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978-0-521-72397-8 - Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared

Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick

Excerpt

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I

Introduction

After Totalitarianism – Stalinism and Nazism Compared

Michael Geyer with assistance from Sheila Fitzpatrick

The idea of comparing Nazi Germany with the Soviet Union under Stalin is not a novel one. Notwithstanding some impressive efforts of late, however, the endeavor has achieved only limited success.¹ Where comparisons have been made, the two histories seem to pass each other like trains in the night. That is, while there is some sense that they cross paths and, hence, share a time and place – if, indeed, it is not argued that they mimic each other in a deleterious war² – little else seems to fit. And this is quite apart from those approaches which, on principle, deny any similarity because they consider Nazism and Stalinism to be at opposite ends of the political spectrum. Yet, despite the very real difficulties inherent in comparing the two regimes and an irreducible political resistance against such comparison, attempts to establish their commonalities have never ceased – not least as a result of the inclination to place both regimes in opposition to Western, “liberal” traditions. More often than not, comparison of Stalinism and Nazism worked by way of implicating a third party – the United States.³ Whatever the differences between them, they appeared small in comparison with the chasm that separated them from liberal-constitutional states and free societies. Since a three-way comparison

¹ Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (London: HarperCollins, 1991); Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, eds., *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Henry Rousso, ed., *Stalinisme et nazisme: Histoire et mémoire comparées* (Paris: Éditions Complexe, 1999); English translation by Lucy Golvan et al., *Stalinism and Nazism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Richard J. Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004); Robert Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

² Klaus Jochen Arnold, *Die Wehrmacht und die Besatzungspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion: Kriegführung und Radikalisierung im “Unternehmen Barbarossa”* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2004).

³ François Furet and Ernst Nolte, “Feindliche Nähe”: *Kommunismus und Faschismus im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: F. A. Herbig, 1998).

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might entail associating liberal democracy with its opposite, if only by bridging the chasm between them through the act of comparison, this procedure was commonly shunned – or deliberately used to suggest that, despite it all, the three regimes were not so far apart.⁴

This state of affairs is not good, especially considering that the material conditions for the comparative enterprise have markedly changed. For the first time historians are able to approach Nazism and Stalinism on a relatively level playing field. One may legitimately argue that historians did not take part in the first round of comparisons, a round dominated by philosophers, social scientists, and public intellectuals.⁵ Since that time, however, we have accumulated sufficient primary and secondary source materials to merit a serious comparison of the two regimes. Moreover, the historiography on both regimes has grown quite large – massive and overwhelming for Nazi Germany and growing prodigiously for the Soviet Union – and is generally accessible to researchers. Comparison is now a matter of doing it – and doing it intelligently and productively.

It turns out that this is easier said than done. For one thing, thought on totalitarianism always seems to intrude, regardless of what the editors think about the concept's usefulness (on which matter they disagree). It intrudes because the concept is so deeply embedded in how historians grapple with and understand the two regimes.⁶ Second, comparison proves to be a remarkably obstreperous exercise.⁷ While it is easy enough to identify common turf, such as the political regime or everyday practices, it is far more difficult to make the comparison happen in actual fact. As a result, the attempt of understanding Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union as distinct regimes is often sidetracked into an effort to better understand each other's histories. Of course, familiarity with each other's national history is a bonus. If anything, it helps to penetrate the idiosyncrasies of national historiographies.⁸ But comparative history ought to add more value for the exertion of doing it, if it is to matter.

⁴ Johan Galtung, *Hitlerismus, Stalinismus, Reaganismus: Drei Variationen zu einem Thema von Orwell* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1987).

⁵ Alfons Söllner, Ralf Walkenhaus, and Karin Wieland, eds., *Totalitarismus, eine Ideengeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997); Hans J. Lietzmann, *Politikwissenschaft im "Zeitalter der Diktaturen": Die Entwicklung der Totalitarismustheorie Carl Joachim Friedrichs* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999); Mike Schmeitzner, ed., *Totalitarismuskritik von Links: Deutsche Diskurse im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

⁶ As far as Germany is concerned, every historian of stature dealt with the issue at one point or another. Manfred Funke, ed., *Totalitarismus: Ein Studien-Reader zur Herrschaftsanalyse moderner Diktaturen* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1978); Eckhard Jesse, Christiane Schroeder, and Thomas Grosse-Gehling, eds., *Totalitarismus im 20. Jahrhundert: eine Bilanz der internationalen Forschung*, 2nd enlarged ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1999).

⁷ Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁸ Jürgen Kocka, "Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The Case of the German Sonderweg," *History and Theory* 38, no. 1 (1999): 40–50.

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Compared to the grander projects of, say, “thinking the twentieth century,” this is down-to-earth stuff.⁹ But it is of consequence. For in wrestling with Nazism and Stalinism in joint Russian-German essays, the contributors to this book have laid bare what does and does not work. In a progression of labors and discussions in the manner of a *pilotage à vue*, they defined the nature of the two regimes and the two societies more clearly, such that, after a first round of totalitarian theorizing, we can now begin to think historically about Stalinism and Nazism.¹⁰ Moreover, the contributors identify the difficulties inherent in a comparison that is more than the assemblage of like parts and, thus, provided insight into the epochal nature of the two regimes by way of indirection. We might want to see in this a return to the original intent of thought on totalitarian regimes – understanding the intertwined trajectories of socialism and nationalism.¹¹ More assuredly, doing the labor of comparison gives us the means to ascertain the historicity of the two extraordinary regimes and the wreckage they have left. The latter has become an ever more important challenge as Europe and the United States are making efforts to leave behind the twentieth century.¹²

THE WAYS OF “TOTALITARIANISM”

The terms “totalitarian” and “totalitarianism” entered political debate in the 1920s, primarily in reference to Italian fascism.¹³ They moved into academic

⁹ François Furet, *Le passé d'une illusion: Essai sur l'idée communiste au XXe siècle* (Paris: R. Laffont: Calmann-Lévy, 1995); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994); Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Random House, 1999); Moishe Postone and Eric L. Santner, eds., *Catastrophe and Meaning: The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Dan Diner, *Das Jahrhundert verstehen: Eine universalhistorische Deutung* (Munich: Luchterhand, 1999); Bernard Wasserstein, *Barbarism and Civilization: A History of Europe in Our Time* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Waclaw Długoborski, “Das Problem des Vergleichs von Nationalsozialismus und Stalinismus,” in *Lager, Zwangsarbeit, Vertreibung und Deportation: Dimensionen der Massenverbrechen in der Sowjetunion und in Deutschland 1933 bis 1945*, eds. Dittmar Dahlmann and Gerhard Hirschfeld (Essen: Klartext, 1999), 19–29; Dietrich Beyrau, “Nationalsozialistisches Regime und Stalin System: Ein riskanter Vergleich,” *Osteuropa: Zeitschrift für Gegenwartsfragen des Ostens* 50, no. 6 (2000): 709–20.

¹¹ Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹² Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

¹³ Michael Halberstam, *Totalitarianism and the Modern Conception of Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); Wolfgang Wippermann, *Totalitarismustheorien: Die Entwicklung der Diskussion von den Anfängen bis heute* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 1997); Karl Schögl, “Archäologie totaler Herrschaft,” in *Deutschland und die Russische Revolution, 1917–1924*, eds. Gerd Koenen and Lew Kopelew (Munich: W. Fink Verlag, 1998), 780–804. On left totalitarianism: William David Jones, *The Lost Debate: German Socialist Intellectuals and Totalitarianism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Uli Schöler, “Frühe totalitarismustheoretische

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debate in the late 1940s and 1950s with a distinct focus on Germany. They gained popular and academic currency during the Cold War, mostly in reference to the Soviet Union.¹⁴ Concurrently, they became a staple of secondary and postsecondary teaching and of media debate with works like Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* and, more prominently, George Orwell's 1984, which made the image of the ideologically driven, mind-altering police state pervasive.¹⁵ In popular parlance, totalitarianism lumped together the two most prominent European dictatorships of the 1930s and 1940s, Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union, as expressions of absolute evil rather than any particular form of rule.¹⁶ The two regimes were juxtaposed with the "righteous" path of liberal democracy, both as a way of life and as a form of governance.

As a polemical term in political debate and in academic controversy, we may also recall that "totalitarianism" stood in sharp opposition to "fascism." The latter initially served as a self-description for Italian fascists and their European imitators (including some early National Socialists). But left-wing intellectuals appropriated the term in the 1930s. Unlike the concept of totalitarianism, which linked together the dictatorships of the left and right during the first half of the twentieth century, the notion of fascism set them apart. Fascism referred exclusively to right-radical, ultranationalist movements and states. Fascism briefly dominated academic debate in the 1960s and 1970s. The academic notion of fascism, however, collapsed under the combined weight of left-wing political dogmatism and the pervasive discrediting of leftist thought during the last quarter of the twentieth century and is only just now resurfacing.¹⁷

Initially, historians – and, especially, German historians – showed considerable enthusiasm for the ideas of totalitarianism and, to a lesser degree, fascism. They generally held the first-generation master thinkers of totalitarianism, like Hannah Arendt or Carl Friedrich, in high regard.¹⁸ They certainly had Carl

Ansätze der Menschewiki im Exil," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 38, no. 2 (1996): 32–47.

¹⁴ Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York: Random House, 1941); George Orwell, 1984: *A Novel* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949).

¹⁶ Dieter Nelles, "Jan Valtins 'Tagebuch der Hölle': Legende und Wirklichkeit eines Schlüsselromans der Totalitarismustheorie," 1999: *Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* 9, no. 1 (1994): 11–45.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Wippermann, *Faschismustheorien: Zum Stand der gegenwärtigen Diskussion*, 5th rev. ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976); Sven Reichardt, "Was mit dem Faschismus passiert ist: Ein Literaturbericht zur internationalen Faschismusforschung seit 1990, Teil I," *Neue politische Literatur* 49, no. 3 (2004): 385–406; Sven Reichardt and Armin Nolzen, eds., *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland: Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005); Roger Griffin, Werner Loh, and Andreas Umland, eds., *Fascism Past and Present, West and East: An International Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study of the Extreme Right* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2006).

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966); Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956).

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Schmidt to contend with.¹⁹ In hindsight, it also appears that, wittingly or unwittingly, some of the best early works of historians originated out of their struggles with “theory.” Karl-Dietrich Bracher’s monumental studies on the Third Reich worked through Friedrich’s legacy and were picked up by others, like Eberhard Jäckel, who highlighted the ideological motivation of the Nazi regime.²⁰ Martin Broszat’s and Hans Mommsen’s structural-functional interpretation of the Nazi regime’s radicalizing trajectory represented a creative adaptation and transformation of Arendt’s complex reading of totalitarianism that hinged on the inherent instability and the (self-perceived) lack of legitimacy of these regimes.²¹ Timothy Mason’s widely admired attempts to escape the strictures of a dead-end German debate that pitted intentionalists (Bracher) against structuralists (Broszat) were deeply influenced by his struggles with Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy and his attempt to resuscitate nonorthodox theories of fascism.²²

One of the more curious reasons for the difficulty in evaluating the specific impact of theories of totalitarianism on German historiography was that thought on totalitarianism – or really on National Socialism – was so diverse. Those who found Arendt too flamboyantly intellectual and Friedrich too rigidly social scientific always had the option of choosing as their point of reference Fraenkel’s *Dual State*, with its emphasis on the law, or Neumann’s *Behemoth*, with its interest in monopoly capitalism, not to mention the further reaches of Critical Theory and the studies in prejudice that produced the “authoritarian

¹⁹ Carl Schmitt, *Die Diktatur: Von den Anfängen des modernen Souveränitätsgedankens bis zum proletarischen Klassenkampf*, 2nd ed. (Munich and Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1928); Jan-Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

²⁰ Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism* (New York: Praeger, 1970); Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Zeitgeschichtliche Kontroversen: Um Faschismus, Totalitarismus, Demokratie* (Munich: Piper, 1976); Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The Age of Ideologies: A History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984); Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler’s Weltanschauung: A Blueprint for Power* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1972).

²¹ Martin Broszat, *Der Nationalsozialismus; Weltanschauung, Programm und Wirklichkeit* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1960); Martin Broszat, *Der Staat Hitlers; Grundlegung und Entwicklung seiner inneren Verfassung* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969); Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State: The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich*, trans. John W. Hiden (London and New York: Longman, 1981); Hans Mommsen. “[Introduction] Hannah Arendt und der Prozeß gegen Adolf Eichmann,” *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Ein Bericht von der Banalität des Bösen*, ed. Hannah Arendt (Munich and Zürich: Piper, 1986), I-XXXVII; Hans Mommsen, “The Concept of Totalitarian Dictatorship vs. the Comparative Theory of Fascism: The Case of National Socialism,” in *Totalitarianism Reconsidered*, ed. Ernest A. Menze (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1981), 146–66.

²² Timothy Mason, “Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism,” in *Der “Führerstaat,” Mythos und Realität: Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches = The “Führer State,” Myth and Reality: Studies on the Structure and Politics of the Third Reich*, eds. Lothar Kettenacker and Gerhard Hirschfeld (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 23–72.

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personality.”²³ Moreover, there were always those who traced their lineage back to theories of political religion, for whom Voegelin’s 1939 treatise on *Die politischen Religionen*, Raymond Aron’s less well remembered piece on the “Arrival of Secular Religions” in 1944, and Guardini’s little book on the *Heilbringer* of 1946 offered useful points of departure.²⁴ More recently, Karl Popper seems to be making a comeback.²⁵ The point is that German historiography evolved out of contemporary thought on National Socialism, which itself derived from older, competing intellectual traditions; it was, for the most part, mediated by émigré intellectuals.²⁶ Their knowledge of the Soviet Union and its historiography was virtually nonexistent. German thought on totalitarianism was single-mindedly national despite interwar entendres²⁷ – an ironic move further exacerbated by the fact that the only thing that all totalitarian theorists agreed upon (and this separated their theories from ordinary or “vulgar” Marxist theories of fascism) was that National Socialism formed in one way or another an exceptional regime.

Compared to the “theoretical” excitement and the universalizing intellectual horizon of the German debate, Soviet studies was more indebted to politics and to political-science formalism, mechanically reproducing Friedrich’s and Zbigniew Brzezinski’s infamous six characteristics of totalitarianism.²⁸ The latter focused research on party structure, “levers of control,” ideology, propaganda, and the leadership cult, as well as on police and labor camps, and imposed, at least in the view of its detractors, an insufferable straitjacket on Soviet studies in the first postwar decades. In actuality, however, there was a significant amount of interdisciplinary work, most notably the big Harvard Project

²³ Ernst Fraenkel et al., *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1941). Among the other authors of the above text was Edward Shils. Franz L. Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1942); Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1950).

²⁴ Eric Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen* (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer Verlag, 1939); Eric Voegelin et al., eds., *Politische Religion? Politik, Religion und Anthropologie im Werk von Eric Voegelin* (Munich: Fink, 2003); Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934–1964*, trans. Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Raymond Aron, “L’avenir des religions séculières [1944],” *Commentaire* 8, no. 28–9 (1985): 369–83; Romano Guardini, *Der Heilbringer in Mythos, Offenbarung und Politik: Eine theologisch-politische Besinnung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1946).

²⁵ Karl Raimund Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2 vols. (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1945); Marc-Pierre Möll, *Gesellschaft und totalitäre Ordnung: Eine theoriegeschichtliche Auseinandersetzung mit dem Totalitarismus* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998); I. C. Jarvie and Sandra Pralong, eds., *Popper’s Open Society after Fifty Years: The Continuing Relevance of Karl Popper* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999).

²⁶ Anson Rabinbach, “Moments of Totalitarianism,” *History & Theory* 45 (2006): 72–100.

²⁷ Karl Eimermacher, Astrid Volpert, and Gennadij A. Bordiugov, *Stürmische Aufbrüche und enttäuschte Hoffnungen: Russen und Deutsche in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Munich: W. Fink, 2006).

²⁸ Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*.

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headed by Alex Inkeles, Raymond A. Bauer, and Clyde Kluckhohn that combined political scientists with sociologists, anthropologists, and even psychologists.²⁹ The contributors to the Harvard Project were interested in the totalitarian model as a way of understanding political structures and processes as, for example, in *How the Soviet System Works*.³⁰ However, they were equally interested in everyday life, seen through the prism of modernization theory. Indeed, modernization theory was highly influential in the development of U.S. Sovietology. Thus, in *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society*, Inkeles and his collaborators implicitly compared the Soviet Union both with other modernizing states, like Japan and Turkey, and with states that had already modernized, like Britain and Germany.³¹ If you learned your Sovietology in the 1960s, you were almost as likely to develop an interest in modernization theory as in totalitarianism, given that Barrington Moore held more sway over first-generation totalitarian theorists than either Friedrich or Brzezinski.

In the 1970s, the challenge to the totalitarian model by political scientists like Jerry Hough placed the early Soviet experience (from the Revolution at least up to the Second World War) firmly in the context of modernization and eschewed the Nazi-Soviet comparison because of its Cold War politicization. From the 1960s to the 1980s, another comparison, deeply unsettling to many, lurked on the fringes of political scientists' discussion of the Soviet political system – the comparison with the United States. For some, this comparison was based on ideas of gradual but inexorable convergence of the two systems as the Soviet Union modernized.³² For others, the point of the comparison was to find out how well Western social-science categories, like “interest groups” and “participation” (usually derived from U.S. experience, but claiming universal applicability), applied to the Soviet situation.³³ For a third group from the New Left, it was to convey an understanding that the United States was, in its own way, “totalitarian.”³⁴

²⁹ For a description of the project, see Alex Inkeles and Raymond Bauer, *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 3–20.

³⁰ Raymond A. Bauer, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn, *How the Soviet System Works: Cultural, Psychological, and Social Themes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956).

³¹ Inkeles and Bauer, *The Soviet Citizen*.

³² “Convergence” of Soviet and Western systems was much discussed, first by economists and then by political scientists; most Sovietologists, especially those in political science, took a critical stance. See the exchange of opinions in the Congress for Cultural Freedom journal *Survey* no. 47 (April 1963), 36–42; Alfred G. Meyer, “Theories of Convergence” in *Change in Communist Systems*, ed. Chalmers Johnson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970), 36–42; Daniel Nelson, “Political Convergence: An Empirical Assessment,” *World Politics* 30, no. 3 (1978), 411–32.

³³ Jerry F. Hough, *The Soviet Union and Social Science Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

³⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) and id., “Repressive Tolerance,” in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr., and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 95–137.

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All of this happened not so long ago; yet these debates sound as if they occurred on a different planet. The intensity of the debate and the vitriol expended and, not least, the blinders that some academics wore have now become subjects of a history in their own right. These academics produced distinctive histories and theories, all written within the penumbra of World War II and the Cold War and ineluctably marked by these wars.³⁵ Their import at the time is perhaps as striking as their ephemeral nature today. The debates on fascism and on totalitarianism were part and parcel of a receding world of the twentieth century, which in hindsight appears as tantalizing as it is remote.

If historians were divided about the merits of theories of totalitarianism, they have been even less enthusiastic about using totalitarianism as an analytical tool.³⁶ They found that the totalitarian model – with its claim of a monolithic, efficient state and of a dogmatically held, mind-altering ideology – did not describe, much less explain, historic reality. It appeared as an overly mechanistic model foisted upon them by political scientists. Time and again, historians have come away disenchanted from the concept because it proved unhelpful in articulating new research questions and in organizing empirical findings. Moreover, with the deescalation of the Cold War in the context of East-West détente, the time seemed right to leave behind concepts and ideas that had a distinctly polemical, if not outright ideological, quality. Empirical historians, in particular, came to consider terms and concepts like totalitarianism contaminated by their Cold War exploitation.³⁷

Therefore, the demobilization of militant and militarized European politics during the last quarter of the twentieth century provided an unusual opening for empirical historians. Whatever grander ambitions may have driven them, they have since had their way for thirty-odd years, free from all manner of ideological and theoretical entanglements. German historians were much better off, as they had open access to archives and have systematically used them since the 1970s. Soviet historians, by contrast, have had and continue to have more difficulties, but they have made tremendous strides in the past decade and a half. Historians now know a great deal more about Nazism and Stalinism than was ever known before and most of their findings have been tested repeatedly against an ever broader stream of sources. This research-oriented, scholarly community remains, for the most part, in a posttheoretical and posttotalitarian mode.

³⁵ Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

³⁶ Typically Ian Kershaw, "Totalitarianism Revisited: Nazism and Stalinism in Comparative Perspective," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 33 (1994): 23–40; Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London and New York: Arnold, 2000).

³⁷ Institut für Zeitgeschichte, ed., *Totalitarismus und Faschismus: Eine wissenschaftliche und politische Begriffskontroverse: Kolloquium im Institut für Zeitgeschichte am 24. November 1978* (Munich and Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1980).

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There is much disagreement, even between the editors, whether or not this is a good state of affairs. But in the end, the tempers and bents of historians are neither here nor there. For whether coming from a more theoretical or a more empirical end, all historians have rediscovered the immensity of the mountain that they set out to scale. Whatever else may be said about Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union, they were two immensely powerful, threatening, and contagious dictatorships that for a long moment in a short century threatened to turn the world upside down. Empirical historians mainly worked over and disposed of older concepts and ideas of totalitarianism (and, for that matter, of fascism), but their own research only made the two regimes stand out even more clearly. Hence, making sense of the Stalinist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, with the much expanded empirical work at hand, has become of paramount importance. These two regimes may be the grand losers of twentieth-century history, but they exerted tremendous power over the century nonetheless – and continue to do so long after their defeat and collapse, respectively.

Telling metaphors were coined for this condition – Europe was a *Dark Continent* in an *Age of Extremes*.³⁸ But despite a tremendous wealth of research, neither of the two historiographies ever managed to sustain such encompassing metaphors, let alone employ them productively. History has for the most part remained national – and devoid of grand narratives or grand explanations. Unfortunately, this leaves us with an empirical history that is, by and large, parochial despite its broader ambitions. There is a price to pay for this self-limitation. With few exceptions, Soviet and German historians have not studied each other's work, although they have eyed each other from a distance, never quite losing the sense and sensibility that in a better and more transparent world, in which everyone knew each other's history, they might actually learn from one another – and in learning from one another might possibly achieve a better understanding of the tremendous fear and awe that both the Stalinist and the Nazi regimes elicited in their time.³⁹ Although historians have grown tired of the shackles imposed on their work by the concept of totalitarianism and the political debates over fascism and totalitarianism, they have also increasingly realized that the two national historiographies have to move toward each other, because, for one, antagonists as the two regimes were, they were quite literally on each other's throat and, for another, they shook the world in their antagonism. This may not be enough to make them of the same kind,⁴⁰ but it is surely enough to see them in tandem and in interaction – and to explore what they might have in common.

³⁸ See fn 9.

³⁹ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Julian Bourg, *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004); Jan-Werner Müller, *German Ideologies since 1945: Studies in the Political Thought and Culture of the Bonn Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴⁰ Leonid Luks, "Bolschewismus, Faschismus, Nationalsozialismus – Verwandte Gegner," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 14, no. 1 (1988): 96–115.

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The project of seeing the two regimes together – its scope and its method, as well as its thematic framework – has yet to be determined. In fact, despite a number of recent studies, the very nature of the challenge remains undefined. For what is at stake is not, as it may appear at first glance, the validity of the old debates, but an effort to make historical sense of the twentieth century; and, one of the crucial touchstones of this endeavor is making sense of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, a task yet to be accomplished, in history, as well as of the contemporary intellectual controversies they elicited.⁴¹

The scholarly enterprise of historians, however, is one thing; historical trends are quite another. Whether historians like it or not, reflections on totalitarianism have been rekindled in recent years. Initially, the revival of totalitarianism could be seen primarily as a French (liberal, pro-Western) preoccupation with exorcizing the specter of late Marxism among its intellectuals and as a German as well as British (conservative) effort to provide an antidote to a dominant, social-scientific understanding of Nazism and Stalinism.⁴² It has, perhaps more importantly, been encouraged by the rise of “people’s power” – democracy – as a European and global phenomenon.⁴³ The collapse of the Soviet Union, in turn, has led to intriguing conversions – and has created some strange bed-fellows.⁴⁴ Last but not least, the link between religious fundamentalism and

⁴¹ Michael Rowe, *Collaboration and Resistance in Napoleonic Europe: State Formation in an Age of Upheaval, c. 1800–1815* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴² Guy Hermet, Pierre Hassner, and Jacques Rupnik, eds., *Totalitarismes* (Paris: Economica, 1984); Léon Poliakov and Jean-Pierre Cabestan, *Les totalitarismes du XXe siècle: Un phénomène historique dépassé?* (Paris: Fayard, 1987); Stéphane Courtois, ed., *Une si longue nuit: L’apogée des régimes totalitaires en Europe, 1935–1953* (Monaco: Rocher, 2003); Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970’s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); Uwe Backes and Eckhard Jesse, eds., *Totalitarismus, Extremismus, Terrorismus: Ein Literaturführer und Wegweiser zur Extremismusforschung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 2nd rev. ed. (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1985); Uwe Backes, Eckhard Jesse, and Rainer Zitelmann, eds., *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit: Impulse zur Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Propyläen, 1990); Hermann Lübke, and Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, eds., *Heilserwartung und Terror: Politische Religionen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1995); Horst Möller, ed., *Der rote Holocaust und die Deutschen: Die Debatte um das “Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus”* (Munich and Zurich: Piper, 1999); Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000).

⁴³ Guillermo A. O’Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan, eds., *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Achim Siegel, ed., *Totalitarismustheorien nach dem Ende des Kommunismus* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998).

⁴⁴ Ferenc Fehér and Agnes Heller, *Eastern Left, Western Left: Totalitarianism, Freedom, and Democracy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1987); Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Linke Geisterfabrik: Denkanstöße für eine antitotalitäre Linke* [with an introduction by Daniel Cohn-Bendit] (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag neue Kritik, 2001); Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London; New York: Verso, 2001).