

International Symposium

The “Red” Enemy

The Figure of the Communist in Contemporary ‘Enemization’ Processes

(19th-21st century)

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*Ernesto Bohoslavsky (CNRS – Mondes Américains)
Alexandre Rios-Bordes (Université Paris Cité - Echelles)*

The figure of the Communist is undoubtedly the **most prominent incarnation of the political enemy** in—and perhaps beyond—the 20th century. One can find evidence of this contested, imagined and sometimes vindicated figure almost everywhere. From the earliest days of the “long” Cold War, the specter of communism expanded its threatening presence beyond Europe: in a wide Atlantic world, colonized Africa, the Asian subcontinents, and the most remote corners of the “world-system.” The communist threat thus extended far—sometimes very far—from the places where intellectuals and activists formulated its first bodies of doctrine, where the first organizations were created, and where the founding events of the revolutionary myth were located. This **cosmopolitical menace expanded upon other threatening figures** – *partageux*, *communards*, socialists, anarchists, and other types of “radicals” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Soon, the figure of the communist would overshadow them everywhere, and eventually replace them in political imaginaries across the world.

This international conference will be dedicated to the role and impact of this peculiar figure in internal conflicts in the 20th century. In specific contexts, the figure might be **easy to identify**, as, for instance, when people themselves embraced the label, when communist parties were created, pledging allegiance to the Comintern, joining global networks, and receiving help and support from their Soviet – or, later, Chinese, Cuban, and perhaps today Venezuelan – comrades. In other situations, the figure proved **much more uncertain**, often **evasive**: when others assigned the infamous label to their

political foes, supposedly to reveal the “true nature” of their organizations, ideas and claims.

It is a well-known fact that the epithet was often weaponized by political actors to disqualify others, because of what the “reds” were or were supposed to be. The figure of the communist thus embodies a paradigmatic form of **domestic enemy**, thanks to two main characteristics. First, communists were **radicals**. They were avowed adversaries of the existing political and social order. Their activities were supposed to be driven, at least in the long run, by their revolutionary objective, i.e. overthrowing—possibly through violence—the “bourgeois” State and society. Secondly, communists were seen as **exterior to society**, as “foreign agents.” They were not only active members of an organization that was partly clandestine, they also indirectly belonged to a transnational structure backed by a foreign power, the Soviet Union. Communists therefore **transgressed two essential qualities of the contemporary polity**: the idea that political disagreements or conflicts could be settled **peacefully** within the existing institutional framework; and the inscription of opposition within a **national context**, and its formulation in the name of the nation’s or the people’s interests. As agents of subversion and “domestic foreigners” communists embodied a double threat which was – and still is – highly stigmatized.

This symposium will highlight major historiographical developments in the history of communism(s) and anticommunism(s) in the last two decades, characterized by a focus on **transnational and global perspectives**. It will foster collective and historical reflections on the articulations between the global scale and national and local arenas during the “long” Cold War, and beyond.

More broadly, from the sociological perspective of the [Enemy](#) research program, it will also re-examine the **dynamics of radicalized**, domestic, social and political **conflicts** in the age of contemporary globalization – i.e. in a context of increasing circulations and communications, and the consequent extension of interconnections and global chains of interdependence.

It will build on the assumption that the **irruption of “communism,”** however tangible it might be in specific contexts, was systematically connected to **pre-existing political and social antagonisms**. The aim will therefore be to examine what the irruption of communism – or the communist trope – did to local political conflicts over the course of the “long” 20th century; and symmetrically, to a lesser extent, what these local

conflicts might have done to the global conflict of the Cold War and to anti-communism at a global scale.

How did the figure of the figure of the “communist” came into play, and sometimes to the fore of otherwise pre-existing political and social conflicts? Under what specific form? What translations, selections and adaptations repertoires and representations proved necessary? How did this transnational framework affect local political configurations, i.e. the actors involved, the interplay of positions and the types of confrontations? What effects did it have in terms of violence and repression? Did such local conflicts echo in other areas, in other places? What remained in collective memories once the conflict had died down (at least for a while)?

These are just some of the questions we intend to explore, based on **case studies** that may cover any of the areas concerned, over the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. While the historical perspective will be an important part of the reflections, works from **all disciplines** will be welcomed and given careful consideration. In any case, authors are invited to relate their reflections to conflict situations that are spatially determined – whatever the scale chosen – and chronologically bounded – a particular “moment”, whatever its duration.

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Proposals for contributions should be sent to the organizers by September 30, 2025, with a title, an abstract (300 words, in English, Spanish and/or French), and a short scientific resume (150 words). Proposals must be original and thus suitable for scientific publication, to which participants will commit themselves.

Organization :

Ernesto Bohoslavsky : ebohoslavsky@ehess.fr

Alexandre Rios-Bordes : alexandre.rios-bordes@u-paris.fr

Scientific Committee :

Sophie Coeuré (Université Paris Cité)

António Costa Pinto (Universidade de Lisboa)

Olivier Dard (Sorbonne Université)

Jean-François Fayet (Université de Fribourg)

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