

THE AVATARS OF SOCIALISM AND ITS AFTERMATH. A SURVEY OF THE ROMANIAN POST-COMMUNISM

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Abstract: This paper is about the most seductive political theory of all times: The Socialism. During its almost 250 years journey throughout the timeline of world history, it embraced different forms, names or agents, so that it became a very confused way of thinking sociopolitics. Just as we research the working arrangements of Socialism (the socialist political ideas, the ways of implementation of them or, even, the criminal compulsions of it), so we must analyze the consequential effects of socialism in post communist Romania.

Keywords: socialism, communism, post-communism, Romanian post-communism, ideology.

As a scientific doctrine, the socialism incarnates the most quivering story of the 20th century. No other belief influenced more the people, the precepts on no other doctrine had deeper repercussions on the contemporary history because, thanks to its perverse faculty, thrive to show off the musty manifesto brochures or off the shelves of the libraries and to implement straight to the point: in the bosom of the societies which were unable to adhere to democracy.

From the beginning, it is needful to draw up a distinction between the essence of the doctrine and its function: the first one is outlined in quasi-explicit terms while the second one is perfectly intelligible. The appeal to reality and the ideological education of the workers according to the spirit of socialism tempt people to accept the fundamental ideological principles of this political scheme and also its political authority, even the formal adhesion to the Communist Party.

In the antic Greeks' terms, the moment of death is the very instant when the genuine nature of the man is revealed. The same hypothesis is also applicable to socialism: its flashing collapse and its electrifying suicide prescribe the real dimension of what socialism meant. The egalitarian outbursts, the vigorous anticlerical enthusiasm and the successive rebellions aroused from uncertain

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millenarianist ambitions are to be found to the origins of socialism concurrently born with the French Revolution. For instance, Gracchus Babeuf's *Conspiracy of the Equals* (fig. 1) was used as "the Fate" of the collectivization of private property, the one who was proclaiming itself as the unique reason of the "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity". The voyage of the socialism through the universal history points out other important halting places in England, then in America, led by Robert Owen (fig. 2), the owner of a weaving mill in Scotland.

In the very moment when all these experiments seemed to fail, the socialist idea was took over by the German tandem Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels whose closing by the socialist aspirations was disguised in a kind of intellectual misionarism that helped the two ideologists to distort, in an original way, the sources of socialism. It transgressed the genuine existentialism towards the non-transcendental branches, with no remnants of metaphysical. Marx and Engels' offer meant a petrifying of history and then a going off the track of it, which signified, of course, a moment of crisis.

Historically speaking, in the USSR, no long after that episode V. I. Lenin saves this theory by using instead of the proletariat the communist avant-garde. This is the way in which Lenin created the most well known absolutist system in history, a system made, in fact, to be controllable only by him. But the Leninist doctrinaire-guiding idea, which can be taken up from Chernishevsky's *What's to be done* brochure was that socialism should be made for workers not by them.

We should pop over now from Lenin to Mussolini, a leap which in not very different by that one from Marx to Lenin, because each one of them had acclimatized the socialist doctrine in agreement with local regulation. The failure of the bolchevik leader in putting his precepts in circulation beyond the borders of the imperial Russia did not absolute signify the elusion of any influences. In 1922 Benito Mussolini, "the baby in red diapers" – he came from a family with socialist options: his father, a blacksmith, was a member together with Mark and Engels, of the first communist Internationale and then was involved in promoting the anarchist ideas of Mikhail Bakunin – proceeded to build his rising and, on a Leninist pattern, drew up his own doctrine which was based on an eccentric socialism. The fascism.

The fascist regime like the bolshevik and then the communist regime, impelled the mass indoctrination to an unprecedented level, reinforcing the cult of personality.

On the one hand, after this lapidary fascist episode, the idea of socialism materialized itself totally, especially because the end of the Second World War noticed the cropping out of a few communis regimes and on the other hand it was about the burst of energy of social-democracy as a result of the success in elections of Clement Attlee in opposition with Winston Churchill in the Great Britain.

An American historian and politologist, Joshua Muravchik¹, attaches the emergence of the new post-collonial countries to the historical circuit of socialism

¹ Joshua Muravchik, *Raiul pe pământ. Mărirea și decădere socialismului*, translated into Romanian by Dorian Branea and Cristina Chevereșan, Timișoara, Brumar Publishing, 2004.

and from here the consolidation of the “Third World socialism” with its communist and social-democratic hybrids. One of the author’s examples is Julius Nyerere’s Tanzanian regime (fig. 3), sequentially and complementary built on a mixture between the Chinese maoism and the British fabianism.

Communism, social democracy or the tiermondism were the governmental options in almost all countries in the late 70’s of the 20th century, when socialism was at the height of its glory. But, little by little its armour begins to crack, mainly because of the disarming economic failures, then because the American economy, paradoxically built on the working class, led by George Meany (fig. 4) and Samuel Gompers (fig. 5) had began to be a defiance for socialism. The venturing into an unknown way of the two principal features in the internationalist plot, USSR and China which were led by the neo-reformers Michail Gorbachov (fig. 6) and Deng-Xiao-ping (fig. 7), loomed a predictable relaxation of social-economic congestion of socialism. And in 1997 social-democracy stepped back thanks to Tony Blair (fig 8) who revitalized the metastatic party of Attlee, using a disguising method: “the Labour party is the businessmen party”. Consequently, if we toy with Joshua Muravchik’s idea we will see the the historical voyage of socialism is complete after 200 years after the failure of Gracchus Babeuf’s *coup d’etat*.

From the owenian neo-harmony to Moscow and from Dar es Salaam to London, via Rome, socialism acts very foolishly by using an opaque delirium compared to the most trifling and credible possibility of transgression of reality.

As a jew, Muravchik resorts to an “addendum” of the already analysed mechanism of socialism, making a digression in the experimental sciences. He learns us, in the epilogue of his volume, how to live in a jewish kibboutz.

Such an example is the Ginosar kibboutz (fig. 9), a community built in 1937 located in a valley in the north-east of the Galilean Sea. For christians, this place has a peculiar symbolic value because Jesus Christ committed the miracle of multiplication of fish and bread and for the jews it represents a place of memory of the resistance against the Roman occupation.

The population of a kibboutz meant “the aristocracy and the clergy of the national ideology”. Following this course we will find out that the prime-ministers David Ben-Gurion, Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Shimon Perez or Iehud Barak were, at one time, members of a kibboutz.

The golden age of Ginosar lasted until the ’80 of the 20th century. The conservative Menahem Begin had had elected as prime-minister in 1997 when the long Labour rule ended. Therefore, the kibboutzs confronted with the collapse and their inhabitants were aware of the fact that the nation will not appeal to them in order to continue the colonization project or to monitorize the borders.

When the socialists acted in a democratic way, the result was the progressive detachment from ideology. The basis of utopias, from the ancient Greeks to Thomas Morus, from the millenarianism to Edward Bellamy, whose novel “*Looking Backward*”, written in 1887 meant the highest expression of the

American socialism, was the idea of constraint. Why is so important the example of the kibboutz? Because, according to the author, “after they established it, they chose, in a democratic way, its abolition”.

Is it possible that the socialist topic, which is only very faintly heard, be the last obstacle in front of an ever-growing and menacing alterity seen as a threat to the stability and national integrity of the East-European states? Could this inquiry into post-communist matters be legitimated the moment Central and Eastern Europe willingly open their gates to the modern world of the West? These are some very debatable issues which, if closely taken into account, can give birth to confused and subsequent discourses.

Undoubtedly, the post-communist era is a transitory one, an indenture, a return to democracy, fact which does not involve, by any means, renewed adjustments in fixing a typical hierarchy of the old regime of the communist period. On the contrary, this brings into discussion a completely different and radical epoch, a revisitation of the geography of European space and a transgression of the Soviet epoch and space towards the European space. Consequentially, the dimensions of this transformation cannot pass over a concrete European history that has been constructed as such for the last sixty years.

In the 1960s, the powerful communist parties in Eastern Europe declared “the implementation of socialism”, and consequently, this process immediately metamorphosized into a new political organism known as “the socialist republics”. Therefore, the purpose of this political event was taken over by the newly created Constitutions, in accordance with which the term “socialist” was added to the term “republic”.

However, the unpredictable course of recent history, whose *boiling point* was materialized during the European revolutionary movements in 1989, swept away “the victorious socialism” which had been ubiquitous in Budapest and Warsaw, Prague and Bucharest, and likewise in Sophia and West Berlin.

The communist system, also known as “the future model of the mankind”, brought together, along with its collapse, different versions of the totalitarian mythology, one by one exfoliating off the monolithic imaginary of the system in case.

The myth of a common identity which was supposed to unite the ex-socialist republics, revealed itself to be nothing else but a mere fantasy. The burlesque of the situation made the appropriate pawn, “the new man”, disappear instead of legitimating the totalitarian regime.

As a result of the collapse of the repressive regime of the State Party, there outburst some changes in culture, mentality, and social behaviour, specific to each of the ex-communist countries. If something remained after the disappearance of the old regime, then it melted under the newly recovered and assumed identities.

The circulation of the information is now free and diverse. Human perspectives enlarge as the cultural horizons are expanding. The young generation follows the model of the West-European typology to such an extent that it

identifies with it. Thus, the touristic imaginary, reduced to the C.A.E.R countries only by the communist regime begins to expand while opening its gates and allowing the people to travel to previously forbidden destinations, not to mention the fact that the market economy has definitely replaced the socialist way of production. On the whole, these are the reasons why this process of *normalization* of the society should regard as relative the obsession concerning the national identity issue, nonetheless, this is not at all the case!

To put the point nicely, the avatars of the Romanian historical discourse are far from being an accident during the period after the Second World War course of history. The massive state mobilization, the enthusiasm with no real support and the habit of solemnly celebrating history are all intellectual and political misfortunes, whose origin dating long before the 1989 Romanian Revolution can't be ignored. The response strategy is simple and predictable and it covers all the aspects of the situation.

Within this context of revisiting history, the appeal to the 'masters of ceremonies' of the Romanian national-communism was necessary as long as it created the need for a return to a recent past (which has never been thoroughly analysed) in order to legitimate the present.

The permanent appeal to history calls upon a political method which was cooked to perfection by those generations after the year 1945: historical and political figures, writers, artists, but especially historians built a mechanism designed to put forward an acceptable version of history, which could legitimate the communist regime. A close investigation into the recent past could be the turning point of the re-evaluation of identity.

The post-1989 state assumed its obvious umbilical relationship with the communist party, not only with regard to the issue of collective memory, but also in respect to its self-localization against the background of a society both monochromatic from an intellectual point of view, and spoilt and ruined from a financial point of view. In addition to this, the Party should not identify itself with the State. When this happens it can't stand any opposition, or anything that requires a certain distance in relation to its doctrine. Thus, while embodying the proletariat, one of the Party's main objectives is to rebuild a state apparatus which should govern according to the possibilities created by the situation and also in conformity with the needs of the population.

The Party should not make the decisions that belong to the State, even if it might influence the apparatus². As it becomes a state doctrine, dogmatism grows into a more destructive ideology which should be condemned as such. Consequently, it is necessary that the new democratization be developed and institutionalized and that the different attempts to clearly and coherently analyse the discourse created around the State/Party issue be identified.

² Claude Lefort, *Invenția democratică*, (the original title is *L'invention democratique*, translated into Romanian by Nicolae Baltă and Vasile Mlesniță), Pitești, Paralela 45 Publishing, 2002, pp. 244-245

The Communist Party has been portrayed as *the* unique party, which is an incomplete characterisation. A unique party can be the tool of a dictatorship which allows a civil society to subsist. It does not necessarily imply the existence of various political alternatives. This unique party can coexist with some forms of association, especially with those trade unions which are considered legal. However, The Communist Party is deeply rooted in a fantasy, being a hybrid born out of the mixture between the social and the political³.

According to Adrian Marino, the perpetuation of the communist ideology into contemporary culture under the form of national-communism is a characteristic cultural phenomenon which occurred after the communist era. It has definitely been noticed that in all East-European countries nationalism has remained the only possible surviving option of the communist ideology. Ceausism, as an endemic form of national-communism, is still alive. The communist aversion to the Occident, pluralism, democracy, and integration in suprastatal organisms is perfectly disguised by the national traditional pride, to defend the national independence and sovereignty⁴.

So far, one of the most important episodes of the post-communist period has been the explosive problem of the “de-mythisation of history”. This concept not only assumes that myths are deconstructed, but also, *in extenso*, it emphasizes the fact that history and its heroes are politicised and nationalised, which makes everything be read in the key of *historicism*.

It is but obvious that every political class is looking for cohesion in society, while history is weaving the ideal mask under which it redirects the attention of the civil society to some other ways, different than those established by the contemporary truth, which seems very often difficult to explain in a rational way. When the world seems to overwhelm you, the glorious ancestry of the thread of the history is firing you up.

Therefore, the “de-mythisation of history” is materialised in an antiseptic process which can be applied to the massively forged historical memory. In order that the mechanism of the collective memory be understood, it is essential that within the field of scientific research possible obstructions of intellect and mentality should be prevented. A strong and steady nation in regard to the question of the psychology of identity is required to accept such deconstructions without dramatizing the situation due to the fact that this concept of the “de-mythisation of history” does not endanger national identity, as it has very often been assumed.

The present article attempts to determine whether those who object to the historical figures not being represented in our national Pantheon as authoritarian are self-conscious of their identity and history. Under the spell of involuntariness

³ *Ibidem*, p. 245.

⁴ Adrian Marino, *Politică și cultură. Pentru o nouă cultură română*, Polirom Publishing, Iași, 1996, p. 203.

the Romanians have replaced *history* with a general myth-inventing and national *hysteria*.

The Romanian historiography as a neo-eschatology of pseudo-intellectual type is based on a messianic and canonic parentage almost impossible to avoid and oppose. All the conclusions that are inferred from the different re-interpretations of history found themselves gathered under the same roof of the *melting-pot* of the Romanian unwillingness. The mentality of the Romanian historians (and this is not meant to generalize the situation) is specific for the rhetoric of the Orwellian ‘Ministry of Truth’ and a relaxation of the situation cannot be achieved as long as their educational influence is to be found in schools, high schools, local cultural and religious centers. According to Andrei Pleșu,

“the *legendarization* of history (which has as its derivative the term heroism used in the sense implied by the poorly-made handbooks) can thus become the substance of an unhealthy sophism according to which the virtues of our forebears are very easily inherited, the same way we inherit the blue eyes, from one generation to another. Yet, it is not enough to noisily remember the heroes or multiply their portraits in order to take after them”⁵.

All along the Balkanic geopolitical area, history still stands for xenophobia, revengeful feelings, uncertainty and hatred, as opposed to the abstract, sometimes hilarious frameworks (see the demagogic discourse produced by the concept of *political correctness*) of the consumerist stereotypes it comfortably experiences in the Occident.

As far as Romania is concerned, things haven’t settled down yet, we still live in uncertain times, and the flux of history is still blocked by prejudices resistant to changes and new perspectives. In other words, even if the Western strategies of demythisation of history appeal to multidisciplinary, thus offering a whole range of possible and multiple points of view, most of the times they are not compatible with the Romanian endemic realities. A certain relaxation to ‘read’ history in a self-mocking, playful and generous manner is missing.

The circumstantial aspect of the Occidental deconstructivist phenomenon, frequently called upon by the French intellectuals is not at all to the Romanian historians’ taste, because the obvious balance between the absence of the document and the inflated discourse of history is politically and institutionally legitimised. It is very uncomfortable for the Romanian history not to have at least one clear and scientifically sustained historical event completely agreed upon by the historians.

However, a new chapter of the Romanian historiography has begun its way into the local market of ideas. Lucian Boia⁶ is the first to have promoted a new and different perspective on the study of historiography, which does not mean the death of historiography, but a revisitation of it.

⁵ The quotation is my translation of a fragment taken from Andrei Pleșu’s *Rigorile ideologiei naționale și legitimitatea universalului*, in *Chipuri și masti ale tranziției*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 1996, p. 220.

⁶ Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 2002.

The study of the practices of everyday life is in its beginning. Toader Nicoara⁷ was the coordinator of an anthology of texts meant to offer an introduction to the history of collective mentalities. Adrian Cioroianu⁸, Marius Oprea, Stejarel Olaru⁹ are only but a few names among those who have successfully re-visited and re-evaluated the Romanian recent past, or, in other words, that area concerned with the Romanian communism. The praise-worthy well-documented analytic project on the study of the concept of *pétit histoire* during the Romanian communist epoch conceived by the four young researchers Paul Cernat, Ion Manolescu, Angelo Mitchievici, and Ioan Stanomir¹⁰ is a good start for the clarification of the Romanian communist mythology. Needless to say, many other different contributions to the study of history are to be mentioned, but as far as I am concerned, I shall focus on those studies which refer mainly to the Romanian communism and post-communism.

Accordingly, balance and stability are the main points of reference for an attempt to build a fresh project released from the constrictions imposed by the old national-communist mentality. Yet, this venturesome thought is very difficult to accomplish owing to the counteroffensive of the Ministry of Culture which accepted as scientific truth any false representation of history, from the nationalist obsession to the ones referring to protocronism or tracology.

For the ex-communist countries, the opening towards Europe poses a fundamental and quite new problem – that of the place their formerly ignored identity and cultural contributions will occupy from now on within the future European context. We will be looking forward to seeing how they will respond to the offer made by contemporaneity and to what an extent Western Europe is willingly to open itself and accept the heritage of the *Other Europe*.

All things considered, what we are to find out is whether Isaiah Berlin was right when making the following statement:

The answers must be known to someone: perhaps Adam in Paradise knew; perhaps we shall only reach them at the end of days; if men cannot know them, perhaps the angels know; and if not the angels, then God knows. The timeless truths must in principle be knowable¹¹.

⁷ Toader Nicoara, *Introducere in istoria mentalitatilor collective (antologie)*, Cluj, Presa Universitara Clujeana, 1998.

⁸ Adrian Cioroianu, *Ce Ceausescu qui hante les Roumains. Le mythe, ses representations et le culte du Dirigeant dans la Roumanie communiste*, Bucharest, Curtea Veche Publishing, 2004.

⁹ Marius Oprea, Stejarel Olaru, *Ziua care nu se uita*, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 2003.

¹⁰ Paul Cernat, Angelo Mitchievici, Ion Manolescu, Ioan Stanomir, *O lume disparuta. Patru istorii personale urmate de un dialog cu H.-R. Patapievici*, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 2004.

¹¹ Isaiah Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, Farrar Straus Giroux, New York, 2000, p. 5, also available in Romanian as *Adevaratul studiu al omenirii. Antologie de eseuri*, Bucharest, Meridiane, 2001, p. 35.



Fig. 1. Gracchus Babeuf

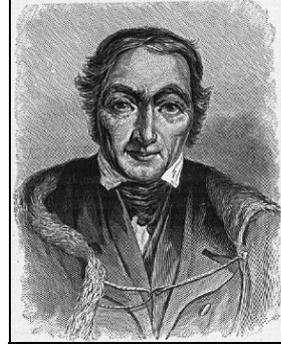


Fig. 2. Robert Owen

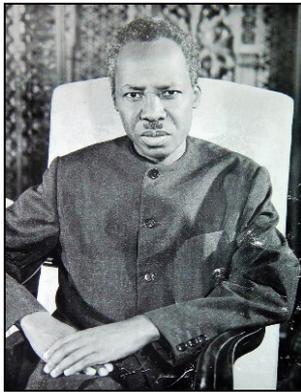


Fig. 3. Julius Nyerere



Fig. 4. George Meany



Fig. 5. Samuel Gompers



Fig. 6. Mikhail Gorbachev



Fig. 7. Deng Xiaoping



Fig. 8. Tony Blair



Fig. 9. Ginosar kibboutz