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Introduction

The most powerful images of the end of state socialism in Eastern Europe – broadcast around the world – showed cheering East and West German citizens dismantling the Berlin Wall. Due to a series of lucky coincidences and failures in communication, the heavily fortified border had been breached first during the night of 9 November 1989. TV stations all around the world showed the images of *Mauerspechte* ('wall woodpeckers'), who were chipping away openings in the Wall that had stood as a symbol of dictatorship and a divided Europe for twenty-eight years.[1] Within two months Communist rule would collapse across Eastern Europe, and then, in 1991, in the Soviet Union, too. The enduring power of these images, particularly in the Western media, derived from the fact that they appeared to provide a powerful illustration of the ways in which we have come to understand the transition in formerly socialist Eastern Europe.[2] First of all, the Wall itself stood for the isolation of the region, shut off from a world society and economy; such isolated socialist polities apparently could no longer survive in an increasingly globalised and interconnected world. Second, the cheerful crowds who dismantled the Wall seemed by their existence to prove that European peoples had been captured by an Eastern tyrannical system that was alien to their nature; their hopes of joining and catching up with the West seemed to embody a supposedly eternal desire for freedom and prosperity. Third, the cameras' focus on ordinary people as agents of historical change hid a far less marketable truth about 1989: contrary to public perceptions in the West, it was mainly reforming Communist elites,

[1] On the series of accidents, see Mary Elise Sarotte, *Collapse* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), xix.

[2] On the absence of Berlin Wall images in Eastern Europe and their popularity in the West, see James Mark, Anna Saunders, Muriel Blaive, Adam Hudek, and Stanislaw Tyszka, '1989 after 1989: Remembering the End of State Socialism in East-Central Europe', in Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik (eds.), *Thinking through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe after 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 495–96.

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rather than popular revolt, that had played the pivotal role in shepherding many countries of the region to a new world.[3] Last, and perhaps most importantly, such imagery stood as an easy visual shorthand for a much wider intellectual apparatus that made sense of the transformations of 1989 through the lenses of Western liberalism: here was a region, they seemed to say, that was shifting from immobility to mobility, passivity to activity, the old to the modern, obsolete planning to the market, and inertia to development.[4] Eastern Europe's transformation underpinned and nurtured ideas about the superiority of the Western liberal model: '1989' confirmed to many that the dynamic mix of liberal democracy, free markets, and Western-led globalisation would be the future of modern statehood.

Such stories were not just Western mythologies propagated to sustain a particular post–Cold War identity renewed by a sense of victory over Communism and the inevitability of the triumph of its own political and economic models. In the first fifteen years after the end of Communism, many Eastern European elites were happy to align themselves with such narratives, too. Although there was remarkably little positive commemoration of 1989 in the region itself, such readings of the past were often performed on a pan-European or wider stage: they were intended to prove the commitment of Eastern European states to a new post–Cold War Western-dominated order and its values, as they endeavoured to integrate into the European Union and NATO.[5] This commitment also provided them with a sense of their region's new global importance: they were the ones who had brought Communism to a close, had liberated themselves from the Soviet 'Evil Empire', and now had a moral obligation to support a Western-led world. Understanding the promotion or armed imposition of market democracy in other authoritarian contexts as part of a wave that included their own experience of liberation from a centrally planned dictatorship, many Eastern European post-socialist governments – alongside former dissidents from Adam Michnik in Poland to Václav Havel in the Czech Republic and Liu Xiaobo in China – supported the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Other important figures of Eastern Europe's transition took on roles as advisors in the so-called

[3] For this thesis, see Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2009).
[4] Christina Schwenkel, 'Rethinking Asian Mobilities. Socialist Migration and Post-Socialist Repatriation of Vietnamese Contract Workers in East Germany', *Critical Asian Studies*, 46/2 (2014), 240–41.
[5] On the absence of commemoration, see James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution. Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), chap. 1.

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Colour Revolutions from Ukraine and the Balkans to Central Asia or as consultants on how to do democratic transitions during the Arab Spring in 2011.[6]

This dominant liberal narrative, which downplayed the particularity of the historical conjuncture that had enabled the revolutions of 1989, has now come under attack. The notion of Eastern Europe as a region that is naturally converging on a form of Western liberalism at home and is advocating its values abroad was increasingly questioned from the beginning of the 2010s.[7] Right-wing populist governments across Eastern Europe have turned against the liberal interpretation of '1989': they drastically cut funding for institutions charged with preserving the democratic values of 1989, such as the European Solidarity Center in Gdańsk.[8] Some of the heroes of 1989, including such once luminous figures as the former Solidarność leader and Polish president Lech Wałęsa, have been rebranded as traitors to the nation for having compromised with the former Communist elites. Revisionist histories of 1989 suggest it was not a revolution at all but rather an opportunity captured by socialists whose grip on the state was not loosened until twenty years after the notional collapse.[9]

As the liberal narrative of 1989 faces head winds, so too does the notion of Eastern Europe's inevitable Westernisation. Under Vladimir Putin, from the early 2000s, Russia increasingly rejected the idea of being an ordinary nation-state in a 'common European home', preferring rather to reclaim a great power status between Europe and Asia. In the 2010s this notion of civilizational separateness spread to those countries that had initially integrated themselves westwards through joining the European Union. Whilst liberal forces still championed their region's attachment to what they encode as Western progressive cultural values, an ever-strengthening populism from the right and the left defined itself against a morally dissolute West and looked to Moscow and Beijing for

[6] Leszek Balcerowicz, 'Economic Reform. Lessons for Post-Saddam Iraq from Post-Soviet Europe' (American Enterprise Institute working paper, 24 March 2005); 'Ein "Balcerowicz-Plan" für den irakischen Wiederaufbau. Was der Irak von Polen lernen kann', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 14 June 2005.

[7] Ivan Krastev, '3 Versions of Europe Are Collapsing at the Same Time', *Foreign Policy*, 10 July 2018.

[8] See www.gdansk.pl/wiadomosci/darowizny-dla-europosjkiego-centrum-solidarnosci-jest-juz-numer-konta,a,136983#.XFGai2w5bzc.facebook.

[9] See, e.g., Rudolf Tőkés, *A harmadik magyar köztársaság születése* (The Birth of the Third Hungarian Republic) (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2015). Tőkés argues that 1989 was captured by 'socialist lawyers' and that real 'moral reparation' for the nation did not happen in Hungary until 2011 with the passing of a new 'Fundamental Law'.

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new political, financial, and economic support.[10] After Viktor Orbán, once an iconic liberal figure of Hungary's 1989, was re-elected prime minister in 2014, he all but disregarded the twenty-fifth anniversary of the end of state socialism. Instead, in a series of programmatic speeches he declared that the 'Western financial crisis' had been a more pivotal turning point than 1989, posited his 'illiberal democracy' against despised 'European values', and aligned himself with Singapore, China, India, Turkey, and Vladimir Putin's Russia.[11] Across Central Europe right-wing populist governments began to challenge the dependency on Western investment and transnational capitalism of the first decades of the post-Communist order.[12] For those in the Balkans who had not been admitted to the European Union, the performance of desiring Europe whilst being kept in a state of 'ambivalent liminality' had begun to wear thin.[13]

This anti-liberal shift was not confined to Eastern Europe but could be observed in many regions that negotiated the transition from authoritarianism to multiparty democracy between the late 1970s and early 1990s: in Southern Europe, such radical political parties as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain have developed fundamental critiques of the transition as the source of later political corruption and economic inequality; a younger leftist generation in South Africa turned away from the ruling party, the African National Congress, and its celebration of the negotiated South African transition; right-wing populists such as Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro reject their countries' liberal cultures of transition and openly celebrate military dictatorship; parts of the left in the Philippines have critiqued the unfinished nature of the pre-1986 struggle to topple Ferdinand Marcos's dictatorship and how it paved the way for

[10] On this crisis, see Ivan Krastev, *After Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Ziemowit Szczerek, 'New Separatisms: Or What Could Happen If the West Disappeared from Eastern Europe?', *New Eastern Europe*, 3/4 (2018), http://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/04/26/new-separatisms-happen-west-disappeared-eastern-europe/.

[11] 'Viktor Orbán's Speech at the XXV. Bálványos Free Summer University and Youth Camp, 26th July, 2014, Băile Tuşnad (Tusnádfürdő)', *Budapest Beacon*, https://budapestbeacon.com/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-baile-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/.

[12] Vera Šćepanović and Dorothee Bohle, 'The Institutional Embeddedness of Transnational Corporations: Dependent Capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe', in Andreas Nölke and Christian May (eds.), *Handbook of the International Political Economy of the Corporation* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2018), 152–166.

[13] Christoffer Kølvraa, 'Limits of Attraction: The EU's Eastern Border and the European Neighbourhood Policy', *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 31/1 (2017), 11–25.

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the revival of authoritarianism under President Rodrigo Duterte from 2016.[14]

The collapse of a consensus is often a fortuitous moment for historians. It enables new questions to be asked and previously calcified versions of events to be challenged and rethought. No longer are the events of 1989 only precursors of the present. After a generation they can be analysed in their own right and as a very particular historical conjuncture. '1989' represented the highpoint in a faith in a liberal vision that came to be challenged both in Eastern Europe and in the world more broadly. Without the sense of inevitable convergence, the story of 1989 now appears as a very specific moment in the region's history, chronologically bracketed on either side by movements – whether Communists or today's populists – whose leaders were resistant to, or at least deeply sceptical towards, certain types of integration with the West. Moreover, this divergence sheds light on other aspects of these years of transition that have got lost in the too easy celebration of a liberal breakthrough. Just beneath the surface, other forms of transformation, populist, authoritarian, or radical socialist, were widely articulated in the transition period but erased from the liberal script in the aftermath. A reconsideration of the historically contingent assemblage that triumphed around 1989 also highlights the existence of alternative but forgotten political geographies: Eastern European elites looked to Asia and Latin America as they did to the West in making sense of their late twentieth-century transformations. A global history of 1989 needs to explain how these alternative visions were closed down but must also address their persistence in some Eastern European political cultures. These ideas, forged in the decade of crisis that preceded the collapse of Communism, returned to inform aspects of the illiberal populist moment in the region in the 2010s.

Going Global

The notion that it was a 'wind of change' blowing in from the West that swept away stale Eastern dictatorships dominated both popular images and scholarly frameworks of the Communist era in Eastern Europe. It was not only the West German rock group the Scorpions but also US president Bill Clinton who were drawn to this metaphor: 'If we learn anything from the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the

[14] Kostis Kornetis, 'Introduction: The End of a Parable? Unsettling the Transitology Model in the Age of Crisis', *Historein*, 15/1 (2015), 5–12; Lisandro E. Claudio, 'Memories of the Anti-Marcos Movement: The Left and the Mnemonic Dynamics of the Post-Authoritarian Philippines', *South East Asia Research*, 18/1 (2010), 33–66.

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governments in Eastern Europe', he asserted in a speech given to announce the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993, 'even a totally controlled society cannot resist the winds of change that economics and technology and information flow have imposed in this world of ours'.[15] Historical frameworks to understand the transformation of Eastern Europe were established at a high point in the faith in a Western-led globalisation – studies often concentrated on those integrative processes that acted as precursors to a world dominated by the West.

Although histories of the Eastern European transformation are usually not very global in outlook, they nevertheless rely implicitly on frameworks derived from a very Western-centric version of global history: Eastern Europe commonly came to be viewed as a victim and as a passive recipient of Western 'medicine' for its ailments, a cure that enabled the region to abandon its isolation and engage with the one true globalisation. According to one US intellectual, 1989 represented 'removing a temporary roadblock to globalization, ending traditional colonialism, and permitting Eastern Europe to enter post-history'.[16] The prominent German left-liberal public intellectual Jürgen Habermas spoke of the 'rectifying' or 'catching up' revolutions of 1989, which represented the idea that, as sociologist Talcott Parsons had put it, 'the great civilisations of the world would converge towards the institutional and cultural configurations of Western society'.[17] So-called transitologists normalised a convergence on the values of Western economy and politics[18];

[15] President William J. Clinton, 'Remarks at the Signing Ceremony for the Supplemental Agreements to the North American Free Trade Agreement' (14 September 1993). The German rock group the Scorpions' 'Wind of Change' was the soundtrack to German reunification. Others have argued that, despite its seemingly apolitical content, the Swedish pop band Roxette's 'Listen to Your Heart' was *the* song of 1989, as it was used in some of the first post-Communist election campaigns – including by Havel's Civic Forum and Viktor Orbán's FIDESZ: Joshua Clover, *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This to Sing About* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 108–9.

[16] Gale Stokes, 'Purposes of the Past', in Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob (eds.), *The End and the Beginning: The Revolutions of 1989 and the Resurgence of History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012), 35–54, 52.

[17] Talcott Parsons, quoted in Gareth Dale, *Between State Capitalism and Globalisation. The Collapse of the East German Economy* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 9–10; Jürgen Habermas, 'What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left', *New Left Review*, 183 (1990), 3–21.

[18] Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter (eds.), *Transitions from Authoritarianism: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Democratic Transitions and Consolidation: Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Kathryn Stoner and Michael McFaul (eds.), *Transitions to Democracy: A Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

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postcolonial scholars suggested that Eastern Europeans had internalised a 'Western gaze' through which they constructed their own backwardness and peripherality;[19] leftist economists took this further, arguing that Eastern Europe had been turned into the West's 'Third World' so it could become the object of economic transformation by international institutions.[20] This was a unidirectional imagination in the tradition of 1950s' modernization theory: non-Western 'peripheries' had shown themselves to be unworthy of their own history and would inevitably recognise their destiny to become 'like us'.

The idea of Western capitalism as the sole engine of modernity has left us with a distorted view of socialist states as inward-looking, isolated, and cut off from global trends until the transition to capitalism in the 1990s.[21] There are many manifestations of this. Seen through Western liberal eyes, only those aspects that appear to be missing from their conceptions of an authentic globalisation tend to be noted, such as Eastern European limitations on mobility and lower levels of transnational economic integration. Post-Communist historians from the region most commonly sought to revive the anti-Communist *national* story and displayed scant desire to write their twentieth century into histories of globalisation.[22] The division between post-Communist and postcolonial scholars has meant that there has been, until recently, little interest in bringing together stories of a wider socialist world.[23] The gradual economic integration of late socialism has been addressed, but usually in an account that has stressed how the region was a victim of such processes. This is another 'rest to the West' story: only after 1989 does the region enter a true (i.e., Western-led) globalised world.[24] In this sense such accounts essentialise the region's home in the West and provide a

[19] Lucy Mayblin, Aneta Piekut, and Gill Valentine, '"Other" Posts in "Other" Places: Poland through a Postcolonial Lens?', *Sociology*, 50/1 (2016), 70.
[20] Andre Gunder Frank, 'Nothing New in the East: No New World Order', *Social Justice*, 19/1 (1992), 34–59.
[21] For an account along these lines, see André Steiner, 'The Globalisation Process and the Eastern Bloc Countries in the 1970s and 1980s', *European Review of History*, 21/2 (2014), 165–81.
[22] Histories of globalisation in Eastern Europe usually start in 1989. See, for example, Katalin Fábián (ed.), *Globalization. Perspectives from Central and Eastern Europe* (Bingley: Emerald, 2007).
[23] On this divide, see Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, 'Thinking between the Posts. Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51/1 (2009), 6–34, 16.
[24] The study of globalisation in Eastern Europe, or nascent 'Global East studies', usually start only after 1989.

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relatively unproblematic story of convergence with a Western liberalism according to which it was 'liberated' in 1989.[25]

In this book we contend that a very different view of the history of the Eastern half of the continent is needed. Eastern Europe not only has long been globally interconnected, but also has been, for two hundred years, a 'swing region'. Its very identity as a meaningfully distinct area has always been shaped by a sense of its in-betweenness; it has self-defined both with, and against, the West.[26] Various postwar experts, and in particular economists, believed that Communism could produce a future for the region free from dependency on the West, in alliance with anti-imperialist forces across the globe; in the late twentieth century, the idea that the region belonged in a liberal West came back; populists have in the 2010s once again questioned the region's relationship to an imagined 'liberal West' and sought new alliances with China, Russia, and the Middle East. We also have to recognise the heterogeneity of this in-betweenness: Yugoslavia as part of the Non-Aligned Movement always viewed itself as between East and West, whereas other states found their Western-ness only later in the Cold War. None of these positions were absolute: Eastern Europeans have always contested these geopolitical and geocultural regional positionings of their elites. Anti-Communists argued that Communist regimes had stolen their region from the West in the name of a barbaric Eastern Bolshevism in the early Cold War, whereas many leftists argued against an uncritical embrace of a Western orientation of the region in 1989. Yet the question of where the region belonged in the world was constantly raised. From this perspective, 1989 was not the attainment of an inevitable destiny in the West but part of a much longer-term argument about Eastern Europe's place in the world, one that is still ongoing.

The region's engagement with the world during the Communist period was not a type of globalisation immediately recognisable to the

[25] For a criticism of this focus on the West in the 1980s and the Soviet turn to East Asia, see Chris Miller, *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy : Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 20–23.

[26] See the approach adopted in Balázs Trencsényi, Maciej Janowski, Monika Baár, Maria Falina, Michal Kopeček, 'Introduction', in Trencsényi, Janowski, Baár, Falina, and Kopeček, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe. Volume I: Negotiating Modernity in the 'Long Nineteenth Century'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), esp. 3–5; Katherine Lebow, Małgorzata Mazurek, and Joanna Wawrzyniak, 'Making Modern Social Science: The Global Imagination in East Central and Southeastern Europe after Versailles', *Contemporary European History*, 28/2 (2019), 137–42; Manuela Boatcă, 'Semi-peripheries in the World-System: Reflecting Eastern European and Latin American Experiences', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 12/2 (2006), 321–46.

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West; mobility was limited, and Communist states often eschewed multilateral cooperation. Nevertheless, to differing degrees Eastern European states had already opened up to trade and engaged in developmental and cultural exchanges with the states that had decolonised in the Global South, within a broader socialist world, and out towards the West long before 1989.[27] For a time there was thus a commitment to building an alternative world order based on a common anti-imperialist solidarity that would protect the region from political or economic subordination to the West. Yet, tentatively, from the late 1960s, with the relaxation of tensions between East and West, reflected in the so-called Helsinki Process, gradual integration occurred economically and culturally. Over the last two decades of the Communist system, the region's in-betweenness prompted important questions: Was it to ally with a non-Western alternative form of global modernity, or rather integrate into Western globalism? Was a fealty to both systems possible, or was the world converging towards one global system? The answer given differed from country to country, from political group to political group, and within society at large. Nevertheless, increasingly, alternative global visions were hollowed out from within.

Adopting this perspective, we argue that 1989 was less the beginning of the region's globalisation than a confirmation of a choice about the form of globalisation that the region would take, based on a process of partial, often contradictory, and sometimes reversed attempts at realignment that had started from the 1960s. It provided finality to the process of hollowing out an alternative form of global interconnectedness based on anti-imperialist geographies. These shifts were more commonly remarked on by those from outside the region, some of whom viewed them as a moment of loss: some African and Caribbean leftists, for instance, saw the end of state socialism as the reconstitution of a white colonial Europe that marked a definitive end to an era of high decolonisation. In this view the Iron Curtain had not been lifted in 1989 but displaced southwards along the Mediterranean, dividing Europe from Africa. Some non-European anti-imperialists understood 1989 as a story of deglobalisation through which Eastern Europe had sought a civilizational realignment to a white world and the racialized privileges this would afford them. They could point to the fact that since the dismantling of the inner-European fortified border, over a thousand kilometres of new walls

[27] James Mark, Artemy Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung, 'Introduction – Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World', in Mark, Kalinovsky, and Marung (eds.), *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

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and fences have been used by EU countries to redraw the boundaries of an expanded Europe.[28]

Eastern European reformers, by contrast, did not note a racialised reorientation or the new forms of bordering that this realignment implied; they saw it rather as a return to a normal path towards modern global civilisation.[29] Against the background of economic crisis in the 1980s in Eastern Europe, this became a compelling script that served to normalise a particular vision of Western development based on liberal democracy, the smaller state, and a market economy, which later appeared to be the only plausible route to success. They abandoned all belief in the possibility of an alternative global modernity and presented their course as a journey to normality. Even Communist leaders themselves saw the West as the natural destiny for Eastern Europe by the late 1980s: the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union had now decided to 'enter world civilisation', while Jerzy Urban, the Communist spokesman for the military ruler of Poland, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, admitted in 1989 that 'the superiority of Western civilization had become obvious for everybody'.[30] There were also critics, whose voices have been lost in histories of 1989: they feared that an uncritical Westernisation would lead to economic re-peripheralisation, high social costs, an end to profitable international trade, the undermining of hard-won social, economic, and gender-based rights, and the marginalisation of labour. We will tell their stories too.

The Long Transition and the Making of Transitional Elites in Global Perspective

Eastern Europe's realignment to dominant Western economic and political norms generated remarkably little critique at the time. The reorientation of its elites from state socialism to liberal capitalism happened astonishingly quickly considering that they had based their legitimacy on

[28] Ainhoa Ruiz Benedicto and Pere Brunet, 'Building Walls: Fear and Securitization in the European Union' (2018) www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/building_walls_-_full_report_-_english.pdf.

[29] On 'race' as an absent category in Eastern European studies, see Catherine Baker, *Race and the Yugoslav Region: Postsocialist, Post-conflict, Postcolonial?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), esp. the introduction; Anikó Imre, 'Whiteness in Post-socialist Eastern Europe: The Time of the Gypsies, the End of Race', in Alfred J. Lopez (ed.), *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 79–80.

[30] Georges Mink et Jean-Charles Szurek, *La grande conversion: Le destin des communistes en Europe de l'Est* (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 88.

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