

MARCI SHORE, *The taste of ashes: the afterlife of totalitarianism in Eastern Europe*, New York 2013, pp. 370.

This book is unusual in every aspect. Difficult to pigeonhole, it does not fit neatly into patterns adopted in the contemporary world of science. At the same time, it is the Author's diary, a novel, a historical reportage, and a scientific study. Its numerous and various characters are mainly the residents of Eastern Europe or, to be more precise, of Central-Eastern Europe. All of them share the experience of totalitarian rule – either Nazi during World War II or communist after the end of the war, or both. Every one of them bears the mark of those times and regimes; in each and every case, history determined their lives and left memories that will always come flooding back. That is why Marci Shore's book is a reportage written in a particular and special region of Europe which is inhabited by “historical nations”, that is nations influenced by the most contemporary history to a large extent. This history has a profound impact on their present political, social, and cultural lives.

It is a book about the Author's meetings with people living in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania who have been entangled with history in various ways and make different evaluations of their reactions towards totalitarian regimes. Talks with these people let the readers come to a shocking conclusion regarding “a long lasting” of totalitarianism in the minds of its victims. They provoke reflection on the essence of these modern 20th century dictatorships which made controlling even one's private life and the mentality of individuals its goal. And, in the meantime, it deluded so many people. Hence, as the Author rightly proves, one of the striking features of totalitarianism was that a person could be its victim and, at the same time, a perpetrator of its crimes – a tool it used to fight those who were doomed to die by a totalitarian regime. The characters of this book frequently played both parts, which should make us, the readers, ponder the human nature and especially its darker side prone to betrayal, abandonment of a just cause and another man, susceptible to manipulation, ready to choose illusions instead of virtues, especially if the former are presented in an attractive way. It is a pity the monograph lacks in a systematized definition of totalitarianism and its varieties, mutations, e.g. post-totalitarian regimes. The Author failed to discuss either the diversity among dictatorships described as totalitarian (e.g. fascist, Nazi, communist)

or the evolution of these systems after the end of World War II, especially after 1953 when Joseph Stalin died. As a result, her study of the essence of totalitarianism is more shallow.

Undoubtedly, one of the assets of the book is the way it is written. Making her observations very tactfully, the Author goes on to sketch her characters. When doing it, she uses the participant observation method popular in anthropology. Fulfilling its requirements, she normally stays in a given environment for a long time, gets to know its members well, establishes more personal relationships – sometimes even close bonds – with them. She earns their trust, talks to them, asks questions. She remains open, delicate, kind and understanding towards her interlocutors. Nevertheless, she combines these elements with discrete criticism supported by distancing herself from their subjective emotions and opinions. However, her distance tends to be missing, as a result of which she reveals her private preferences and prejudices. For instance, when talking about the political life in post-communist Romania, she draws general conclusions on the basis of one or two accounts of people representing only one of the political parties. At the same time, she does not try to verify their opinions (p. 87-88). In a similar vein, she proceeds when describing lustration, or actually its results in the lives of people who faced the actions of secret service of individual regimes during the communist rule. She states arbitrarily that lustration in the Czech Republic brought a “moral crisis” and does not consider whether a more significant crisis was not triggered by “living in untruth”, that is a situation when people cooperating with political police – often guilty of their friends' and colleagues' injustices – were still believed to be moral authorities or at least important agents of public life. What should be emphasised is that these same people often created the moral climate of public life in their respective countries.

One example of such inconsistencies can be the career of Father Professor Michał Czajkowski – an important catholic intellectual and a participant of the Polish-Jewish dialogue. Relegated to a parish priest in Zgorzelec following the decision of the Bishop of Wrocław, thanks to the protection of the Polish Secret Service, he was transferred to Warsaw Theological Academy where he soon became professor. Simultaneously, for approximately 25 years, he wrote letters denouncing Polish opposition activists. After the fall of communism, for the next dozen or so years, he was one of the most well-known intellectuals in Poland, setting moral standards of Polish public life. He was exposed only thanks to the disclosure of the documents produced by the Secret Service and the inquisitiveness of historians<sup>1</sup>.

In the meantime, when the Author draws on painful experiences of one Polish person she met who was expelled from a catholic seminary in Cracow, without hesitation she quotes his opinion that it was the punishment administered by the church authorities for his “suspicious contacts with foreign Jews”. Here, the Author forgets about a cardinal principle of the methodology of historical research, that is:

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<sup>1</sup> Father Czajkowski pleaded guilty to the charges advanced by historians. However, he denied having denounced top activists of Polish opposition, e.g. Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, Jacek Kuroń, and Jan Józef Lipski.

the necessity to verify each individual piece of information, especially when a person who provides it talks about himself or herself, and gain knowledge from outside sources which could constitute a starting point for the objective assessment of presented opinions. In this particular case, she should have considered whether in the epoch of John Paul II – whose example emphasised respect and kindness towards Jews – his disciples and co-workers from the Cracow seminary would resolve to expel its member following rumours of his alleged “contacts with Jews”. It is known from other sources that, in the period described in the book, Polish seminaries screened candidates very carefully, eliminating many of them from a group of future priests due to moral, regulatory or characterological reasons. Hence, there could have been many more reasons to expel the person in question than he reveals. It does not mean that these reasons were right, but they might have been different than described. And it is the Author's duty to verify them.

One of the advantages of the book is the way of presenting controversial events and complicated historical processes. M. Shore writes about them in a concise and communicative way, showing their most important features, complexities, and dramaturgy. This is how she writes about the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, about the dilemmas of Jewish insurgents in the Warsaw ghetto, Stalinism in Czechoslovakia, the Jedwabne massacre, or the slaughter of Poles by Ukrainian nationalists in Wołyń in 1943. The mistakes she makes when describing these facts and events prove how difficult a task it is. From time to time, she tends to oversimplify discussed phenomena so that some descriptions are more similar to those appearing in school course-books, not in academic studies, an example of which – apart from its uneven form and content – “The taste of ashes...” should be regarded as.

This is exactly the case when she describes the Jedwabne pogrom which happened on 10 July 1941. Trying to get to the bottom of the matter, the Author presents it meticulously but she fails to notice the dynamics of the pogrom and correct role of Germans, who, in the first days of the German-Soviet war (22 June 1941), were not able to control conquered territories previously occupied by the Soviets, which resulted in a few days of anarchy. During this period, various groups of local militia, troops of the Polish independence movement or de facto gangs of criminals secured public order on the territories they conquered, at the same time, they took revenge (lynching, pogroms, arrests) on people who actually and allegedly collaborated with the Soviet system, regardless of their nationality. Jews were the most frequent victims of such attacks, but in Łomżyńskie and Podlasie regions there were also many Poles and Belarussians among them.

It was not before the beginning of July 1941 when German authorities began planned mass killing of Jews, engaging some part of the Polish community, especially the members of collaborating militia and peasants tempted by the perspective of seizing the property of victims. Mass killing in individual towns were induced by groups of German security police, determining its scenarios, that is its course, scale and the scope of repressions. One factor facilitating the whole enterprise was the anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic stance of a big part of the Polish community, accusing Jews of collaboration with the Soviet occupant. It is not an accident that the most active criminals in Jedwabne and other towns of Łomżyńskie and Podlasie regions

were prisoners released from Soviet prisons and the members of families deported deep into the Soviet Union just before the outbreak of the German-Soviet war. It is also a pity that the Author – presenting the opinions of the main polemicists: J. T. Gross and T. Strzembosz – failed to comment on them in order to present their stronger and weaker sides.

Oversimplification of discussed problems appears to result from a frequent absence of authorial comment on naturally subjective and fragmentary opinions of people interviewed in this book. For instance, reporting on the course of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto, the Author omits to mention that after the war communist authorities appropriated the narration of this uprising by creating the myth of the Jewish Combat Organization and consigning the Jewish Military Union – connected with Polish underground authorities loyal to the Polish government-in-exile based in London – to oblivion. Quoting statements that put partial or entire blame for the Holocaust on Poles, she fails to provide even a short description of their conduct together with its conditioning. Discussing complicated circumstances in which Polish Jews had to live in the Polish People's Republic and their emigration to Israel, she does not add that, in the first years after the war, Jewish minority was the only racial group which was not forced by Polish authorities to partially or completely leave Poland or to be resettled within the country. On the contrary, in the nationalistic atmosphere of socio-political life of the time, they encouraged its representatives to stay in the country, which contrasted with the situation of Germans, Belarussians, or Ukrainians. On the other hand, she rightly defines the dilemmas of Polish Jews, both from the period of WWII and after its end.

One drawback of the book is the lack of definitions of key terms that appear here. Apart from the already mentioned “totalitarianism”, it is also the case when it comes to the category of “anti-Semitism”. It is frequently used either in the context of the Holocaust, its genesis, course, and consequences or with reference to Polish-Jewish relations during and after the war, and also to the entanglement of Jews in communism. It was not, however, properly explained through the description of its distinctive features and various kinds. As a result, the readers will not be able to understand which of the following phenomena – so different from each other – is understood by this category: economical competition between Polish peasants and Jewish traders in the Second Polish Republic, attacks of the representatives of the Polish community on Jews in hiding during the war, accusing Polish Jews of collaboration with the post-war communist state, including crimes against Poles, or perhaps the criticism of Israel's policy towards Palestinians. Similarly, it is quite unfortunate that the book lacks in the definition of the term „communist mentality” used in the description of a former Romanian dissident who was harassed by her political opponents with methods reminding the ones of communist secret service. The readers can only guess what is meant by this notion and whether or not it could be employed to refer to residents of other post-communist states of Central-Eastern Europe. This flaw also results from the failure to include at least a brief explanation the term “post-communism” as a political, social, and cultural category, even though secondary literature although in area is extensive.

Similar doubts arise when it comes to the aim of the book. As I have already mentioned, it is fairly difficult to evaluate mainly due to its unconventional form and content. As it can be deduced from the descriptions of meetings, journeys and learning by the Author the complexities of individual characters' experiences and the history of individual environments, organisations and countries, its main objective is to show simultaneously the Author's personal development and the shape and character of what remains after the 20th-century totalitarianisms in the biographies and mentality of the witnesses of the epoch. This assumption is confirmed by the title, or more precisely the subtitle of the book.

However, the way this plan was implemented does not seem to be appropriate in the methodological sense. The Author tries to show the impact of totalitarianism on the lives of individual people, social groups and whole societies, but, to do so, she used – undoubtedly detailed – interviews with the representatives of only one social group, namely intelligentsia. The random sample she selected consists of school kids, students, writers, scientists, journalists, teachers, in other words people who either made a living doing intellectual work or who were planning to do so in the future. We will not find here the representatives of other walks of life who are more numerous, e.g. physical workers, peasants, the representatives of lower middle class or bourgeoisie. That is why, the depiction of the bygone past, especially Stalinism, which we can find on the pages of this book is one-sided, that is based on the experiences of some elites and not broader social circles of each described country. Perhaps, it would be more correct to title this monograph in the following way: „Long lasting” of totalitarianism in the mentality of Eastern European intelligentsia”. Additionally, most of the witnesses of the epoch remembered by the Author belonged to the part of intelligentsia which was in favour of communism with all the consequences of this choice, and only later did they choose to oppose this system. Some of them never openly protested against „real socialism”, often having good memories of this time. Among them, there were relatively many representatives of the Jewish community, whose life was first marked by the nightmare of pogrom, and then by the necessity to choose between going to Israel or accepting the reality of communist rule. The Author approaches them with understanding and sympathy, even if she does not share their opinions. Sometimes, however, one might get the impression as if she sympathized more with those who collaborated with the Stalinist regime than with its victims. The reason behind this impression is that the victims of Stalinism only rarely appear as positive characters of this publication.

One exception is the example of Milada Horakova, sentenced to death in a show trial and executed in Prague in June 1950 together with three other people and also Rudolf Slansky. Many other „persons of the drama” – described by M. Shore – supported the Stalinist policy of terror or actually participated in it. As one could easily guess, the Author's sympathy originates in establishing personal bonds with them and a lack of emotional attachment to the remains of totalitarianism discussed in the book, which results from the fact that the Author grew up in a completely different cultural environment and in a different part of the world (beyond a shadow of a doubt, the second factor considerably influenced the Author's approach to the 20th-century history of Eastern Europe). To my mind, the book would be much more

credible if the voice of the victims of communism and their relatives was more audible on its pages. The readers could better understand then the essence of the communist policy of terror.

Selective and incomplete characterization of Stalinism and other periods of communism in the post-war Europe included in the book also consists in focusing mainly on terror and repressions which the residents of Eastern European communist countries were exposed to. Surely, too little attention was paid to another, important aspect of communism which drew the interest and guaranteed the support of millions of people, namely positive aspects of Marxism and Leninism and the attempts to bring some of them to life. The Author seems to forget that communism could gain the affection of the masses mainly due to implementing the promise of equality and social justice, e.g. by providing free education, widely available jobs, free healthcare, cheap holidays and social advancement. It concerned chiefly the representatives of the poorest social classes, blue-collar workers and peasants, who – thanks to communist authorities – got an education, moved from the countryside to cities, assumed new social roles, experienced real social advancement. What they received was an actual chance to lead a better life than their parents. Hence, communist totalitarianism survived both materially in large factories, roads, railway lines, public buildings, as well as in the consciousness of Eastern European societies as the time of limiting one's freedom, but also social advancement, equalisation of chances and social security. Its legacy is very complicated then and it cannot be easily evaluated. In the meantime, „The taste of ashes...” is dominated by the narrative of martyrdom, which appeals to the emotions of the readers, but at the same time it distorts the picture of communism and its remains in Central-Eastern Europe.

One methodological mistake is quoting generalizations which were not properly proven. For instance, describing M. Horakova's trial, the Author observes with obvious disgust that the central authorities of Czechoslovakia were flooded with thousands of letters from “regular citizens”, “working people”, asking for the highest penalty for the accused. She seems to regard the fact of sending letters as the evidence of pro-Stalinist attitude of the society of Czechoslovakia and its hatred towards Horakova. At the same time, she forgets that such campaigns were typical of Stalinism and they rarely reflected actual opinions of the society. In reality, they were propaganda spectacles, directed to the minutest detail and conducted by the political and state apparatus. The Author makes a similar mistake when she uses the term “civil war” to describe the struggle of the Polish Underground State with communist authorities and their Soviet principals after 1944/1945. Doing so, she fails to notice that a civil war consists in clashes between home social and political forces with the military, while, in this case, Polish underground organizations and partisan units clashed with the Red Army, NKVD and the secret service of new authorities, created from the scratch and at Soviets' bidding. Therefore, it resembled more another national uprising against foreign occupants or a “peasants' war”, not a typical civil war. It must be remembered that considering the then balance of political forces and leanings, Polish communists would not be able to rule for more than a week without the support of the Soviet Union. However, they managed to do so for 45 years.

The Author herself plays an important role in this book. She acts as a guide to the past, “the orator of the dead” speaking on behalf of participants of historical events, the main narrator explaining complicated nuances of the past; at the same time, she is a therapist helping the witnesses of history to cope with difficult historical experiences, especially the feeling of guilt. Sometimes she becomes one of the characters taking part in the described events. What is more, she is a researcher, “memory physician”, discreetly – if, in my opinion, too rarely – verifying subjective points of view on the reality of individual persons of the drama. Her multidimensional engagement makes one consider the role of a historian as the author of scientific studies about the past. It is not an easy task since it is hard to assess to what extent the book in question is a scientific study and what its ultimate goal is<sup>2</sup>. Undoubtedly, it is postmodern in nature, which manifests itself in crossing accepted boundaries with respect to form, content of scientific studies, the author's role, and finally the fundamental intention which is at the heart of the book. Surely, combining a few genres of scientific and non-scientific writing resulted in a sophisticated, original, and sensitive study (I would like to write so gracefully myself). It is a study with „a double bottom”, a deep message, which reads smoothly and with great joy. However, the craftsmanship of form does not always go hand in hand with the perfection of content. To my mind, inconsistencies and methodological mistakes mentioned above are the evidence of that.

In sum, I am not sure whether I understood this really fascinating book, whether I moved even one step towards the Author's intention. Nevertheless, I can say that her multilevel narration, subtle form, and meaningful understatements provoke deeper reflection. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, it is an original and insightful study both in the literary and anthropological sense mainly due to the interpersonal skills of the Author, who immerses herself in the environments she observes, lives in them, and, at the same time, she distances herself from them which facilitates performing mostly correct and critical analyses of their mentality and customs. Even though from time to time it is faulty in the strictly scientific and historical sense, it strikes the readers with the relevance of authorial intuition and some reflections. Her methodological mistakes partially result from the fact that the Author followed into the steps of her previous research on Polish men of letters initially fascinated and later disappointed with the Stalinist version of a communist system<sup>3</sup>. In my opinion, this might be the reason behind focusing too much on the experiences of intellectuals – former proponents of communism which distorted her perspective in the following monograph.

In spite of these drawbacks, Marci Shore's study is an excellent and even shocking work, mainly because it shows the state of human nature in contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, the book does not contain the bibliography of secondary literature, as well as footnotes which would be of help when investigation the process of drawing general conclusions and source materials of voiced opinions.

<sup>3</sup> See M. SHORE, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism*, Warsaw 2008.

times, exposed to the influence of totalitarianism. It makes it possible to enter the soul of an Eastern European intellectual, faced with the nightmarish experience of the disaster brought about by “the failure of the Enlightenment project”, that is World War II, resulting in the death of the body and perverse, tantalizing and detrimental in the spiritual sense influence of communism.

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MARIAN CABALSKI, *Przemoc stosowana przez kobiety. Studium kryminologiczne*, Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls” 2014, ss. 579.

Jednym z najpoważniejszych zagrożeń dla praw lub dóbr osobistych człowieka, z jakimi spotykamy się nierzadko w domach, w szkole, miejscu pracy czy na ulicy, jest zjawisko przemocy. Przemoc w jakimś sensie wpisała się w rzeczywistość codziennego życia. Czujemy się niejednokrotnie bezradni wobec docierających do nas za pośrednictwem mediów informacji o kolejnych aktach agresji i przemocy, w których konkretne osoby są narażone na niebezpieczeństwo utraty życia i zdrowia, naruszana jest ich godność, nietykalność cielesna, wolność, w tym seksualna; powodowane są szkody na ich zdrowiu fizycznym lub psychicznym, a także wywoływane są cierpienia i krzywdy moralne.

Literatura, m.in. psychologiczna, socjologiczna, pedagogiczna, prawna czy kryminologiczna, poświęca problematyce przemocy coraz więcej miejsca i ukazuje dużą złożoność tego zjawiska, co również utrudnia w miarę precyzyjne i ogólne zdefiniowanie przemocy.

Definicja WHO, przyjęta w roku 1996 i aktualnie obowiązująca, określa przemoc jako „celowe użycie siły fizycznej lub władzy, sformułowane jako groźba lub rzeczywistość użyte, skierowane przeciwko samemu sobie, innej osobie, grupie lub społeczności, które albo prowadzi do, albo z którym wiąże się wysokie prawdopodobieństwo spowodowania (<https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Przemoc> [dostęp: 27.07.2015]). Możemy mówić o przemocy fizycznej, psychicznej, seksualnej, ekonomicznej.

W skomplikowaną, aczkolwiek aktualną problematykę przemocy, wpisuje się obszerna (579 stron), a jednocześnie nowatorska monografia naukowa autorstwa wybitnego znawcy zagadnień z zakresu kryminologii, prawnika, autora licznych reportaży, felietonów i esejów – Mariana Cabalskiego. Jak wskazuje tytuł, na kartach recenzowanej książki znajdziemy fachowe omówienie i analizę różnorodnych badań nad przemocą stosowaną przez kobiety w rodzinie (w związkach małżeńskich i partnerskich) zarówno w Polsce, jak i na świecie, które ukazują jakość i skalę tego problemu, o którym na razie nie mówi się zbyt często.