, p. 16-17)

<sup>3</sup> P. Hassner, "Par delà l'histoire et la mémoire," in H. Rousso, ed., *Stalinisme et nazisme. Histoire et mémoire comparées* (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1999), p. 370. The text quoted by Hassner is from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, in a passage on the Jacobin Terror. Hegel defines a form of "fanaticism," where the desire for a universal void leads men to chop off heads as they might split a cabbage. On the link between fanaticism and totalitarianism see D. Colas, *Civil Society and Fanaticism: Conjoined Histories*, trans. Amy Jacobs (Stanford University Press, 1997).

fundamentally upset. The Lenin Museum and Mausoleum on Moscow's Red Square are closed, but the flames along the Kremlin's northern wall above the names of Soviet cities that were theatres of battle after 1941 are still burning. And in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, though there are only a few curious visitors to the dacha where in 1898 a gathering of young men founded the Russian Socialist Democratic Workers' Party (ancestor to the Soviet Communist Party), there are many more at the city's war museum, and every July 9 there is a parade to celebrate the Red Army's retaking of the city in 1944. Likewise in Saint Petersburg, though the name of the Kirov Theatre has been changed, the sculptures on the city hall recalling that the city received the Lenin Award for its heroism during the 1941-1944 German siege, are still in place. As is the monument in homage to the resistance, erected to the west of the city, facing the invaders. As are monuments to the liberating Red Army in Budapest and Sofia.<sup>1</sup> In Saint Petersburg, however, there is also a museum devoted to the poet Anna Akhmatova where we can see a photograph of her first husband, the poet Gumilev, executed in the first years of the regime for anti-Bolshevik conspiracy. And in Moscow the statue of Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Cheka police, has been removed from the square in front of the Lubyanka, headquarters of the KGB. And in Minsk everybody knows of the mass grave discovered on the outskirts of the city containing the bodies of 200 000 persons executed by the communists.<sup>2</sup>

There is therefore a potential upset of memory (potential because a part of the population cannot assimilate the new meanings produced by the end of communism; for some, Stalin remains a hero, Gorbachev a traitor, and Yeltsin a Trotskyite). It is beyond the scope of this text to describe all such upsets to memory brought on by the collapse of communism. However, it is not too much of a generalization to say that in Russia there is a tendency to turn toward the past rather than valorize the new post-communist present. What is known there as the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, together with the other wars of Russian history, are being invested with the role of collective unifier: at the Western exit from Moscow, around the nineteenth-century triumphal arch symbolizing Russia's victory over Napoleon, a large visiting area has been created, including most significantly a church. The calendar has been reconstructed: holidays commemorating the October Revolution have become "Reconciliation Days"; Moscow has recently celebrated 800 years of existence as a city and Saint-Petersburg is preparing to celebrate its third century. In the undertaking of reconstructing the past, the project of canonizing Tsar Nicholas II (after burying the remains of the imperial family in Peter and Paul Fortress, the symbolic heart of the third Rome) is highly significant. The Orthodox Church presents itself as that institution which can incarnate and realize the

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<sup>1</sup> For these museums, monuments, and other sites I prefer not to use Pierre Nora's notion of "lieux de mémoire" (realms of memory). If we qualify communism as an ideocracy--a term that may already be found in the writings of Nicolas Trubetskoi (most known for his linguistic work) in the 1920s but that has also been used by many other thinkers (Berdiav for example) and theorized by Ernest Gellner in *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Enemies*--then communist discourse should be considered one which forbids the uttering of any other discourse rather than being itself a positive object of belief. Everyone in Poland knew that the Soviets, not the Nazis, had executed the Polish officers at Katyn, but no one had the right to say it and thus to utter a discourse different from the official one. In such conditions the question of whether an utterance is true or false cannot be posed. Totalitarianism, we might say, following Lyotard, imposed one, invariable Narrative.

<sup>2</sup> Zyanon Pasniak, the archeologist who discovered the mass graves outside Minsk and now a militant nationalist, writes as follows: The people in all the burials were killed by being shot in the head (mostly in the back of the head, the occipital region) with Soviet Nagan-type revolvers.... The burials, which we excavated, were of small or moderate dimensions. The number of corpses which, according to our calculations, might have been buried in such graves ranges from 150 to 260 corpses per burial. If we assume a mean of 200 corpses per grave and simply multiply up by the number of graves visible today, we get 102 000 persons. But the true number of burials must have been 2 to 2.5 times greater and therefore must have reached 220 000 to 250 000" (Kurapaty, in Belarusian and English [Minsk and New York: Belarusian Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1993], p. 27 and pp. 24-25).

permanence of Russia.

In this context publication of *Le Livre Noir du Communisme* does not appear a major event. Whereas the Czech version was in all Prague bookshop windows as soon as it came out and the Romanian version rapidly sold out, the book has been much more discreetly presented in Russia. There are at least two explanations for this. First, it has less in the way of revelations about Russian history than the history of other countries; moreover, the communist past has not been legally condemned in Russia, nor has there been any public accounting of individuals' role. It became possible to criticize the regime publicly in the late 1980s: publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* was authorized, and Party reviews published documents showing the brutality of the regime from its earliest days. It was one such review--the titular head of which was the then General Secretary of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), Mikhail Gorbachev--that published a 1922 order by Lenin calling for the liquidation of the greatest number of Orthodox priests in the shortest amount of time possible, under cover of the famine then ravaging the countryside. We should also underscore, however, that there has been little institutionalizing in Russia of the work of memory of, and historical research on, the Soviet past. The contrast is flagrant between the power of the present-day communist party, which wins 20% of the popular vote, controls approximately 100 newspapers, still possesses a significant part of the real estate property it had when it was in power, and an association such as Memorial, which played an important role when Gorbachev was in power. For obvious reasons, the weight of the Soviet past in Russia is greater than in most of the other former communist European countries, and at the same time, there is the least amount of public reflection on that past. With the exception of Memorial, created in 1988 and engaged in a major undertaking of information collection and publication, there is no research institution in Russia, or institution charged with examining political or legal responsibilities. Memorial was active from its founding (at that time its best-known activist was Andrei Sakharov), and the candidates it endorsed for the 1989 legislative elections won, most often against CPSU candidates. But after 1991 its role diminished and today the group that has kept it going, namely by constituting an archives, is divided on the issue of Chechnya. Still, it was on the initiative of Memorial that in June 2000 a worldwide trial of communism was officially begun in Lithuania, by a significant gathering of human rights activists. There is, however, no official authority for looking into who decided to make war against Afghanistan in what circumstances, who decided to intern opponents in psychiatric institutions, or into the attempted coup d'état of August 1991. The change from the KGB to new security institutions was actually effected within a certain continuity. And as is well known, with the exception of a number of new individuals' rise to economic power, all administrative responsibilities at the national and regional levels and in the army remain in the hands of former Party members who have not the least intention of prosecuting the ancien régime from which they benefited largely in the past and of which they are now the heirs. Similarly--and contrary to what happened even in Bulgaria, where the Party remained in power for a long time after the collapse of the Soviet system--Russian university personnel have not been called into question: new educational establishments have been opened but the old ones continue to operate, with the same professors, some of whom once taught Marxism-Leninism or CPSU history. The Soviet past has instead undergone a large-scale cosmetic operation, symbolized by the vastly expensive reconstruction of the Church of Christ the Savior, near the Moscow Kremlin.

In Germany we encounter what may be described as the opposite situation. There we find a whole series of measures aimed at dealing with the past proactively rather than just letting time pass--breaks with the old system, namely with the communist legal procedures, and the replacing of communist-inspired institutions and political personnel with Western ones. The

almost immediate encompassing of the former GDR within a democratic republic that itself arose from a forced process of breaking with its past--the Nazi past--has meant that criticism of communism has gone further here than anywhere else. The country that successively experienced Nazi and communist totalitarianism is also the country that has become the most integrated--and the quickest--into the framework of democracy while dealing the most rigorously with its past. It is also in Germany that a book has been devoted to the debate around *Le Livre Noir du Communisme*, a book whose very title is a potential source of contention: *Der rote Holocaust und die Deutschen: Die Debate um das "Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus"* (The red Holocaust and the Germans: the debate on the Black Book of Communism).<sup>1</sup>

The expression "red Holocaust" is not used in Germany alone, and the idea and term "communist genocide" are widespread in Eastern Europe-- in Romania, for example, where, together with Bulgaria, the communists remained in power longest after the collapse of the USSR. We know that the liquidation of Ceausescu was orchestrated as a kind of trompe-l'oeil operation by the Romanian communists: the botched trial and live execution of the dictatorial couple saved the rest of the Romanian political and police apparatus. It wasn't until 1996 that the democratic opposition won legislative elections (and democracy there is still extremely unsure on its feet). Nonetheless, *Le Livre Noir* was translated a few months after its publication in French and quickly sold out. The Romanian version included a special chapter on repression in Romania written by the same group of historians that publishes documents on the communist period in Romania and has recently created, through its own initiative and fund-raising efforts, a memorial museum to the victims of communism. Some of these historians have been accused of practicing "justice-meting" history, historical study whose main purpose is to mete out justice.<sup>2</sup> And the dangers of this have been pointed out. In effect, during the Second World War Romania was the country with the most widespread participation by local authorities and individuals in the destruction of the Jews after Germany.<sup>3</sup> And the opinion has been expressed that what we are seeing in Romania is a tendency to prosecute communism more determinedly than Antonescu's fascism, or even Nazism: a whole vocabulary, often associated with the Shoah, is being used against communism in a way that could, it is feared, "make commonplace the genocide of the Jews."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. Moller, ed. *Der rote Holocaust und die Deutschen: Die Debate um das "Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus"* (Munich 1999). Much of the debate in this book concerns the similarity between the theses of Stéphane Courtois and those of the German historian Ernest Nolte, a question which deserves a talk in itself. Nolte's theses are not the same today as they were during the 1980s "historians' dispute." As for Courtois', they are often more formulae than demonstrations.

<sup>2</sup> Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine uses the expression "exigence justicière" critically in her contribution to Rousso, ed., *Stalinisme et nazisme: "Fascisme et communisme en Roumanie,"* p. 218. But we may rightly ask whether it is possible to place history outside the field of value judgments, to imagine, as Laignel-Lavastine seeks to do, opposed processes of memory, understood to construct a collective identity, and history, understood to construct truth (an obvious trap in her conception is, of course, that in the very adoption of the posture of "truth-constructing historian" against the "historian-meter-out-of-justice," one becomes the latter). The author reports that in 1991 the Romanian parliament observed a minute of silence in homage to the memory of the fascist nationalist Antonescu. If this did happen, it was during a late-night parliamentary session with a very small number of legislators present (information given to me by researchers at the Ecole Doctorale en Sciences Sociales of Bucharest). In his commentary on Laignel-Lavastine's text at the end of the work, Pierre Hassner wonders whether the author has not let herself get "carried away," whether she has not "passed a bit too quickly over the legitimate reasons for comparing the two totalitarianisms and the horror of the fate inflicted on the victims of communist prisons and torture, the history and memory of which deserve to be preserved and explored, without damage to the history and memory of the Shoah" (p. 357).

<sup>3</sup> Raul Hilberg, *La Destruction des juifs d'Europe*, (Paris: Fayard, 1988), p. 656.

<sup>4</sup> Laignel-Lavastine, « Fascisme et communisme en Roumanie », p. 229

The Romanians who created a memorial museum to the victims of communism in the former prison of Sighet are understood by these critics to have done so in explicit reference to the creation of a memorial to the Holocaust at Auschwitz.<sup>1</sup> They themselves say their project was particularly difficult to realize due to the neo-communists' hostility, their own weak resources, and the paucity of archives, as well as the immunity enjoyed by former members of the Securitat police. We can see here the tendency for two antagonistic discourses to develop: one maintaining that to speak of communist crimes and call for a kind of Nuremberg trial for communism is to obscure the Shoah; another according to which the reality of the Shoah is used to prohibit any radical denunciation of communism.

It should be noted that denunciation of "communist genocide" is not new and in no way originated with *Le Livre Noir du Communisme*. Emigrés from communist countries, particularly from the Baltic states and Ukraine, were already denouncing communist atrocities in the 1950s: a work published in Canada in 1950 denounces the "genocide" of the Belarusians, and in 1958 a work was published in Munich entitled *Genocide in the USSR*<sup>2</sup>. One difference is that today the denunciation by Zyanon Pasniak, the archeologist who discovered the mass graves outside Minsk, of the "genocide" of the Belarusians, for example, is also tightly linked to the idea that the Belarusians are a people, an "ethnos" (a term widely used in the USSR). Today, characterizing Stalinism as a genocidal project is not so much aimed at relativizing the Shoah as at elevating Belarusians to the status of a nation, with its own language, culture, and traditions.<sup>3</sup> Those who formulated for the first time in Belarus the accusation of a communist genocide were seeking to obtain independence for this Soviet republic, like that which it had briefly enjoyed in 1918. To affirm that there had been genocide is the strongest, most dramatic way of demanding recognition as a nation.

I have of course not chosen the example of Minsk and Belarus at random. This city occupies a whole chapter in another *Black Book* that came before the one being discussed here. I am referring to Ilya Ehrenbourg and Vassily Grossman's *Chernaya Kniga: The Black Book : the ruthless murder of Jews by German-Fascist invaders throughout the temporarily-occupied regions of the Soviet Union and in the death camps of Poland during the war of 1941-1945*.<sup>4</sup> Two hundred fifty of the book's 1000 pages are devoted to the extermination of the Jews of Belarus; the chapter on the Minsk ghetto was written by Vassily Grossman<sup>5</sup> Though ready to go to press in 1947, the book was never published in the USSR. Official doctrine required the forefronting of the Soviets' patriotic determination; Jews could not be distinguished as victims of any particular Nazi persecution. Here we run up against a kind of aporia: the Soviet communists must be ranked among those who deny or negate the exceptionality of the Shoah, especially during the last phase of the Stalinist period, when numbers of Jewish intellectuals were eliminated or "purged," some in connection with the denunciation of the "white coats"

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.* It is worth noting that this point is not made in the group's text in French, published in *Communisme* 59-60 (1999): pp.219ff.

<sup>2</sup> Nikolai Dekker and Andrei Lebed, eds., *Genocide in the USSR: Studies in Group Destruction* (Munich: Institute for the Study of the USSR, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> "A nation, like a human being, has its own individuality. But a human being is a single entity and the nation is manifold. Human beings are bounded in time by their own life span, but the nation is eternal in its history" writes Pazniak in Kurapaty, p. 27. Quoted in Goujon A. "Genozid," in *Journal of Genocide Research* 1, no. 3 (1999)

<sup>4</sup> The complete English version, translated from the Russian by John Glad and James S. Levine (New York : Holocaust Publications : Distributed by Schocken Books, c1981). A first, incomplete version was published in English as *The Black Book*, the Nazi crime against the Jewish people (New York: The Jewish Black Book Committee, 1946), 560 pp. The complete original was published in Jerusalem in 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Vasily Grossman is well known for his *Life and fate*, (translated from the Russian by Robert Chandler; New York : Harper & Row, 1986).

conspiracy. To underline the exceptionality of the Shoah, therefore, is also necessarily to remind people that communism in Eastern Europe obscured the extermination of Europe's Jews in favor of nationalist exaltation, whether Soviet or of some other group. This could lead us to look beyond the supposed radical opposition between Nazism and Leninism toward what, in the entente between the two, might have its source in something other than political compromise<sup>1</sup>. Can we forget that in May 1945 Stalin celebrated the defeat of the Nazis as a victory of the "Slavic peoples" over "German tyranny"?<sup>2</sup>

To conclude, let us focus on two images of the presence of the past in Minsk--a presence that is hard to find, as if there were a desire to efface both these elements of the past: a small plaque marking the place where the Minsk ghetto once was, and, at the mass graves of Kurapaty, a barely visible cross.<sup>3</sup>

*(trans. Amy Jacobs)*



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<sup>1</sup> On proximity between Nazism and communism based on "state racism" ("racisme d'Etat"), see Michel Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société* (Paris: Gallimard and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1999), pp. 71-72 and pp. 230ff; the text is in fact that of a seminar given in 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Stalin, "Address" of May 9, 1945 and the apology of the "Russian people" as the most outstanding nation of the Soviet Union in the speech of May 24, 1945, (*Pravda*, May 25, 1945). On Stalin's antisemitism, especially from 1942 to 1953, see Gennadi Kostyrchenko, *Out of the red shadows : anti-semitism in Stalin's Russia*, trans. from Russian (Amherst, N.Y. : Prometheus Books, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Warmest thanks to my doctoral student, Alexandra Goujon, Institut d'Etudes Politiques of Paris, for some of the information on Belarus; I have also used her article on the notion of "genocide" in that country: "Genozid," in *Journal of Genocide Research* 1, no. 3 (1999).