



INTRODUCTION

Historians Reassess Totalitarianism Theory

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By 1974, like most, if not all, editors at the publishing house where he was working, Mircea Radian was quite familiar with the notorious prescriptions of the Direcția Presei (Directorate for Print Media), the main institution of formal censorship of those years in socialist Romania.¹ The publishing house where he was an editor had been founded through a recent merger of two former publishers, Editura Științifică and, respectively, Editura Enciclopedică, likely due to budgetary constraints. Radian was now supervising a rather significant project for the newly founded Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică: the publication in Romanian of Thomas Kuhn's groundbreaking book *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*.

The project was significant, not only because of the value of Kuhn's book, or the need to establish a reputation for the new publisher. Its translation into Romanian was signed by Radu Bogdan, a philosopher whose recent departure for the United States was unlikely to please the authorities. Radian had obtained the approval from the Direcția Presei to have the translation printed at the new publishing house, while leaving out Bogdan's name as the author of the translation. He also commissioned Mircea Flonta, Bogdan's former professor at the University of Bucharest, to write the introductory piece for the volume.

It is the exchanges between Radian and Flonta surrounding the latter's introductory study to Kuhn's work that interest us here, albeit very briefly. After the first study's draft was submitted, Radian informed Flonta of the censors' unsurprising request for changes to it, so as to comprise a critique of Kuhn's work from the rather ideological perspective of a "dialectical materialist view" of science. Radian's advice to Flonta was that his second draft should include such modifications.

For his second draft, Flonta had only two choices: either he would conform to the request and add some meaningless criticisms of Kuhn's work, highlighting the alleged

superiority of the ill-defined dialectical materialist position, or he would withdraw his study as a clear sign of protest against the censors' request. The latter decision would have jeopardized the project of publishing Bogdan's translation of Kuhn's book.² But as Flonta writes in his recently published memoirs, beyond the conforming or dissenting actions, he contemplated a third choice: the addition of his own critique of Kuhn's position, the outline of what he perceived as a tension within it, one far removed from a so-called dialectical materialist interpretation of it.

Flonta's choice of action, opting for what he describes as "the third path," was, of course, determined by Radian's advice, following the censors' request that he submit a modified draft. It was also influenced by their respective familiarity with the constraints imposed by the *Direcția Presei* up until 1975. But since the latter was shortly replaced by Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, with a novel gatekeeper for cultural production, *Consiliul Educației și Culturii Socialiste* (Council of Socialist Education and Culture), it is also very likely that this last, institutional-level change played a substantial role in the publication of Bogdan's translation of Kuhn's work. And when published in Romanian, Kuhn's work included Flonta's introductory study, as he submitted it in its second version.³

What Flonta calls "the third path" for his introduction, and its leading to the publication of his study under the supervision of a censorship institution, are not exceptional episodes of knowledge production and cultural institutions during real socialism in Romania, nor in other countries of the former Soviet bloc. In the region and at that time, in various disguises, such epistemic tensions and sensibilities, decisions and outcomes took place daily, lodged within fairly similar formal institutions for knowledge production or regulation; indeed, many of them were designed in previous decades in the Soviet Union and then imposed, sometimes with local support as well as resistance, in the countries of the bloc in a process now called Sovietization. Chronicles of such everyday interactions among intellectuals, party leaders, editors, censors, and librarians have been published widely in the thirty-five years since the large-scale sociopolitical changes of 1989–90 in the region, in the local languages as well as in English, French, or German. By now they are a significant part of another monumental change, one taking place in the social science accounts of this region's recent past.

Providing interpretations for knowledge production and accounts of the related cultural institutions in the former Soviet bloc has implied substantial conceptual trials, beginning with that of accounting for massive amounts of varied, even incoherent, archival materials remaining after the abrupt dissolution of many of the respective states' institutions.⁴ But historians and other social scientists alike have carved out novel sociotheoretical frameworks for their analyses of people's lives in the former Soviet bloc, while also accommodating an increasing diversity of data sources, beyond the archival ones, for example, oral testimonials by survivors and the publication, after 1990, of numerous works of poignant ego-literature.⁵ A significant number of those who experienced what life was like under socialism could still provide commentaries in the recent decades, many of them conflicting ones, so to a great measure historians have had to come to terms with writing a moving, living history.

This has implied their holding, even re-creating, the standards of scholarly accounts as distinct, but not disconnected, from artistic renderings of those experiences, many of which have reached the public more slowly, or left a paler mark, than stirring theater plays or moving historical fiction.⁶ But they also responded to calls for redressing the local collective memory narratives, or to formal processes of transitional justice, at various political and/or national levels, including calls for drastic condemnation of the former communist regimes. Historians' involvement has been quite visible in setting up new commemorative places for the regimes' numerous victims, or in producing formal reports, under order by new governments, for the purposes of truth commissions.⁷ In short, a herculean task for different generations of historians. Soon after the collapse of these communist regimes, their tasks have included accounting systematically for multifarious "third paths" taken by intellectuals, artists, experts, or high-culture bureaucrats during socialism and recreating in a persuasive, albeit monumental, tapestry their respective settings.⁸

But the task of thinking about the historiography of the region's recent past has also turned into that of rethinking it. Historians' understanding of the society and culture of the former Soviet bloc has also been attended by another persisting challenge, one related to the adoption or rejection of the sociopolitical analytical concepts offered by the totalitarianism school. Historiography of state socialism in this region is currently divided between presentations following a so-called totalitarian blueprint and nuanced depictions of nonconformity, resistance, or semi-clandestine activities at various levels of social organization, including research and artistic communities.

What do we understand for these debates by the phrase 'the totalitarian blueprint'? Rooted in the classical works by Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, the paradigm customarily invokes binaries for accounts of people's agency, such as coercion versus consensus, and related concepts of total control, indoctrination, or mass mobilization. Faced with such analytical concepts, many historians of this region have asked: exactly how do they help account for the newly accessed empirical findings? Do these concepts still inspire, even provide guidance for detailed, subtle understandings of a wider variety of findings about the institutional settings in which people made, or felt imposed, choices, whether in 1970s Romania, in the GDR, or during Stalinism in the Soviet Union? Can the paradigm still prove itself fruitful in providing novel understandings for a monumental gamut of widely diverse findings, despite its focus on either the Stalinist Soviet Union, or on the contrastive comparison between the two German dictatorships, or on institutions of individual nation states of the former Soviet bloc?

Our goal in this volume is to offer a novel assessment of totalitarianism's analytical potential while pursuing historians' lead with regards to what *they* identify as issues with a historiography inspired by the totalitarianism school, along with their proposed alternatives. The questions outlined above are central to historians' recent discussions on the tension between what they see as a top-down approach *versus* an account of individuals' semi-clandestine, even subversive, forms of adjustment to the domination exercised by the regime.⁹ Indeed, our volume builds on the remarkable efforts at shaping conceptual

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changes by historians preoccupied by revisionist and postrevisionist responses to totalitarianism in Soviet historiography, and those debating whether comparisons between Nazi Germany and the GDR are apt, and if so, within which analytical standards.

But once they highlight some central institutions for knowledge production and regulation in the region, the contributions to our volume move one step forward and ask wider questions, dealing more pointedly with social ontology and epistemology: given the recent divide within the historiography of totalitarian regimes of the former Soviet bloc, what view of history, and what standards of evidence, should explanatory accounts of the region's recent past adopt? What perspectives of institutions can provide deeper elucidations over contested methodological standards, and for what explanatory tasks?

This introduction presents readers with the historians' main arguments contesting the value of the totalitarianism school for historiography of the former Soviet bloc. It elaborates on the above questions for accounts of knowledge production and cultural practices and identifies one narrative thread of the historians' rethinking of their accounts in their (implicit) views of what studying the normative settings of social fabric requires. It also defends involving philosophical analyses in mapping historians' issues with the totalitarianism school, especially those providing avenues much less explored by either political scientists or historians. The introduction closes with an overview of the contributions to this volume.

Locating Historians' Discontent

A comprehensive review of the literature pointing to the shortcomings, adjustments, and (re)assessments of the totalitarianist school is well beyond the project of this collected volume. There are numerous attempts in this same vein, many of which are fairly comprehensive.¹⁰ But they also focus on issues removed from the historians' preoccupations. To highlight what distinguishes our project in this volume, it helps to illustrate what it has in common with such attempts, as well as what distinguishes the idea for our project from their perspectives on the epistemic, or broader normative, values of the totalitarianist paradigm.

As in the contributions to this volume, the literature from whose approaches we depart mainly deploys the phrase "totalitarianism school" to refer to the works by Friedrich and Brzezinski and their followers. They find in their 1956 work the roots of the future paradigm, characterizing a model of totalitarian regimes by drawing attention to a few related traits, including rule by a single party dominating the state machinery (in that it has control over the economy), the means of armed combat, the social organization, and mass communication, and it governs through a vast security service and other repressive means, including an all-encompassing ideology.¹¹ Many such commentators remind us of the striking waves of popularity undergone during the cold war by the paradigm rooted in their 1950s work, from the faded currency in communist studies in the West after the 1960s, to its redeployment in the 1970s–80s in the works of dissidents

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or leaders of opposition groups in Poland or Czechoslovakia, such as Václav Havel and Adam Michnick.¹²

While attentive to the historical path taken by proponents and supporters of the totalitarianism paradigm, such assessments are by and large supportive of the approach specific to it, or they highlight its weaknesses while pointing to some natural remedies for them. More importantly, they remain unmoved by, even oblivious to, the growing discontent among historians of the former Soviet bloc surrounding totalitarianism's analytical concepts.

By contrast, historians' reflections on their disciplinary requirements not only have been growing but have generated an increased awareness of scholarly paradigms and paradigm changes within two major historiography schools—that is, those tackling the history of the Soviet Union and, respectively, twentieth-century Germany. Their rich investigations of conceptual frameworks have opened up novel analytical avenues for evaluating the totalitarianism paradigm, specifically alongside two main themes: on the one hand, they question its historical links with political agendas during the cold war, and, on the other, they doubt its narrow deployment of core social scientific concepts, such as ideology, mass mobilization, and popular opinion.¹³ Both contentions are momentous and deserving of further, albeit interdisciplinary, examination. And an account of the striking analytic convergence toward two types of issues raised by working historians (despite the diverse clusters of empirical findings they accommodate for their chosen state/ regime) also calls for a rethinking of the historiography of the whole region.

What Is at Stake in the Historians' Strife?

We can identify three major movements among historians sharing those two types of concerns. Historians who eschew the use of totalitarianist concepts are found first among those associated with the so-called revisionist school in the English-language historiography of the former Soviet Union, starting with works by Sheila Fitzpatrick or Ian Kershaw.¹⁴ But arguments about the methodological shortcomings of the totalitarianism school for understanding the history of real socialism are not limited to the revisionist school or to accounts of Soviet historiography. In the 1990s, once historians of the former GDR such as Mary Fulbrook, Jürgen Kocka, and Konrad Jarausch started publishing their seminal accounts of newly available archival material, one can identify a second movement and a deepening of the same methodological divide surrounding the deployment of totalitarianism's analytical concepts.¹⁵

Since then, the debates they inspired concerning methods and criteria of success for historiography of the region have made regular scholarly appearances in prominent journals well beyond the "confines" of Soviet or German historiography. While adopting new standards for comparative, transnational analyses of institutions typical for state socialism in the former Soviet bloc, other historians have also argued for the move away from concepts of totalitarianism theory. Surprisingly similar in content to the earlier

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complaints, their objections often read as methodological manifestos, or state-of-the-art surveys of the historiography of the Soviet bloc.¹⁶

Besides their arguments in favor of simply adopting novel additional approaches when accommodating newly accessible material, some historians of the region have also taken a more radical stance, discrediting *any* appeal to the totalitarianist paradigm. This is in conflict with interpretations adopted routinely by institutions of the region's new regimes for findings from archives of the communist regimes, including recent arrangements for transitional justice.¹⁷ This is also the case for public discourses in Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic, or Poland, where the term "totalitarianism" has been deployed at times to serve illiberal agendas, and where academics have been politically taken to task for their attempts at nuanced positions—even presented as apologists for communism. So, what motivates historians' resistance to this popular political pull to a (proverbial) low-hanging fruit in such varied institutional contexts, but with striking similarity in the identification of problematic issues?

Exactly What Are the Charges?

As I mentioned earlier, the rather broad suspicion that analytical concepts of totalitarianism lead one to historiographic accounts incompatible to those proposed recently by historians of the Soviet Bloc seems to have at least two distinctive motivations. First, when historians target the deployment of the concepts of totalitarianism, many do so with a profound concern for the political bias such concepts and issues may introduce for interpretations of the empirical findings.¹⁸ Especially at times close to recent major events, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall or the German unification, when "historical controversies are entangled with political judgements," GDR historians worry that political evaluations are biasing interpretations of the newly available data and driving the research away from standard historiographical methodologies.¹⁹ Revisionist historians of the USSR similarly contend that deploying the paradigm involves a bias toward denouncing of the regimes' repressive policies, or of communist ideology as a doctrine. They also depict the deployment to which the paradigm was customarily put in Soviet studies as pulling the research away from their disciplinary focus on scholarly accounts of the regimes' traces in a variety of public sources.

Second, once we abstract away from historical links between political ideologies or agendas and the totalitarianism paradigm, there lies a deeper concern with the latter's approach, namely its placing agency only within the high-level, formal institutions of the respective regimes. This feature of the paradigm arguably hinders historiographical accounts on two related explanatory endeavors. To begin with, historians contend that totalitarianism theory provides a fairly static model for the states and societies of the region. Historians aim at a fine-grained periodization over the regimes' decades in power, and they also focus on explanations for stability, linked not only to fading repression or changes in party leadership but also to modifications inside other (types of) institutions

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or networks. When accounting for the evolution of these societies, some label the blueprint served by the paradigm an “analytic cul-de-sac.”²⁰

To elaborate briefly on this converging complaint: because it limits agency to regime representatives and to repressive policies and indoctrination as mechanisms, changes at the level of social networks are left unaccounted for at a plethora of levels of social organization. At least for heuristic purposes, when it comes to providing an understanding for evolving relations between church and state in the GDR, or dynamics of institutionalized advanced research, or of student or faculty recruitment, historians take themselves to be better served by searching for, and introducing, their own, novel, less predictable, analytical frameworks.²¹

Moreover, the convergence of their concerns seems to grow even further when they focus on findings in the sociocultural spheres. Like the move to revisionist approaches to Soviet history, the critical stance to classical totalitarianism in the historiography of the rest of the Soviet bloc has been linked to historians’ interest on findings about activities inside institutions such as writers’ and artists’ organizations, the publishing industry, language training, student exchanges, or legal institutions.²²

Those who document knowledge production and research practices in the former Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, or Hungary point to, even require, narratives about numerous “third paths” very similar to that sketched at the beginning of this introduction. They interpret their findings to debunk the totalitarian hypothesis that the regimes succeeded to subject their citizens to what the classics of totalitarianism labeled “total control.” As well they recommend looking for traces of resistance and opposition across much wider varieties of material products than the traditional focus on deliberate political dissent, such as that expressed in dissidents’ texts.²³

What changes of frameworks do historians propose instead, especially for accounts of cultural activities? Called to implement what Fulbrook calls “an empathetic look” at the everyday lives of the subjects, many adopt this as a criterion of scholarly accounts, grounding their interest in depicting professional or generational milieus, networks, institutions in which individuals led their lives, adopted, and adapted social norms. Briefly, in their search for scholarly objectivity, historians require accounts of subjectivities. It is thus no surprise that they find as highly restrictive the depiction of actors consistent with the totalitarianism theory—that is, as victims, perpetrators, collaborators, or bystanders. For them, moving beyond binaries, such as coercion *versus* consensus, only emerges once older theoretical assumptions are identified and removed so that new accounts of agency fill in their place.²⁴ Notably, they propose new sociopolitical concepts or theories in their explanatory accounts, for example, depicting the GDR as “a modern dictatorship” or as a “honey-comb state”;²⁵ and many of them insist on delivering novel accounts of cultural activities while adopting analytical frameworks from distant corners of socialpolitical theory, when they characterize the publishing industry and/or mass media communications within socialism as lodged within a “Soviet-style public sphere” or highlight within them material practices of cultural opposition.²⁶

Their interest in novel analytical concepts does not stop at adopting, or translating, images from theoretical settings outside the historiography of authoritarian regimes and societies to knowledge production in the Soviet bloc. Even more radically, some, such as Michael David-Fox, require new approaches to traditional concepts in (Western) sociopolitical theory, such as ideology. He begins by carving out the many ways in which ideologies can be said to permeate people's lives, producing and deploying varied cultural artifacts, in different institutional settings. In support of his proposed depictions of ideology as multifarious—as a doctrine, or as a worldview, then as a concept developed by prominent activist users, or as a discourse, a performance, or even a faith—he reviews a host of works by historians of Soviet cultural phenomena, many motivated or guided by the impact of revisionist historiographical works.²⁷

To conclude, historians have stressed quite clearly the need to account for findings concerning cultural practices, including those highlighted by David-Fox's six facets of ideology. In turn, the plethora of cultural activities they aim to accommodate are not limited to those customarily taken as topics for a history of knowledge production, and thus raise novel questions about methods or frameworks for an account of them. Since the contributions to our volume engage mainly with the felt need for accounts of publishing or research activities, higher education, or legal proceedings, a few comments are in place here about our approaches to the notion of knowledge practice, and the related ones of intellectuals or experts, and of institutions for knowledge production or regulation.

The cultural practices of interest for the contributions to this volume involve many of the formal institutions imposed in Central and Eastern Europe through the process of Sovietization that took place in the first decade after the end of World War II—for example, practices dependent on Soviet-type, state-level, formal institutions. These include legal frameworks concerning permitted types of ownership, material production or political organizations, surveillance systems (including movement restrictions), and research or education institutions, all quite new for the region, and imposed after World War II outside the former Soviet Union. For some readers, the fact that these frameworks are sometimes depicted as Soviet in nature might hide the burdens involved in their being newly imposed on the states of the Soviet bloc outside the Soviet Union, and their being felt as part of a colonizing, imperialist project initiated by Stalin's regime. Moreover, as hinted in my brief narrative surrounding the publication in Romanian of Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Soviet-type institutions, for the purposes of the contributions to this volume, also comprise those of higher education, research academies, writers' or artists' unions, publishing houses, and the varied adaptations and deployment by the recently trained intelligentsia of the Soviet bloc of what was described in the Soviet Union as the ideal of *kulturnost*.²⁸

In light of this interest in formal/informal, media-based institutional groups, and in an expansive variety of media, the perspectives on social practices and cultural institutions of the Soviet bloc explored here can be taken to be similar to those adopted by a historian of science, or of knowledge.²⁹ Our project begins with, and then is expanded

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well beyond, the formal networks of intellectuals, experts, top-level bureaucrats or party leaders. Such an expansion is motivated, firstly, by archival materials documenting that actors played their various professional, political, or social roles with remarkable fluidity. But it is also motivated by the historians' novel construct of "cultural opposition" inside such fluid social practices, which directs us beyond the more established focus on dissidents' *texts* as expression of deliberate political dissent.³⁰ Then we open avenues for further inquiries, for instance, one within a future sociology of knowledge practices for the Soviet bloc, aiming to elucidate the various emerging institutions of cultural production, many of them exploited by agents of the cultural opposition.

Drawbacks of Historians' Proposed Alternatives

One more clarification is needed to describe the novel approaches taken in our volume: the issues raised by historians' concern with institutional, sociocultural changes within the Soviet bloc converge so clearly on their intensive conceptual engineering, all ripe for deeper examination within the philosophy of historical and social sciences. First, despite some resemblances, historians' perceived tension with works rooted in the concepts of totalitarianism is not yet presented in a coherent, cohesive research program. Their recommendations, when it comes to methodologies for future research, seem to occupy an uncomfortably large spectrum, with conflicting positions ranging from methodological pluralism, even eclecticism,³¹ to unforgiving claims that proper historiography is incompatible with totalitarianism concepts. Philosophical investigations of their recommendations can provide them with clearer grounding and improved overall coherence. Unless we find some common conceptual sources for the resemblances in their complaints, for example, surrounding binary accounts of agency or subjectivity, their convergence when it comes to the perceived conceptual shortcomings of totalitarianism is itself left without an explanation.

Second, similar to the conceptual engineering proposed by historians for accommodating novel empirical findings, conceptual innovation has also emerged in more systematic appraisals of classical totalitarianism, which also engage less with the historians' critique. The latter proposals involve, for instance, a defense of classical totalitarianism along the distinction between evaluative versus cognitive aspects of totalitarianism theory, or, respectively, between deployment of its concepts inside practices of collective remembrance as opposed to historiography proper.³² Or such proposals provide only crude contrasts as starters for investigation, many of which have only scarce application to the wider historiography of the former Soviet bloc. At best, these attempts merely echo, but leave unexplored, historians' broader uneasiness to taking an evaluative, moral-political stance concerning agents whose lives they bring to the surface of scholarly accounts.³³

Our hope is to explore such topics further and in novel directions, lodged, for instance, at the interface between the philosophy of historical social sciences and social

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epistemology. Arguably, approaches further explored in this volume have their roots in Thomas Kuhn's arguments for a sociohistorical analysis of the dynamics of knowledge systems, and in recent social epistemology.³⁴ Relatedly, both concepts from social ontology and political philosophy can help bring to the forefront normative disciplinary contrasts between political theory and historiography, between political science and cultural historiography.

The Volume's Structure and Contributions

The chapters in this volume examine the overarching themes identified above, focusing on those surrounding the totalitarianism paradigm's (implicit) political commitments and the narrow conception of agency or social change behind its explanations. Many inquiries in the volume also expand on analyses initially introduced for the historiography of the Soviet Union and the GDR by putting them to test, for example, by mounting them to broader accounts of cultural institutions in the countries of the region. This latter goal explains the book's focus on case studies surrounding knowledge production in the former Soviet bloc and, specifically, studies involving legal procedures, universities, research academies, translating, or even collecting projects, all lodged within the framework of some Soviet-type institutions.

Here are some of the central questions for these case studies: Exactly how do the issues surrounding institutional practices in the Soviet Union and the GDR, highlighted by practicing historians, find an echo in recent accounts of institutions of the other countries in the former Soviet bloc? What concepts associated with the so-called cultural turn—for example, Soviet-type public sphere, cultural opposition—are more in tune with rigorous analyses of oral history, ego-documents, and archival materials?³⁵ Broader yet, all contributions to this volume attempt to pin down the value and limitations of totalitarianism, and examine what analytical concepts, such as those between its evaluative versus cognitive aspects, can help clarify the controversy. Their wider aspirations surround initiating a more sustained dialogue on potentially fruitful research frameworks among historians of Central and Eastern Europe and other social scientists, including philosophers. But the volume also aims, almost as a side effect, to portray, through a rich tapestry, the lives of people in the former Soviet bloc, and to illuminate the settings in which their individual "third paths" succeeded to create what historians of the GDR call *Eigen-Sinn*.³⁶

The volume is divided into three parts, intended to cover first the main debates concerning the analytical limitations of classical totalitarianism, and then, in Parts 2 and 3, to elaborate and illustrate the more theoretical concerns with case studies, covering different areas of social life and various cultural practices in different states of the former Soviet bloc during a variety of decades until 1989–90. The chapters in Part 1 of the book introduce key concepts and examine in detail main arguments pro and contra the appeal to the totalitarianism paradigm for historiography. In his chapter, Daniel Little presents

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his broad umbrella thesis concerning a conception of history required for tackling large-scale, abrupt changes, such as those accounted for in the historiography of this region. His arguments converge on the claim that large-scale historical developments are *highly contingent* and path-dependent processes, for whose account it is crucial to stress the joined contributions to historical outcomes of the particulars of institutions, knowledge systems, and social actors. It is within this framework that he then highlights the limited scope of representative works within the totalitarianism paradigm.³⁷

Stephen Turner's chapter addresses some neglected but important questions about Carl Friedrich's theoretical assumptions behind his proposed "totalitarianism syndrome," which he presents as the outcome of an unclear division of theoretical labor between an empirical theory of human behavior and a normative proposal concerning the role of elites. As Turner underscores, Friedrich's intellectual engagement was clearly with the theory of the modern state in the German tradition of his time. But Turner also argues that Friedrich's approach reflected his hostility to approaches by Continental liberals, including Max Weber. Highlighting Friedrich's view of the discretionary, "rational" bureaucratic state operated by a "responsible elite," the author thus provides a novel account of Friedrich's failing to criticize National Socialism and Stalinism in terms essential to the American conception of politics, that is, involving the rule of law, democratic accountability.

The following two chapters provide an introduction to the two main historiographies in which scholars have had to grapple with questions concerning the adequacy and the heuristic value of the totalitarianism school, namely history of the Soviet Union and, respectively, that of the GDR. Mark Edele's chapter "Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life: Major Frameworks Reconsidered" is a revised and updated version of his earlier 2007 *Kritika* paper with the same title, in which he argues against the need for a radical paradigm shift in Soviet historiography. Edele's argument is grounded in a broad overview of major changes in methods, concepts, results, and ensuing discussion, within works as diverse as those representative of the Harvard Interview Project, and their particular interpretation of Soviet *society* as "totalitarian," in contrast to Stephen Kotkin's groundbreaking study of Magnitogorsk, for whose purpose Kotkin borrows analytical concepts from Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau.

The chapter by Joachim Kocka is a reprint of his earlier "The GDR as a Modern Dictatorship," which highlights the concerns, in the decade after Germany's reunification, with the taxonomy inherited from the totalitarian paradigm by the emerging historiography of the former GDR. Without aiming for a firm rebuttal of totalitarianism theory, Kocka's arguments are representative of the Potsdam school of historiography established soon after the German reunification and support the characterization of the GDR in terms of alternative concepts.

Krzysztof Brzechczyn's chapter reconstructs the discussions among Polish historians and social scientists on the limitations of the totalitarianist approach for explaining the dynamics of real socialism in their country. His contribution makes the case for concepts needed to *capture processes*, for example, totalitarization, de-totalitarization of regime or

society. Brzechczyn also elaborates on Leszek Nowak's account of totalitarianist regimes within the latter's non-Marxist historical materialist typology and supports an interpretation of the concept of totalitarianist syndrome in terms of Walter B. Gallie's notion of an essentially contested concept.³⁸

Manuela Ungureanu's chapter questions historians' perceived incompatibility between their accounts and those lodged within classical totalitarianism. With help from social ontology, she investigates some discipline-specific (tacit) criteria of evidence and explanatory success in social sciences to distinguish further between historiography and other social sciences and, especially, political theory. In turn, her approach can account for the seeming incompatibility perceived by historians, and elucidates further the particular sense, or reasons for which the concept of totalitarianist syndrome can be taken as an essentially contested concept.

The following two chapters present a few principled arguments in favor of continued deployment of the analytical concepts of totalitarianism for a study of the region's political evolution. While they provide rebuttals of historians' systematic doubts surrounding totalitarianism theory, they take different argumentative strategies. Charles Turner begins by addressing head-on two of the historians' complaints: first, that "totalitarianism" is a politically loaded term, a so-called polemical counterconcept, not useful for historical research, and second, that totalitarianism entails an understanding of human agency that cannot do justice to the multifaceted sources of agency still found in politically repressive regimes. For Charles Turner, in each of the arguments he refutes there remains what he calls "*a blurring of lines*" between the different perspectives in historical and, respectively, social science scholarship.

Aviezer Tucker defends the theoretical relevance and usefulness of the concept of totalitarianism in terms of a contrast less tackled by historians, namely that between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. In his view, this distinction is indispensable for understanding an important period in the world history (1914–91), and also for what followed totalitarian and authoritarian regimes into the twenty-first century. To carve out how post-totalitarian regimes, for example, those in Russia, Hungary, and Poland, have taken *distinct* trajectories from what he calls post-authoritarian regimes, for example, Spain or Chile, he characterizes their differences in terms of such features as, for example, the locus of power, the scope of oppression, provisions for independent institutions, and ideology, where the latter is understood as portrayed within the totalitarianism paradigm.

The chapters in Part 2 focus on concepts and distinctions required for accommodating societal processes of radical change, in political science and/or historiography, with application to the recent past of the former Soviet bloc. Part 2 begins with Mary Fulbrook's novel arguments against the appeal to the concepts specific to the totalitarianism paradigm, based on archival and interview-based research surrounding trials put on in the former GDR and involving former Nazis. She defends the need for approaches to dictatorships not only in terms of their synchronic patterns of power and structures of repression but also in diachronic terms. To elaborate on the latter, Fulbrook reiterates

her plea for sensitivity, in historiography, to *evolving subjectivities*, exploring the social history of the people who experienced, what Little calls, large-scale radical change. But she also addresses objections raised in the contributions by Charles Turner and Aviezer Tucker in this volume while stressing that historians' choices of narrative structures, and even the language used to write about the past, are a reflection of the contexts in which they write, and the impact they aim to have on their audiences.

The chapter by Molly Pucci was published in 2022 as a longer version in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian Studies*. The parts included here point out that the literature on the Sovietization of Eastern Europe rarely defines what version of the Soviet model traveled, and provides missing focus on how it traveled through the so-called 'Soviet advisors.' To articulate their contribution to Sovietization, she follows some NKVD security advisors who brought their version of communism to Europe in the first decade after World War II, advising and training security forces, for example, in Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. Her studies on Soviet security advisors to Czechoslovakia undermine the expected convergence between Soviet politics and the system they succeeded to export abroad.

Barbara J. Falk's contribution also focuses on the early years of Sovietization in Czechoslovakia, with reference to the 1952 Slánský trial; but she also proposes a broader conceptual framework for analyzing political trials so as to accommodate others, for example, the 1949 Rajk trial in Hungary. Falk construes the study of such political trials across a spectrum that includes both democratic and nondemocratic regimes, and she highlights their hallmark features, for example, the use of conspiracy charges or the misuse of evidence. She argues that postwar East European trials addressed a number of perceived challenges, including regime legitimation and the search for and elimination of "objective" political threats at a time of economic unease. While Falk supports construing the politicization of justice as a phenomenon evident *across* regime types, in her view it is preferable to avoid normatively loaded terms such as "totalitarianist," even with respect to Stalin-era show trials.

Mihaela Șerban's chapter also focuses on radical transformations inside the legal institutions in the early years of Sovietization, but in Romania. Her contribution tackles the prevalent characterization of socialist legality, in contrast to the rule of law. In her view, understanding communist legality exclusively from a totalitarianist perspective ignores the complexity of law on the ground, especially the extent and impact of resistance in and through the legal framework. Focusing on a proposed spectrum depiction of socialist legality, Șerban questions the application of the notion of the Soviet public sphere to both legal continuities and legal resistance and mobilization by individuals, as she has identified in her case studies.³⁹

Dragoș Petrescu focuses on the dynamics of legitimacy in Romania and proposes a periodization of the relation between regime and public opinion, which, in his view, started with a stage of legitimacy deficit after the radical change initiated by the establishment of the People's Republic of Romania on 30 December 1947. His account emphasizes *the lessons* learned by the party during the period of increased permeability

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of Romania's borders (1967–69) and the significance of the events during the year of the Prague Spring for the wider Soviet bloc. His analysis articulates the political backdrop for the other Romanian case studies, such as those grouped in Part 3 of the volume.

Under the term *homo sovieticus*, Piotr Weislik's contribution brings together a family of concepts, including Havel's greengrocer, and highlights their role as vehicles of civic mobilization or rhetorical resources to constructing an oppositional identity characteristic of post-totalitarian political language. His chapter documents the trajectory of the dissidents' texts across the years of the other large-scale change in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic during 1989–90, for which he identifies in the dissident critique of the political culture of complicity a *conceptual break* away from the paradigmatic totalitarianism model.

In her review of the debate around the notion of totalitarianism in the Czech Republic, Muriel Blaive starts from an observation by historian Milan Drápala about how muted the local exchanges on this theme have been in contrast to those in Poland or Germany.⁴⁰ In her chapter, she takes issue with a *persisting confusion* between two words available for translating the term/concept of totalitarianism in Czech: the exact translation, *totalitarismus*, and the shorthand version *totalita*, which has become predominant in the past two decades. Blaive explains the prevalent use of the Czech term *totalita* by looking at their evolving use in Havel's works, and its reception within recent historiography and public discourse.

The chapters in Part 3 present case studies on institutions of higher education, research academies, and relatedly, but rather briefly, on the publishing industry and writers' unions, all core institutions of knowledge production, which were imposed, transferred, and adopted during the processes of Sovietization in the region. Analyses of the related cultural transfers outside of the Soviet Union, such as those included in this part, presuppose some familiarity with the model institutions of education and research established in the Soviet Union during Stalinism, which were then transferred within local settings in the rest of the Soviet bloc. It is the task of the first two chapters in Part 3 to provide broad outlines for such Soviet-type institutions, later analyzed in their adapted versions in Ukraine, Romania, and Hungary. But, echoing the picture of Stalinism emerging from Edele's contribution, the first two chapters of Part 3 also examine the fate of Soviet universities and research academies during this period.

Benjamin Tromly's contribution addresses a core question for our volume: for the period 1945–53, what are the prospects of a totalitarianist approach to the study of higher education in the Soviet Union? As he reminds, while the concept of totalitarianism is introduced in an explicitly comparative endeavor, and renewed interest in the concept in past years has also come from an interest in making comparisons, the *opposition* to totalitarianism is mostly fueled by scholars working on specific national contexts. Tromly aims to test some oppositional arguments while keeping them to a national focus, and with regards to higher education. In his view, the establishment of a totalitarian regime in the USSR, a process that took final form during Stalin's "Great Break" from 1928 to 1933, is essential for understanding the rest of the history of the Soviet Union. Tromly

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concludes by supporting a middle position on the relevance of the totalitarian model for understanding higher education during late Stalinism.

Alexei Kojevnikov's contribution to our volume examines the life and work of Sergei Vavilov and walks us, over the period of his long career, through core institutions of Soviet science production: the Moscow Scientific Institute, Moscow University, the Academy of Sciences, including the Physical Institute of the Academy of Sciences (FIAN), where Vavilov worked as director until 1951. Kojevnikov studies Vavilov's recently released private diaries to reveal a scientific persona deeply disputed by the tragedies of that harsh historical era, one of whose victims was his brother, Nikolai, a famous geneticist. While generally disillusioned by society, Sergei Vavilov performed the duties of president of the Academy of Sciences not merely as required by institutional politics of the time, but rather with devotion. In Kojevnikov's view, it is this *mélange* of alienation and responsibility that made Vavilov an efficient, successful administrator of science, and not least a protector of scientists threatened by repressions.

Cristian Vasile's case study documents the life of another administrator of high-culture institutions, Mihai Ralea, whom he describes as protector of Tudor Vianu, a prominent philosopher and historian of literature, who was constantly under threat in 1950s–60s Romania. Adopting Vladimir Tismăneanu's notion of cultural Stalinism, Vasile describes the latter concept in terms of a (Romanian) cultural policy based on Zhdanovite-type censorship institutions and practices, including those supervised by Soviet advisors delegated to Bucharest in the 1950s.⁴¹ Vasile's portrayal of the close relationship between Ralea and Tudor Vianu is lodged within depictions of the humanities faculties at the University of Bucharest or research institutes of the Soviet-style Romanian Academy of Sciences.

Valentyna Savchyn's piece is the only contribution to the volume explicitly dealing with the publishing industry, writer's unions, and translation projects in the region.⁴² It is also the only piece focused on knowledge production in Ukraine during Stalinism. Savchyn stresses the importance of translation issues in the study of totalitarianism, raising novel issues, for example, those concerning cultural colonization and, respectively, national identity. In her view, given the danger of losing both national and linguistic identity, Ukraine's totalitarian experience went far beyond what was faced by other Soviet republics. Her chapter depicts the institutional mechanisms of power and coercion set by the Soviet regime on translation activity and the extent to which translation projects managed to support Ukraine's nation-shaping.

The three remaining contributions in Part 3 present case studies related to the evolution of academic institutions, with a focus on the training and activities of professional historians and sociologists, disciplines targeted by communist regimes for their perceived ideological resources. The theme of Adela Hîncu's chapter is the evolution of sociology as a discipline after 1966 in Romania. Her contribution defends the appeal of a mixed-methods account, in favor of historicizing intellectual autonomy, and treating it as an analytical term used to understand knowledge production under state socialism. Hîncu identifies some conventional, and restricting, dichotomies at work not only in

the totalitarian paradigm's theoretical framework of knowledge production but also in the alternative framework of cultural anthropology. In her view, there is a need to move beyond some other analytic binaries, for example, between science and ideology or intellectuals and the party-state, that have animated recent revisionist literature. But she also illustrates how to deploy a mixed methods account for the highly context-dependent research conditions on the ground.

Like Hîncu, Réka Krizmanics analyzes the dynamics of intellectual autonomy during real socialism, within higher-education and research academies. Her focus is on historiography, as produced during socialism in Hungary. Krizmanics proposes a neo-institutionalist account of continuity in the production of university-based Hungarian historiography. Her primary interest is to propose a shift from a discourse about state socialist academia where the "political" is treated separately from "scholarly," which she sees as especially problematic for depicting the practices inside the Party History Institute.

Cristina Petrescu's chapter continues the focus on professional historians, but this time in 1980s Romania. Her two case studies build on her contribution to the COURAGE projects, including to the material collections presented on its website: <http://cultural-opposition.eu/>. The microhistories she documents showcase the novel interpretation of "cultural opposition" as covering informal albeit media-based institutions, and forms of (nonpolitical) cultural activism across multifaceted material products. Her research on two historians' collections illustrates how the latter continuously moved between public and private identities, between the formal and the underground culture, while reinterpreting rules and routines, in pursuits of professional careers *and* underground hobbies. Both collections represent testimonies of semi-clandestine activities. One is a collection of photographs of historical monuments that would soon be demolished by Ceaușescu's regime; the other is a collection of oral history interviews taken from individuals with diverse ethnocultural identities, condemned by the regime to forced assimilation. In her analyses, the two collections illuminate the paradoxes of two professions that experienced intense institutional control, and were among the most ideologically controlled academic domains.

To sum up, the contributions to this volume are located within scholars' respective searches for a more promising social and political theory for cultural phenomena specific to the Soviet bloc. While they provide interdisciplinary analyses of the local, institution-based conditions for knowledge production and regulation, together they can also be taken to weave a wide and vibrant tapestry of the various aspects of sociocultural life in the Soviet bloc. Beyond the tapestry of convoluted institutional practices, contingently offering third paths for the actors of their microhistories, the contributions examine some rich social-scientific presuppositions behind the discussions of the original paradigm of the classical totalitarianism concepts, for example, about the proper units of sociopolitical analysis (regional or national), the synchronic or diachronic aspects of social arrangements to be examined (political or cultural, medium based). Lastly, the assumptions under examination also include expectations, typical for discipline-specific

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objectivity, concerning the success of their hypotheses, for example, from their empirical adequacy to their predictive power, or their alignment to some abstract, normative requirements about both agency and institutions, some only formulated through thought experiments.

Notes

1. Throughout this chapter I use “communist” and “socialist” interchangeably, with no intended distinction between their usages. This allows the inclusion of more of the relevant literature in the discussion, e.g., anthropological analyses as well as those authored by political scientists. I use the phrase “the Soviet bloc” fairly loosely to denote the geographical space where Soviet-type institutions were introduced after World War II, e.g., countries such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Romania, and Bulgaria. Arguably, the former Yugoslavia, Albania, and the current Baltic states can also be included in this group, but space constraints have led to the current focus of our volume on sample cultural institutions from the former group.
2. In personal communication Flonta insisted that, without constraining him, Radian was giving advice in favor of the publication of the final draft of the introduction, and this while pointing to the prospect of future, similar scholarly publication projects supervised by the same censors.
3. As I understood Flonta’s critique, he questions Kuhn’s thesis that the dynamics of scientific knowledge is a progressive one since it involves changes that expose two paradigms to the possibility that their supporters reach either incommunicable results or incommensurable advances. See also Flonta, *Drumul meu*, 186–90, and Flonta and Vasile, “Despre viața filosofică.”
4. I have in mind here archives of the Central Committees of the Communist Parties, or those belonging to institutions such as Direcția Presei, publishing houses, universities, and research academies (including their respective human resources files), as well as the more notorious ones, like those of the Stasi in Germany or Securitate in Romania.
5. For Romanian historiography, Bentiou, *Istoria trăită*, and Flonta, *Drumul meu*, provide such interesting works of ego-literature coupled with narratives deserving of being construed as living history.
6. For the Romanian context, again, see Visniec’s plays *L’histoire du communisme* and *De la sensation d’élasticité*, or Corobca’s novel *Caiet de censor* (The censor’s notebook).
7. Ciobanu, “Criminalizing the Past”; Stan, “Truth Commissions in Post-Communism.”
8. For what is sometimes called full disclosure, I should mention here that, in the 1980s, Mircea Flonta was one of my professors at the University of Bucharest. He has also been my mentor ever since, and has even unknowingly motivated my efforts to sketch a satisfactory “big picture” of teaching and research practices inside the Department of Philosophy of the University of Bucharest. It gives me a good measure of satisfaction to find a similar note in Barbara J. Falk’s chapter in this volume. To me, her full disclosure about her mentor marks an astonishing but telling symmetry between our student experiences with great mentors, despite having lived them in opposite corners of the Cold War’s academic world.
9. Corner, *Popular Opinion*, 5; David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*; Fulbrook, “Review Article”; Lindenberger, “Neither Consent, nor Opposition”; Sabrow “Socialism as *Sinnwelt*.”
10. See Siegel, *Totalitarian Paradigm*; Apor and Iordachi, “Introduction: Studying Communist Dictatorships”; von Beyme, “Concept of Totalitarianism”; Shorten, *Modernism and Totalitarianism*; Roberts, *Totalitarianism*; Forti, *Totalitarianism*.
11. Many contributions to this volume review and analyze elements of the classical proposals from their *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*. To avoid repetition, I include here only the rudiments of Friedrich and Brzezinski’s original list of traits.

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12. See Siegel, *Totalitarian Paradigm*. The evolution of the concepts of totalitarianism paradigm inside and especially *outside* academic milieus, including journalism and political decision-making, is surveyed in Nolte, “Three Versions”; Roberts, *Totalitarianism*, and Forti, *Totalitarianism*.
13. David-Fox, “On the Primacy of Ideology.” Corner, *Popular Opinion*; Ritterspohn et al., *Public Spheres*. See also David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*; Edele, *Debates on Stalinism*.
14. Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*; Fitzpatrick, “Revisionism in Soviet History”; Fitzpatrick, *Russian Revolution*; and, respectively, Kershaw, “Totalitarianism Revisited.” Many of their arguments can be found already in Stephen Cohen’s 1985 *Rethinking the Soviet Experience*, together with his passionate denunciation of Cold War political influences on the American school of Sovietology.
15. Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship* and “Limits of Totalitarianism”; Kocka, “GDR”; and Jarausch, “Between Care and Coercion.”
16. I have in mind journals such as *Slavica*, *Kritika*, *Francia*, *History and Theory*, *German History*, and *East Central Europe*. See also Connelly, “Defunct Theory”; David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*; Apor and Iordachi, “Introduction.”
17. Stan, “Truth Commissions.”
18. Fulbrook, “Review Article”; Connelly, “Defunct Theory.”
19. Fulbrook, “‘State of the Art,’” vii; Port, “Introduction”; and, respectively, Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*; David-Fox, “On the Primacy of Ideology.”
20. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 3.
21. Fulbrook, “Limits of Totalitarianism”; David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*; Connor, *Socialism, Politics and Equality*; Connelly, *Captive University*.
22. See Smejkaljova, *Cold War Books*; Baer, “Introduction”; Kopeček, “In Search of National Memory”; Applebaum, “Rise of Russian”; Năstăsă-Matei, “Academic Migration.” See also Oates-Indruchova, *Censorship*.
23. Apor et al., *Handbook of COURAGE*, 11. Many such collections are now documented in the COURAGE handbook and on the related website: <http://cultural-opposition.eu/>. The core of the project consists in a registry created to showcase very creative, informal, nonconformist archival practices pointing to the need for more fine-grained accounts of the so-called gray zone, alongside dissident groups, churches, official and unofficial theatrical productions, and the flourishing of samizdat literature across almost every possible subject matter and group interest.
24. Plamper, “Beyond Binaries”; Lindenberger, “Neither Consent, nor Opposition.”
25. Kocka, “GDR”; respectively, Fulbrook, “State of the Art.”
26. Ritterspohn et al., *Public Spheres*; respectively, Apor et al., *Sovietization of Eastern Europe*, Apor et al., *Handbook of COURAGE*.
27. David-Fox, “Blind Men and the Elephant.” David-Fox also warns us that the concept of ideology is an intimidating one, lodged in ambiguity. Hence his apt analogy between capturing the nature of ideology and that of the legendary elephant, whose various parts are touched by blind men, each convinced of his individual savvy grip of the creature, about which they are all mistaken.
28. Volkov, “Concept of Kul’turnost.”
29. Mulsow and Daston, “History of Knowledge.”
30. Apor et al., *Handbook of COURAGE*, 22.
31. See the editors’ piece in *Kritika* 2017: 655–60; respectively, Fulbrook, “Review Article.”
32. Siegel, *Totalitarianism Paradigm*; Traverso, “Totalitarianism.”
33. Connelly, “Defunct Theory, Useful Word.”
34. See Collin, “Twin Roots.” See also Haworth, *Totalitarianism and Philosophy*; List and Valentini, “Methodology of Political Theory.” There is also an inescapable irony here, and one that springs from the circumstances, which I recount earlier in the introduction, surrounding the publication in Romanian of Kuhn’s book and the need for an account of such cultural products of the Soviet bloc. Irony aside, historians and philosophers of social science might do well to return to Kuhn’s

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- work, e.g., for an examination of the totalitarianism school and its dynamics as a knowledge system. I will return to this recommendation in the afterword of the volume.
35. The majority of these case studies showcase recent results from historiography of Romanian institutions in an effort to include them in the wider circulation of similar investigations of knowledge production in the GDR, Poland, Hungary, or the former Czechoslovakia.
 36. See Lindenberger, “Neither Consent, nor Opposition.” I elaborate on this theme in my chapter in this volume “Framing the Rising Discontent with Totalitarianism Theory: The View from Social Ontology.”
 37. In earlier work, Little also argues that many social terms synthesizing historiographic accounts akin to those criticized by the historians—e.g., “the Renaissance,” “European Fascism”—do not denote unified, objective things (Little, *New Contributions*).
 38. Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts.”
 39. Rittersporn et al., *Public Spheres*.
 40. Drápala, “Introduction.”
 41. Tismăneanu and Iacob, *Ideological Storms*.
 42. For arguments highlighting the importance of translation projects during communism, see Baer, “Introduction.”

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