

*Tomasz Ceran*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5037-6378>

Historical Research Department

Institute of National Remembrance, Branch in Bydgoszcz

**‘SCHOOLS OF HATRED’.  
THE ESSENCE OF TOTALITARIANISM  
IN JERZY W. BOREJSZA’S APPROACH**

Let us hope that from a long perspective of the twenty-first century, historians will still notice the fundamental differences between the European authoritarian and totalitarian systems; and, that time will not draw a simple equation mark between them, whereas the historical memory will help fight authoritarianisms and totalitarianisms.<sup>1</sup>

Jerzy W. Borejsza

**Abstract**

Jerzy W. Borejsza regarded the term ‘totalitarianism’ as a helpful tool in describing the political systems in Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and the Bolshevik/communist Soviet Union, but opted for restricted use of the term. Apart from the classical determinants of a totalitarian system, he believed that the mobilisation of hatred against the predefined ethnic/national, racial, or class enemy was essential to any totalitarianism. Rather than adding a new distinguishing feature of the totalitarian system, the Polish historian carried out a series of multi-aspect comparative analyses of its earlier-defined traits and characteristics. He has drawn a precise distinction between a totalitarian and authoritarian system. Not satisfied with apparent similarities, he tried to explore the issue more deeply, identifying different intensities of the phenomena specific to totalitarian systems. He stressed a gradation of totalitarianism in the different totalitarian systems, at the different stages of their functioning. To his credit goes the introduction in the historiography of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jerzy W. Borejsza, ‘Kilka uwag o autorytaryzmach i totalitaryzmach’, in Włodzimierz Mędrzecki (ed.), *Spółczesność, państwo, modernizacja. Studia ofiarowane Januszowi Żarnowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin* (Warszawa, 2002), 45; cf. Jerzy W. Borejsza, ‘O autorytaryzmie można nieskończenie’, *Historia i Polityka*, 2–3 [9–10] (2010), 67–8.

concept of ‘anti-Slavism’ and, as part of it, anti-Polonism, as essential traits of the National Socialist ideology. He opposed the simplifications tending to appear in broadly used terms, the attempts to ‘ideologise’ and ‘politicise’ the history, particularly in describing the communist totalitarianism. According to Borejsza, fascism, Nazism, and communism had once frequented the same school of totalitarian hatred and took there the same classes – but they were differently evaluated when it came to the finals.

**Keywords:** totalitarianism, authoritarianism, fascism, Nazism, communism

## I

As a historian, Professor Jerzy Wojciech Borejsza primarily dealt with the ‘beautiful nineteenth century’, as the title of one of his major works had it.<sup>2</sup> However, reflection on the twentieth century, ‘the century of annihilation’ (to use the title of his another book),<sup>3</sup> was the other significant area of his scholarly explorations. Research into totalitarianisms stood at the core of this activity. Borejsza described himself, indeed, as a historiographer of the nineteenth century *and* of the twentieth-century totalitarianisms.<sup>4</sup> There was no coincidence in that he ran for long years the Department of Totalitarian Systems and the History of the Second World War within the Warsaw-based Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences – Poland’s only academic unit whose name explicitly referred to totalitarianism. This conceptual identification enabled Borejsza’s extensive reflection on fascism, Nazism, and communism, their common elements and fundamental differences. Now, it is worth considering which of the elements of a totalitarian system he considered the most essential, and what was the essence of totalitarianism, to his mind? Can one refer to totalitarianism as an entity appearing in diverse forms, or rather, to several different totalitarianisms?

Borejsza considered the term ‘totalitarianism’ as a valuable and necessary tool in the description of the three systems, one that enabled him to make comparisons between the socio-political systems of fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Soviet Russia. As he put it, “Like many other authors, I appreciate the usefulness of the concept of ‘totalitarianism’, on a shared basis, for scholars exploring the Italian fascism, the national socialism, and Stalinism; it is thus useful to historians,

<sup>2</sup> Jerzy W. Borejsza, *Piękny wiek XIX* (Warszawa, 1984, 1990<sup>2</sup>, 2010<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*, *Stulecie zagłady* (Gdańsk–Warszawa, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*, *Ostaniec, czyli ostatni świadek* (Warszawa, 2018), 11.

political scientists, sociologists, or lawyers. I would, however, opt for restricting the idea in question and observing diversity within it”.<sup>5</sup> Albeit Borejsza, in his studies, tended to emphasise the differences, rather than similarities, between the systems, he would use ‘totalitarianism’ as the common term for all of them.

The concept that, according to Borejsza, is fundamental for the understanding of the essence of totalitarianism, is hatred – a literary rather than historical term. With all the apparent differences between the three totalitarian systems, hatred is the core of all of them. The same connection between hatred and totalitarianism is underlined by the Romanian historian Vladimir Tismaneanu.<sup>6</sup> Though diverse, hard to measure, and targeted at different national/ethnic or social groups, the scale of mobilisation of hatred was for Borejsza the essence of totalitarianism. As he aptly argued, “the European fascisms, and the European totalitarianisms in general, were, indeed, schools of hatred – targeted against the ‘enemies of the class’, ‘enemies of the nation’, ‘enemies of the people’ or ‘public enemies’, ‘enemies of the state’, or, ‘enemies of the faith’ ... In the name of fighting those mythologised foes, killings of millions were organised and justified”.<sup>7</sup> Borejsza was positive that hatred neither fades away nor is blind, as Polish poet Wisława Szymborska saw it: hatred has got “a sniper’s keen sight and gazes unflinchingly at the future as only it can”.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the threat of totalitarian hatred is permanently present and has not perished with the collapse of the totalitarian systems. The proneness of societies to state-forming and nationalist propaganda has not diminished, either: for Borejsza, it was the source of concern, and a warning. It is not by coincidence that Professor Borejsza’s students, colleagues and friends entitled the festschrift book dedicated to him *Wiek nienawiści* [The Century of Hatred].<sup>9</sup> His love for literary fiction,

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<sup>5</sup> *Id.*, *Stulecie zagłady*, 194.

<sup>6</sup> Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Devil in history. Communism, fascism, and some lessons of the twentieth century* (Berkeley–Los Angeles, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Jerzy W. Borejsza, *Szkoły nienawiści. Historia faszyzmów europejskich 1919–1945* (Wrocław, 2000), 13.

<sup>8</sup> I refer at this point to Wisława Szymborska’s poem *Hatred* [*Nienawiść*] translated by Clare Cavanagh and Stanisław Barańczak. The translation was published in Wisława Szymborska, *View with a Grain of Sand. Selected Poems* (San Diego, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Edmund Dmitrów, Jerzy Eisler, Mirosław Filipowicz, Mariusz Wołos, and Grzegorz P. Bąbiak (eds), *Wiek nienawiści. Studia* (Warszawa, 2014).

which helped him understand the climate of the historical period he described, was an essential aspect of his personality. The spirit of the period often remained ungraspable through traditional historical sources. Borejsza called himself an 'unfulfilled writer' who happened to become a historian.<sup>10</sup>

The parallels between fascism, bolshevism, and Nazism were obvious to Borejsza; he could freely explore them after 1989. Earlier on, he would hardly ever use the concept of totalitarianism; he referred to Italian and German 'fascisms', apparently mainly owing to the communist-period censorship. He was aware that he would not be allowed to openly make comparative analyses between communism and Nazism and fascism, based on a theory of totalitarianism. Instead, he appreciated Ernst Nolte's interpretation of fascism, approaching the phenomenon as a form of totalitarianism. In an anthology on European fascisms published in 1979,<sup>11</sup> he intended to include an essay by Hannah Arendt, which was prevented by censorship. He could analyse communism in comparative depiction only after its final collapse. "As a professional historian, I started to deal with fascisms after 1970, just because writing about them demonstrated how far the entire Eastern Bloc system, whose resolute opponent I had become, was related to them and how distant it was to the old socialist or communist utopias".<sup>12</sup>

In the new geopolitical realities, he wrote: "All the three political systems were established in the name of breaking with the past and the present; in the name of a future system, a new man, and a new world".<sup>13</sup> Let us note that the same line of thinking about similarities between totalitarianisms can be found in Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, who preached a moral Manichaeism (to Borejsza, he was quite a stranger). According to the novelist and diarist Herling-Grudziński, essential to any totalitarianism is the conviction that

the authority has the right to kill or liquidate people, social groups, or nations it considers redundant and even detrimental, intoxicating the work of construction of a new and better world: to kill using cremation

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<sup>10</sup> Borejsza, *Ostaniec*, 527.

<sup>11</sup> See *id.* (ed.), *Faszystwy europejskie (1922–1945) w oczach współczesnych i historyków* (Warszawa, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*, *Ostaniec*, 528.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*, *Szkoły nienawiści*, 29.

furnaces, gradually eliminate humans in the Gulag (squeezing out of the victims everything squeezable), mow down the Jews, kulaks, defiled with their race or class; nations that do not want to cease to be nations; people who do not want or are not able to consider themselves irrelevant; all this immense human trash (or, *szmelc* [scrap], to put it in a German-like manner), doomed to expiration in the dustbin of history, in the name of a racial or class utopia.<sup>14</sup>

Hannah Arendt and, of Polish scholars, Franciszek Ryszka – the former in relation to Jews, and the latter to Jews and Poles – named the target of totalitarian systems the ‘objective enemy’<sup>15</sup> – one that poses a threat by the very fact that it exists, and has certain indispensable and irremovable (‘incurable’) traits. Borejsza followed this path and claimed that homicidal intentions should be noticed in the Nazi ideology also with respect to Slavs, Poles included. Author of *Anty-slawizmu Adolfa Hitlera* [Adolf Hitler’s Anti-Slavism] and *Śmieszne sto milionów Słowian* [A Ridiculous Hundred Million Slavs], Borejsza introduced in the historiography the concept of anti-Slavism as an integral part of the National Socialist ideology, part of which was anti-Polonism.<sup>16</sup> He was the first to notice that Führer’s worldview, which became shared by hosts of Germans, anti-Slavism, and anti-Polonism within it, appeared along with anti-Semitism. Without this, the Nazi concept of *Lebensraum* and the German crimes on Poles, Russians, and other Slavs cannot be understood. Borejsza would undoubtedly have supported Hannah Arendt’s observation whereby National Socialism categorised nations into such whose extermination was perpetrated immediately (as in the case of Jews), such which could expect it in the foreseeable future (the case of Poles, Russians, or Ukrainians), and such as to which there were no ‘comprehensive solution’ plans (the French and Belgians).<sup>17</sup> His consideration for the other mass

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<sup>14</sup> Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, *Dziennik pisany nocą 1997–1999* (Warszawa, 2000), 316.

<sup>15</sup> See Franciszek Ryszka, *U źródeł sukcesu i klęski. Szkice z dziejów hitleryzmu* (Warszawa, 1975), 121–9.

<sup>16</sup> See Jerzy W. Borejsza, *Anty-slawizm Adolfa Hitlera* (Warszawa, 1988), where the author develops his views previously presented in the study “*Śmieszne sto milionów Słowian...*”. *Wokół światopoglądu Adolfa Hitlera* (2006, 2016). 2017 saw the publication of its English version, entitled *A Ridiculous Hundred Million Slavs: Concerning Adolf Hitler’s World-View* (Warszawa, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1959<sup>2</sup>), 622.

crimes perpetrated by the Germans during the Second World War would not translate, after all, into negating the Holocaust as a unique phenomenon: a comprehensive and ‘fulfilled’ genocide.

Most historians have considered the Third Reich’s anti-Polonism in the context of Polish-German stereotypes prevalent over the centuries (cf. Tomasz Szarota)<sup>18</sup> or National Socialist propaganda (Cezary E. Król).<sup>19</sup> Borejsza alone identified and pointed to an integral ingredient of a monopolistic ideology, without which no totalitarian system would actually exist. Apart from one significant exception, this view has not paved its way through to international literature. In his *The Third Reich. A New History*, Michael Burleigh notes, following Borejsza’s findings, that a deep Prussian anti-Polonism drove Hitler’s actions after 1939.<sup>20</sup> The Polish historian believed that “Beside anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism, anti-Polishness joined the permanent, fundamental components of Hitler’s worldview during the war years<sup>21</sup> ... Hitler made a dogma out of the destruction of the Poles”.<sup>22</sup>

National Socialism denied the Slavic nations’ ability to produce an advanced form of social organisation and challenged the entire species, en masse, any state-forming capacity. Hitler argued that “the Nordic-Germanic race conceived the state-centred thinking and put it into reality through forcing individuals to fit into the general framework ... As for the Slavic nations, they are not destined to living autonomously. They are aware of it, and let us not make them believe that they are as well capable of it”.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, like any other

<sup>18</sup> Tomasz Szarota, *Niemcy i Polacy. Wzajemne postrzeganie i stereotypy* (Warszawa, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Cezary E. Król, *Polska i Polacy w propagandzie narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech 1919–1945* (Warszawa, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich. A New History* (London, 2001), 440. I try to resume Borejsza’s considerations on anti-Polonism in Tomasz Ceran, ‘Antypolonizm w ideologii narodowosocjalistycznej/Anti-Polonism in the Ideology of National Socialism’, *Studia nad Totalitaryzmami i Wiekiem XX/Totalitarian and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Studies*, 1 (2017), 84–103, 218–39.

<sup>21</sup> Borejsza, *A Ridiculous Hundred Million Slavs*, 139.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>23</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Hitler’s Table Talk 1941–1944*, ed. by H.R. Trevor-Roper (New York, 2000); Polish edition: Adolf Hitler, *Rozmowy przy stole 1941–1944: rozmowy w Kwaterze Głównej zapisane na polecenie Martina Bormanna przez jego adiutanta Heinricha Heima*, edited by Stefan Dejkało, compiled and translated by Jerzy Hensel and Ryszard Turczyn (Warszawa, 1994), 60–1 (the quote after the Polish edition).

'-ism', anti-Slavism simplified the reality and cannot explain every single relevant aspect of Nazi politics. Hitler's racist policies applied in respect of the Slavs varied, of which Borejsza, with his enormous knowledge of the history of East-Central European nations, was fully aware. The Slovaks had their own state; the Czechs had their own officials and a president within the Protectorate. However, it was the Poles, Russians and other Slavic nations who were doomed to extermination, right after the Jews. Whereas the Nazi ideology was not decisive for Hitler's attack on Poland in 1939, it did determine the character and the main objectives of the occupation policies pursued by the Nazis in Poland. In Hitler's mind, anti-Semitism merged and blended with anti-Polonism soon after the Germany's aggression on Poland: the former was a substrate of total genocide and the latter, of a partial genocide that could turn after the Reich's supposed victory into a total genocide. Those 'ridiculous hundred million Slavs' whom Hitler intended to devour, absorb, or simply remove, i.e. the Poles and Russians, Borejsza named 'the Jews of tomorrow', and this was apparently not a literary embellishment.<sup>24</sup>

In terms of totalitarian thinking, the old regime was unacceptable. As opposed to authoritarianism, Borejsza emphasised, totalitarianism would not proclaim the slogans of curing or retrieving a situation or system. The makers of totalitarian systems are not healers or menders of the world: they consider themselves its new creators – but, in the first place, ravagers of the legacy order. It is only upon its debris that they intend to create a reality compliant with their ideological dogma. Their purpose is to ruin the existing reality in its entirety and implement their own positive programme on its ruins: the vision of a world without the racial, national, or class enemy. In his works, Borejsza extensively deals with differentiating between an authoritarian and a totalitarian system: the former satisfies itself with obedience and a passive attitude of its citizens, whereas the latter mobilises the masses. In totalitarianism, the elites get completely replaced; authoritarianism is partly founded on the inherited social background. There is no 'mono-party' system, with a single political

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<sup>24</sup> Borejsza, *A Ridiculous Hundred Million Slavs*, 149. Cf. Tomasz Ceran, "Zagłada wartościowania". Polska refleksja nad nazizmem', in Paweł Kaczorowski, Marek Kornat, Joanna Lubecka, and Piotr Madajczyk (eds), *Doświadczenie dwóch totalitaryzmów. Interpretacje* (Warszawa, 2018), 270–80.

party at power, and the ‘road roller of a one-and-only worldview does not destroy everything. Hence attempts to win followers by building blocs or ‘fronts’ of support among the other parties and other political formations. Authoritarianisms do not have the ambition to control all the fields of social life and build a worldview monopoly. In an authoritarian system, individuals are shackled by orders and bans, without striving to form a ‘new man’. In a totalitarian system, the idea to form a ‘new human being’ is key and fundamental. An authoritarian system keeps relics and façades of democracy; it is more restrained or reserved than totalitarianism in pursuing social demagoguery. Authoritarian systems are characterised by a much lower degree of social disintegration than their totalitarian counterparts, aiming at destroying society, understood as a social collective whose various planes are tied to one another. The authoritarian regimes were led by dictators, usually associated with the army, showing no rallying abilities and finding contact with masses awkward for them; leaders of considerable charisma usually controlled the totalitarian regimes.<sup>25</sup>

For Borejsza, totalitarianism is a Weberian ideal type that has never been entirely put into practice. He pondered about “how many discriminants taken together would bring about a totalitarian system?”<sup>26</sup> As a minimum, Borejsza adopted – following the classical theorists of totalitarianism: Juan José Linz, whose typology of totalitarianisms and authoritarianisms he cherished above all,<sup>27</sup> Carl Friedrich, and Zbigniew Brzeziński<sup>28</sup> – the five determinants: one mass political party, a monopolistic ideology connected to a cult of the leader, a terror apparatus, propagandist machinery, and a centrally-controlled economy. Rather than adding a new characteristic to the description of totalitarian systems, Borejsza tended to compare them against one another based on earlier-defined traits or characteristics, and filled the description with historical content. The totalitarian systems have put into practice their ‘totalitarian minimum’ on different scales, and in different functioning periods. Thereby, one comes across a gradation of totalitarianism in the different totalitarian systems concerned.

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<sup>25</sup> Borejsza, ‘O autorytaryzmie’, 58–68.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*, *Szkoły nienawiści*, 32.

<sup>27</sup> Juan J. Linz, *Totalitäre und autoritäre Regime* (Berlin, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> See Carl J. Friedrich (ed.), *Totalitarianism: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (Cambridge MA, 1954).



Borejsza was not satisfied with apparent similarities: instead, he tried to reach for a more profound recognition, and identified different intensities of diverse phenomena in the different totalitarian systems.

To describe German Nazism and Italian fascism, Borejsza used the summary term 'European fascism'. As it seems, the dominant criterion for him was these systems' ideologies and rightist bias, as opposed to the leftist roots of communism. He referred to an 'extreme Right' with respect to the nationalistic fascism and Nazism, terming the internationalist communism an 'extreme Left'.<sup>29</sup> This view is at least disputable.<sup>30</sup> Hannah Arendt was the first author to perceive National Socialism as a synthesis of the nationalistic Right and the internationalism of the Left.<sup>31</sup> Borejsza was aware that the criteria of 'leftist' and 'rightist' identity or quality have lost their analytical meaning and were perhaps not-quite-adequate tools to analyse totalitarian systems (he would often quote Hitler considering himself a 'conservative'). All the same, the conviction that fascism and Nazism are rooted in Right-oriented values whereas communism originates from the Left-related ones remained firm in his thinking. He believed that the aspects common to fascism and Nazism, including exaltation of nation and race, a negation of universalism and of any theory of human equality, and opposing the idea of nation with the concept of national community, rendered those totalitarian systems different from communism. Universalism and inclusiveness of communism were decisive about its greater attractive force. The total circulation of the complete works of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union equalled 672 million (as of 1975), the figures for the Lenin works and Marx and Engels works being 483 million (1975) and 108 million, respectively. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was published in 10 million copies, in all the language versions.<sup>32</sup> In the first place, Marxism was a big anti-capitalist utopia, which for many an adherent of a 'doom of the West' was a very attractive offer. Nazism, in turn, was exclusive – and yet it was not bound to Germany, as its elements won acclaim in several countries in Europe. 'Hitler's European helpers'

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<sup>29</sup> Borejsza, *Szkoły nienawiści*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> See Jonah J. Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: the Secret History of the Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (London, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 357.

<sup>32</sup> Borejsza, *Stulecie zagłady*, 209.

perceived as a peculiar *Nazitern* (in an analogy to the Comintern) was Borejsza's scholarly project, regrettably never implemented; perhaps, some historian(s) will follow it up in the future. One may regret that Borejsza himself did not attempt to determine how much of the leftist element is in communism and how much of the rightist, in Nazism (or vice versa).

He opposed the idea to personalise totalitarian systems. He did see the enormous role of the leaders, commanders of chiefs in their formation – a greater one in the case of Hitler and Stalin, a lesser one in the case of Mussolini. Communism would have been possible without Stalin; the answer to whether Nazism would have been the case without Hitler is unknown. However, to Borejsza's mind, not only the leaders were responsible for creating the felonious systems: also the masses participating in their crimes made their significant contributions. As he put it, "in a number of respects, Hitler merely expressed the German mediocrity".<sup>33</sup> Borejsza opposed the perception of Nazism in Germany's history, and of communism in the history of Russia, as an accidental phenomenon, a historical bracket. He considered the view of 'good masses' and 'evil dictators' erroneous. He often recalled the reflection expressed by Robert Kempner, a Nuremberg prosecutor, who debated how he could possibly defend Hitler: "Mr Hitler, I shall be defending you ... I will show how all of them cheered in honour of you, so that you would not have believed it yourself. I will show that, and say, if all those people cheered in honour of you like that, it means that millions approved it, and you then could believe you were doing something good".<sup>34</sup>

Borejsza was afraid that too-far-fetched comparisons might obscure the evil of one totalitarianism by the evil of the other one. The reminding of the crimes of the communist system after 1989, right as it was, should not lead to extinguishing the flame of memory of the crimes of Nazism (save for the 'everlasting' memory of the Holocaust), he exhorted. Anticommunism cannot obscure to scholars, especially Polish ones, what Nazism and the German occupation was. For Borejsza, although Poland was subjected to homicidal practices from two occupying powers, there was no simple equation mark between the German and the Soviet occupation, and one must say he was quite

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<sup>33</sup> *Id.*, *Szkoły nienawiści*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted after *id.*, *Stulecie zagłady*, 152.

right.<sup>35</sup> An attempt at analysing the reciprocal influences of Nazism and communism was the historian's important scientific postulate; despite years of research, the issue has not been thoroughly investigated yet.

Mainly owing to the scale of terror and extermination (including with respect to own citizens), Borejsza categorised totalitarianisms into 'perfect' (Nazism and Stalinism) and 'imperfect' ones (Italian fascism).<sup>36</sup> As he remarked, social life in Italy was not totalised to the extent comparable to that in Germany. Mussolini's state had no mass extermination camps and there was no biological racism; political prisoners numbered, roughly, hundreds or thousands. Nothing like this can be said about the Third Reich or the Soviet Union. The Italian fascism got decomposed almost immediately after Mussolini was overthrown, whereas most Germans remained loyal to Hitler almost until the very end. Forms of psychical terror were similar in both regimes, for a change. Common to Nazism and Stalinism was their self-destructiveness.<sup>37</sup>

Nazism and fascism appeared to be short-lived – they lasted for twelve and twenty-one (or twenty-three, including the Saló Republic) years, respectively, and did not transform. Communism in Russia lived as long as seventy-four years, evolving. Borejsza stated that as for communism, it is hard to refer to an extended perspective in the research into this system, which he otherwise regarded as crucial for historians.<sup>38</sup> The communist system was not knocked down by blows and has evolved. The Third Reich was an 'exterminative totalitarianism' where annihilation of millions was critical: apart from conquest or submission, extermination was an autotelic objective. Stalinism employed terror as well; contrary to its German counterpart, the Stalinist terror was unforeseeable and targeted against its citizens

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Piotr Madajczyk, 'Polityka ZSRS i III Rzeszy wobec elit polskich w latach II wojny światowej', *Studia nad Totalitaryzmami i Wiekiem XX/Totalitarian and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Studies*, 1 (2017), 68–83.

<sup>36</sup> Jerzy W. Borejsza, *Rzym a wspólnota faszystowska. O penetracji faszystowskiego w Europie Środkowej, Południowej i Wschodniej* (Warszawa, 1981), 27.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*, 'Wstęp' [Introduction], in *id.* (ed.), *Faszystowskie europejskie (1922–1945)* (Warszawa, 1979), 18.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*, 'Italian Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism. Three Forms of Totalitarianism from a Twenty-First-Century Perspective', in Jerzy W. Borejsza and Klaus Ziemer (eds), *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes in Europe. Legacies and Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (Warszawa, 2006), 4.

to a more considerable degree. Nazism and communism proclaimed global peace; on the other hand, however, only Nazism affirmed war openly (in his diary, the period between 9 October 1939 and 15 May 1940, Joseph Goebbels opened with the sentence, “Der Krieg ist der Vater aller Dinge”).<sup>39</sup> Stalinism proclaimed the propaganda of peace. While Hitler strove for total war, Stalin preferred local wars. In Borejsza’s view, Hitler impressed a more profound stigma on the system in Germany than Stalin did in Soviet Russia. Whereas we know relatively much about the crimes of Nazism and communism, we still do not know much about a collective fascination with communism and social resistance, which was much more extensive and stronger in the Soviet Union compared to the Third Reich. (It is hard not to notice that there is no counterpart of Czesław Miłosz’s *Captive Mind*, which would deal with the fascination of National Socialism). Communism abolished the class stratification (obviously, apart from the ‘new class’); large parts of the societies under communism (not just in the USSR) preferred that everybody be equally badly off to only a group of people being well off. Fromm’s ‘escape from freedom’ and longing for a strong and efficient authority was the substrate of any totalitarianism.

Although he could not precisely define the relevant notions and concepts, Borejsza opposed simplifications about them. Despite the common core, bolshevism was not equal to Leninism, and Stalinism did not stand for communism. At the same time, they were the varieties of one totalitarian system. According to Borejsza, if we equate bolshevism with Leninism, communism, and Stalinism, Stalin’s line of thinking and acting will triumph. Stalinism was a ‘national bolshevism’, and therefore it has so much in common with Nazism (Hitlerism).<sup>40</sup> The national bolshevism grew similar to National Socialism, and the other way round. (Yet, Borejsza was not sure, in the way Nolte was, about granting primacy to communism, rather than Nazism. Though he highly valued certain analyses of his German colleague as far as classification of totalitarianisms was concerned, he found Nolte’s views on Poles, for that matter, unacceptable). Nonetheless, the totalitarian core of hatred common to all the three varieties of the

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<sup>39</sup> Joseph Goebbels, *Dzienniki*, ii: 1939–1943, ed. by Eugeniusz Cezary Król (Warszawa, 2013), 25.

<sup>40</sup> Borejsza, *Szkoły nienawiści*, 20.

communist utopia is not to be overlooked; no less apparent are the Marxist totalitarian ideas affirming violence, present in all of them. All the same, Borejsza shared Andrzej Walicki's view whereby totalitarianism was not an inevitable consequence of Marxism.<sup>41</sup> The latter was conceived out of a long tradition of political thought instead of fascism or Nazism. In Borejsza's opinion, Marxism-Leninism and Nazism were all overt substitutes of religion: in fact, they were totalitarian religions themselves. All the three totalitarian systems had the ambition to appropriate also this particular sphere of human life, which was done to varying degrees. The agreement between the state and the Catholic Church was one of the strengths of Italian fascism, apart from the class concord and elimination of joblessness.

Borejsza's understanding of totalitarianisms was a strict result of his attitude to history as a science and of his postulate to separate it, as far as possible, from current politics. "In understanding history, we should try to view it not exclusively from the standpoint of our time, our social class, our political formation, our nation, and our moral norms".<sup>42</sup> He did not believe in an objective or axiologically neutral history; instead, he was positive that the historian's duty is to pursue an 'objectivising' history, in line with the *audi alteram partem* principle. He found the theories of post-truth and constructivism theory awkward and alien. A historian should seek the existing truth, the one that is attainable through listening to the reasons given by all the parties to a historical process. "Historians are not, and indeed cannot, act as judges. What they do is establish the facts. They have the right to their own moral evaluations, but never in detachment from the facts ... for a historian, the truth can never be fully explored and is subject to permanent verification".<sup>43</sup> He protested against idealisation and politicisation of the past – mainly because it prevents historians from accurately assessing and perceiving the past and the present. One is a historian or a politician, and the two functions can never be merged or blended. Critical history, rather than affirmative history, was an approach close to his heart: this is how he understood the social role and the task for the intelligentsia to perform in society.

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<sup>41</sup> Andrzej Walicki, *Marxizm i skok do królestwa wolności. Dzieje komunistycznej utopii* (Warszawa, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> Borejsza, *Szkoły nienawiści*, 261.

<sup>43</sup> *Id.*, *Stulecie zagłady*, 214.

For Borejsza, reflection on totalitarianism was a pretext for posing questions about humans and their moral condition, but the historian was far from categorical moral evaluations and carefully approached any generalisations. The enslavement of individuals in totalitarian and authoritarian systems has been the central issue in twentieth-century history for Borejsza himself and for his students dealing with diverse aspects of recent and most recent history.<sup>44</sup> “Does any normal human turn into an abnormal one under abnormal conditions?”, Borejsza asked.<sup>45</sup> Experience and knowledge seemingly suggested to him that the answer is, “No, not *any* human, but a majority of them – well, yes, regrettably”. He was convinced that “evil has thousands of different faces, not just one, even among the followers of these systems”,<sup>46</sup> and it is the historian’s task to spot and identified them. Albeit these considerations often appear inconclusive, they do remain the important questions of twentieth-century humanities. The strength of Borejsza’s works is not about giving simple, unambiguous replies to complicated questions but rather, about the ability to pose fundamental questions and give answers – always partial and uncertain but rendering one closer to the truth about the nineteenth or twentieth century.

When considering the comparisons between totalitarianisms, Borejsza always identified a different option. Aware that a theory is founded on ‘pure models’, he could spot numerous deviations from such models in the past. He knew that history could not possibly be encapsulated in stiff theoretical definitions; however, the latter, though imperfect, are necessary for making any attempts at synthesising and comparing. He believed that there are nations specifically predisposed for authoritarian and totalitarian systems. Such nations have no tradition of parliamentary democracy, freedom of religion and conscience behind them.

The lives of such nations are subordinated to the state or the local ecclesial hierarchy. One would find it difficult to figure out totalitarianism emerging in the United Kingdom. In parallel, the Polish scholar noticed that the history of Germany in the Third Reich time opposes this argument and carries a warning: “A totalitarian system may be

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<sup>44</sup> See Grzegorz P. Bąbiak and Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikow (eds), *Trudny wiek XX. Jednostka, system, epoka* (Warszawa, 2010), 8–9.

<sup>45</sup> Borejsza, *Szkoły nienawiści*, 15.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

built in a society with a developed economy and technology, a long civilisational tradition, with strong accents of parliamentary democracy. It can be built among the most civilised nations”.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly to the writer Jan Józef Szczepański,<sup>48</sup> Borejsza did not doubt that the twentieth century was an age of totalitarianisms – this being the keyword to understanding the epoch. The three pillars of European culture and civilisation are frequently evoked: the Roman Law, the Greek culture, and the Judeo-Christianity – a heritage we can be proud of. Considering the twentieth century, the human rights protection system, which is developed to the highest degree in the European continent, is sometimes added. Borejsza’s works force us to bear in mind also the dark side of our cultural heritage: totalitarianism, along with genocide, is part of the European legacy as well.

In the book *Ostaniec, czyli ostatni świadek*, published a year before his death, pondering on his own scholarly output, Borejsza wrote:

I probably had a wealth of good ideas and an ability to write ... to some extent, I enriched knowledge on European totalitarianisms, on the would-be ‘Fascist International’ ... I have introduced in Polish historical glossary the notions ‘the beautiful nineteenth century’ and ‘Adolf Hitler’s anti-Slavism’, and always most strongly opposed making use of a ‘historically-oriented policy’ instead of the ‘historical truth’.<sup>49</sup>

Clearly, Borejsza must have been aware that not all aspects of the state’s activity in the historical sphere led to a denial of the historical truth and that there were some positive examples of ‘historical policy’ – such as, for instance, the state’s involvement in the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the January Insurrection (1863), which he joined as an active participant. Otherwise, he was quite right when stating that the imposition of a single vision of history was an essential trait of totalitarian and authoritarian systems.

Jerzy W. Borejsza has not created a new, original theory of totalitarianism or authoritarianism; however, his versatility in the history of Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union (including based on his personal experience), and knowledge of the cultures and languages of East-Central European countries, enabled him to nuance and spot

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<sup>47</sup> Borejsza, *Stulecie zagłady*, 215.

<sup>48</sup> Jan J. Szczepański, *Małeńka encyklopedia totalizmu* (Kraków, 1990), 5.

<sup>49</sup> Borejsza, *Ostaniec*, 529.

the gaps in the commonly accepted theories of totalitarianism, reach deeper and identify the essential differences between the three totalitarian systems, which are sometimes neglected, particularly in our day: this seems to be his most significant achievement as a scholar. Fascism, Nazism, and communism had once frequented the same school of totalitarian hatred, taking the same classes – but they were differently evaluated when it came to the finals.

*transl. Tristan Korecki*

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**Tomasz Ceran** – 20th-century history of political thought, German occupation in Poland, theories of totalitarianism and genocide; postdoctoral researcher and acting Head of the Historical Research Department, Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), Branch in Bydgoszcz; e-mail: [Tomasz.Ceran@ipn.gov.pl](mailto:Tomasz.Ceran@ipn.gov.pl)