

Post-Communism and the Stereotypes of Deconstruction

About undoing and redoing the myth of the past

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Abstract

This paper tries to talk about the communist party in a philosophical way. The totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe fall at the beginning of the 90's years. It is still present the specter of the communism: totalitarianism represented a major experiment regarding the concentration, control, essentialism and deformation of the primary structures of imagination. But the communism also represents a utopia and a myth so to talk about it means to tell about undoing and redoing the myth of the past. So what is the cure to escape from the specter of communism? The political philosophy of The Post Decembrist Society analyses the communism as a part of the dictatorial specters but also as a myth. The possible therapy is to integrate into the collective conscience the terrifying image of certain specters, which will only cease to haunt us the moment they are crucified in the historic frame.

Keywords: *Communism, Specters Of The Past, Deconstruction, Reconstruction, Undoing and Redoing The Past, The Post Decembrist Society, The mythology about communism, The Therapy Of Acknowledgement.*

The present filtrated through past spectres

The fall of the totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 90's determined the analysis of a series of structural elements of the latter, which couldn't be accessed previously as a result of the political and ideological barriers. The symbolic and imaginary dimensions of the communist phenomenon became the object of debate recently, a debate that is sometimes too close to involve a perspective from the objective point of view. Communism was stated to have represented a project with a universalist vocation in rethinking the world – however, this thesis was mainly assumed from the historical and material point of view, and less in the field of value-related and symbolic issues. By extension, we

may say that communist totalitarianism represented a major experiment regarding the concentration, control, essentialism and deformation of the primary structures of imagination.

The interactions between the field of collective representations and that of political reality were subject to numerous definition attempts. The major ideas within this debate refer to two antagonist theses: the first approach focuses on treating the political imagination as a derivate, immanent, residual and secondary form of the political space, while the second approach relates the collective imagination to a totalising and coercive vocation over the palpable area of politics¹. The two argumentation lines may not be subject to an absolute approval or rejection, but the mediation thereof may lead to the acceptance of the essential presupposition based on which the imagination field has real valences related to the modification, adaptation and granting of sense to politics. The application of this analysis framework to the complex imagination generated by the fall of recent totalitarian regimes may emphasize a part of its coercive potential over present guiding marks, therewith explaining the derivation and historical after-effect of certain symbolic structures, connected to dead political bodies².

The idealised imaginary of the communist project generated several attempts of organisation, definition and classification, but its heterogeneous substance constantly refused to subject to a univocal analysis spectre. Based on a simplification and essence granting process, the totalitarian system vision may be regarded as an acute and ideologically infiltrated form of certain primary collective narrations, both assumed and devoured by the ideological project³. Further to the collapse of the system itself, the spectres of its mythology continued to populate the social mentality of the societies previously governed by the ideological project. A secondary vision was generated in time, implied by the semantic substance of the first one, but adapted to the new historical and value-related realities. Metaphorically speaking, we may state that the communist utopia has conquered a new paradigm, by insinuating itself in the profound spaces of its own vision. The myths of post-communism, regarded as an area of confluence of several historical periods, both ideological and political, may not be separated from the fundamental substance of the totalitarian project. Although they are not narrations of the system

¹ Jean-Jeaques Wunenburger, *Politics Imageries*, Paideia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, p. 38.

² Katherine Verdery, *The Political Life of Dead Bodies*, Vremea Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, pp. 7-10.

³ Lucian Boia, *The Scientific Mythology of Communism*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, pp. 5-7.

as such, they project the latter beyond the historical barrier, generating a complicated myth and anti-myth synthesis, having modelled and given the sense of the present.

The case of Romanian communism remains paradigmatic in terms of the violence and ideological concentration having invaded the social mentality spaces based on imagination. The local totalitarianism was characterised by the singularity and acute specification of the communist project, which reached its final morbid stage by materialising a primitive dynastic dictatorship, where the ideological element was overrun by the delirium generated by the overestimation of the leader figure. This individualisation of the Romanian communism vision managed to involve a complicate posthumous career of its fundamental myths, which also settled in time a derivate position within the collective mentality

The secondary mythology may be treated as a complex historical artefact, generated by two opposed force lines. The first source of this new vision derives from the reconversion and derivation tendency of the initial totalitarian mythology, forced to identify new manifestation niches within the present geography, while the second source refers relates to the mere attempt to contest the primary communist vision. In time, the two antagonist sources of this new derived mythology implied a set of symbolic narrations with major influence in modelling and sometimes dislocating the guidelines of social mentality.

A de- (re-) composing world

The post-Decembrist Romanian society was confronted with a series of recurrent themes, which tended to monopolise all statements and opinions in relation to the recent past. Generically named the new transition mythology, this set of theses related to the sense, force and finality of the local totalitarian project, is hiding the initial archetypes of the typology beneath its profound layers. Although such a hypothesis may seem surprising in the first instance, the representational totalitarianism generated by the communist dictatorship couldn't be guillotined the moment its political and systemic staging was destroyed. The sphere of fundamental images of the ideology continued to populate the public space, generating hybrid constructions, whose origin seemed radically opposed to the real genesis point. In other words, the communist myths have transmuted in the species of a formal contestation, hiding in fact a reaffirmation of the primary presuppositions of the system.

Among the most influencing axes of development of the new vision, although apparently opposed, we remark the existence of an intersection and

mediation area, the latter finally managing to form a coherent system with major influence over the value sphere. Concretely, the anti-myth and the old mythology reached a symbolic armistice within the new vision, thus propagating a series of narrations having an extreme influence in the construction and deconstruction of the new social universe. As a result of the multiple forms of the images, structurally opposed value scales have been assumed and rendered coherent by the requirements of the new vision⁴, the two genesis areas of the present collective mythology thus implying reciprocally and generating a justifying chain subject to circular argumentation.

The Romanian post-communist myths regard two major construction directions. The first symbolic area is dedicated to the exorcism, delegitimation and perceptive reconstruction of the totalitarian phenomenon, while the second one regards the edification of a new world, more or less projected in the imaginary area. At a first sight the two fundamental lines for structuring the debate seem to be coherent and non-exclusive. However, the research of their profound presuppositions is doubled by the emphasis of a series of latent structural oppositions. The debate regarding the totalitarian phenomenon monopolised the Romanian public space the moment the system itself collapsed. However, the results of this attempt to assume and decipher the collective meanings imposed by the communist project proved to be a road to nowhere. We may say that this war meant to destroy the myths resulted in fact in a rethinking of the totalitarian vision⁵. The most influent theses of the attempt for the deconstruction of local totalitarianism are related to the myth of dissidence, regarded as a form of real contestation of the system, with militant features, the theme of guilt, dually analysed and oscillating between general culpability and the annulment of any responsibility and the thesis of the natural collapse of the system. In the other genesis area of the new vision, the most powerful myths triggered the idea of a new world, the challenge of the past, the theme of forgetting and last but not least, the morgantic image of the future democratic Eden.

The two visions of the myth were in fact reiterating the utopian frame of the totalitarian project. Thus the new world continues to resemble the old one in an imperceptible way, the thesis of the reloaded eternity being in fact an unacknowledged assumption of the totalitarian idea of escaping history, and the idea of the future paradise, this time governed by the democracy sign, may have

⁴ Jean-Jeaques Wunenburger, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-20.

⁵ Daniel Barbu, *The Absent Republic*, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, pp. 83-89.

also been regarded as derived from the “golden age⁶” of communism. Within the deconstruction, the myth of dissidence represented a copy of the ancestral theme of social class fight, drawn by communism from the primary vision of the Conflict myth, the thesis of general (non)culpability proved to be a form of manifestation of unit mythology, while the idea of the natural collapse (thus non-responsible) of the system may be correlated to the vision of historical determinism.

Paradoxically, the Romanian post-communism mythology thus represented an exact recovery of the former system image – which was visible not only in the attempts to imagine a new world, but especially in the attempts to deconstruct the old one. Thus, the system and anti-system myths fuse within the social mentality of a world in search for guidelines. The collapse of communism granted the chance to annul a troubled collective vocation, but it didn’t also grant the framework necessary for the construction of a new value sphere. The historical break generated by this legitimacy and sense void may not be overcome by the annulment mechanism, or by appealing to historical oblivion. This way, the result is the necessity of a complex duty – the abolishment of communism and its former values, of the ideological vision, may be accomplished only by means of an acknowledgement exercise and not by mirroring its symbolic coercive structure.

The stereotypes of deconstruction – the mythology of undoing the myths

The first frame of the post-communist vision is concentrated on the complicated task to exorcise the system – as it was still a menace in governing the vision structures; its death was symbolically proclaimed, as a natural consequence of history dynamics. This time annulment of an epoch aimed the creation of a necessary fracture. The social mentality was avoiding the acceptance of a responsibility which may have been generically imputed to the collective nation. The myth of historical determinism did not represent a recent vision creation, as it outlived its deriving source, the communist ideology. Surprisingly, in order to collapse the absent statue of totalitarianism, the social mentality was invoking one of its fundamental myths⁷. This temptation of the after-effect thus proved to increase its power, the more inaccessible the profound vision layers were.

The second myth having a major influence in the post-Decembrist collective mentality was related to the theme of general de-culpability – the collapse of communism had revealed a troubled social structure, which had become ageless by acceptance. The responsibility for this strengthening of the system had to be

⁶ Lucian Boia, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-140.

⁷ Daniel Barbu, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-104.

eliminated from the immediate space, as it may have generated a collective consciousness process. The social mentality was defending against this possible value fracture by invoking the magic myth remedy – the past became the prisoner of impersonal instances, while the present was the source of a historical leap. The collective culpability theme also generated two formulas of vision escape. The first one is related to the silent opposition myth, while the second one materialises in the posterior contestation of the totalitarian project.

These narrations derived from the historical context of post-communism reveal the existence of an internal malady of non-acknowledgement. The collapse of local communism was determined neither by the mechanisms of historical determinism, nor in the framework of a posthumously imagined generalised dissidence – the destructuring of the totalitarian phenomenon was the result of several combined factors. However, the fact which is still relevant for the value-related guidelines of the post-totalitarian world relates to its necessity to free itself from a representational universe still contaminated by the force of the idealised myth.

The second frame of the post-Decembrist vision also suffered a major infusion of significations recovered from the semantic sphere of the recently annulled former epoch. The new myths founding the democratic society were mere copies of the substance and form of the ideological project of local communism⁸. Although they have been set free from the terror of the system, individuals continue to reason based on its major argumentative lines and to see the world filtered by the lingering vision. This paradoxical escape in the future, hiding in fact the refuge to the past, generated the reiteration of several former myths, in hybrid forms, though maintaining their primary argumentative structure.

The first themes invoked after the collapse of the communist totalitarianism were the ones related to the new world and the perfect society. A regressive mental experiment revealed an amazing resemblance between these apparently revolutionary forms of collective will and the historical beginning of the phenomenon they were trying to cancel. This way, Romanians were restoring the archetypal dreams and hopes specific to any form of collective society, but they were creating hybrids including certain elements of representational totalitarianism – communism was still functioning in a limited and coercive way, in the spaces of decisive guidelines. Thus the myth of a democratic society, where individuals would have found the absolute social harmony and where all oppositions would

⁸ Lucian Boia, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-225.

have been dissolved, was actually a secular copy of the communist mythology. The terrestrial paradise, envisaged either as the class free society or as the perfect democratic world, remains in fact equally inaccessible. The narrative structure was the same, and its results were becoming dangerously similar, generating over time an acceptance of the issues meant to be initially denied.

Another myth which manifested a sinuous evolution within the Romanian post-communist vision was that of the Leader. Under the monstrous sign of personal dictatorship, the last decade of local communism seemed to have healed the collective mentality of the constant need for “saviours⁹”, at least for a while. Surprisingly, the collapse of the system and of its absolute and terrifying personalisation, the Leader, did not also involve the accusation of its specific vision. The myth of the democratic reconstruction of the new world could not be saved against the complicated mechanisms of the vision, as the new universe also had an uninspired set of providential leaders as assembly point.

A general view over the post-totalitarian vision and over the two divergent symbolic axes, namely contestation and reconstruction, reveals a surprising dictatorship of the stereotype. The two major frames of development of the new world – one of them focusing on the deconstruction and annulment of the past and the other one being responsible for the generation of the symbolic staging of the future, were paying a symbolic posthumous tribute to the totalitarian project. The dependence of the vision on the significant frames of recent history may not be accused or annulled – this is part of the series of the natural phenomena of remaining values. However, this chain of the past may not be the object of a mere ascertainment, as it requires a complicate exercise of acknowledgement.

The philosophical exercise task – a therapy of acknowledgement

If the theme of general culpability or the one of collective unconsciousness have generated a separation of the representation universe, which couldn't be settled without marking the exclusion of a certain sphere, the acknowledgement exercise doesn't imply the absolute acceptance or the denying exclusion of the symbolic force of the past. The vision may not be brought to justice – its immanent structures may not be judged within an exclusive and extreme binomial, such as good – evil, as it implies the presence of numerous meaning nuances. One of the possible tasks of the philosophical exercise and of the contemporary conscience relates to the inauguration of an exercise of non-vindictive acknowledgement of

⁹ *Ibidem.*

the past. The totalitarianism mythology conquered the abysmal spaces of the collective mentality by means of a simulation trick – the communism confiscated the primary archetypes of the social vision and infested them with the ideology drug. Its terrible syncretic vocation provided the totalitarian project with the opportunity to create a complex representational space and with a morbid persuasion force. The absolution from myth dictatorship may not be accomplished by a simple and antagonist deconstruction, as it requires a separation from the ideated instruments of the past. The new world can only be created by rethinking and granting ever new meanings to the former world. The contemporary collective conscience acutely reclaims the suspension of this accusing illusion over the past in favour of an attempt to overcome.

The rejection of recent history may generate three types of posthumous maladies of representational totalitarianism: irresponsible denial, as an instrument of renouncement and time expulsion of the past, the ideological hybridisation of the present, as a method to survive a totalitarian crypto-mythology and historical reversibility, generated by the collective disillusionment and disappointment. Each of the three morbid derivations of the totalitarian vision may deform and dislocate the evolution of the present. Their symbolic force may burst, overcoming the register of primary representations and becoming the assembly points of a new collective memory.

The only possible therapy against the ménage of this internal revolt of the vision relates to the exercise of acknowledgement, as the ultimate method to integrate into the collective conscience the terrifying image of certain spectres, which will only cease to haunt us the moment they are crucified in the historic frame.

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