Under Authorities. Philosophy and Ideology in “The Obsessive Decade” of ’50 in Romania

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A research focused on the changes in Romanian philosophy in the times of communist regime under the authority of ideology wasn’t made yet. My aim in this paper is to try to make the first steps in this direction in the form of a general discussion about the cultural and political framework immediately after the Second World War in the so called “obsessive decade” when the excessive Stalinist ideology produced many intrusive changes at the level of academic community and in the cultural public life. My goal is just to launch some challenges in a metaphorical manner, opened a debate about the relations between the popular democracy and the academic community.

Keywords: the obsessive decade, culture, ideology, communism.

Some preliminary remarks

The topic of this study may be inacceptable for those who believe that to speak about our recent history means to tell something which will be uncomfortable for somebody. For this reason, many people who know a lot of things about what happened in the first decade of the communist regime want to preserve a quiet climate and choose to postpone any talk about their memories. But the time is going on and a reconstruction of this recent history will be more difficult and less credible in the future. Anyway, don’t forget that the entirely Romanian society has a saving circumstance: the communist regime was imposed to Romanians, it wasn’t a free choice of our citizens at the end of The Second World War.
Let’s be clear, I don’t want to add here a piece to the political dossier of communist regime. It isn’t my job to judge and to say if somebody is guilty. All I would like to do is to open a critical and academic debate about the statute of philosophy in that time. Of course, the philosophy didn’t exist for itself and through itself, a lot of people were implied, but it isn’t my fault if somebody was an ideological servant of communist regime. He or she could choose anything else. So, it will be necessary to mentions some names, but I hope that the truth, not Stalin, is the friend of everybody. My belief is that we can find the truth together. Before all, I think that we can learn from this history. On the other side, I think that a deeper knowledge of the facts is our duty and that to forget them is a shame.

In this first study, as we are, I am sure, at the beginnings of a long research, I have decided not to use the testimonies of different persons who lived then. I prefer, in order to have a neutral start, to use only written documents like official papers, newspapers, journals and books. The work was hard and, inevitable, incomplete. All I offer here is just a sketch or a project for a research and a challenge for my professional community. Of course, in any written history the author is present in a hidden way, but I have tried to be here only a narrator of some findings. I think that, let’s say so, the only escape from neutrality was my strong will to be correct with the facts. Therefore, the historical context is always described as a main factor in the individual decision process. To put aside the historical dimension of personal beliefs and faith would be a naïve or unilateral approach.

The comrade-in-arms’s comradeship

I will use the term ‘comrade’ in a special ideological sense, namely, for any person who is politically correct from the perspective of the totalitarian communist regime, not only for party members or for party workers. This contextual meaning is, of course, an ideological one, opened to changes imposed by the communist party or by the leaders who has their own freaks. The meaning depends on the opportunist ideological line of the party and on the subjective will of the greatest leader. Therefore, somebody could be a good comrade today, but a bad
comrade tomorrow. This kind of comradeship was the official way of life immediately after 23 of August 1944, when Romania decided to fight against Germany and the Red Army occupied its territory.

Many citizens were good comrades for a while, but after they do all the best and the power was conquered by the communist party, they were forgotten, abandoned or even classified as enemies of the communist regime. This was the case for many intellectuals, especially for those who had social-democratic or leftist political views. At the beginning they believed and were encouraged to think that their voices will be heard and that the Communist Party will share with them all the benefits of the new social order, but soon after the party decided to give up them. This political phenomenon was the main trend in cultural life in Romania between the middle of 1944 and the end of 1947. The fellow travelers became quickly non-grata persons, even enemies of the regime.

In the first line there were the mass-media, namely, the press. Immediately after the 23 of August 1944, newspapers favorable to the Communist Party appeared. On 24th August were launched on the market the first legal number of România Liberă (The Free Romania), self-named democratic and antifascist newspaper, and the first legal number of Libertatea (The Liberty), which was the official voice of Social Democrat Party. Just a couple of weeks later, starting with 21 of September, Scânteia (The Spark), the press organ of Romanian Communist Party, begun his history as an ideological servant of communist order. These three newspapers give the official line of the Communist Party for the activists, named the enemies in social class war, underlined the main ideological hot points in the struggle for a new society and offer the hope for a new order. At the beginning, the general tone was a friendly one, but very soon, after the political power was conquered step by step by the activists helped by the force of the army and not that of the arguments, and many citizens, some of them opportunists, became members of the Communist Party, they changed the music. Some intellectuals learned to speak a new language, that of communist propaganda.

Many writers, poets, philosophers, artists and scientists with left political views join to different cultural groups and founded some periodical magazines. The first impression was that the new order assures a new cultural climate in which every voice has liberty to speak
and can be heard by those who want to be well informed. Freedom of speak was proclaimed as a main value. Now it is clear that this was only a hypocritical strategy; in fact, all the intellectuals opened sincerely their minds, expressed frankly their subjective options, exposed themselves in such a manner that the communist activists could have a ready-made map of cultural forces. The magazines were suspended as soon as the mission was accomplished. It was a soft trap, but the real prison was the next phase for many of the intellectuals.

The literary vanguard was one of the examples of such a naïve behavior. The new magazine Orizont Literatură, artă, cultură și gândire socială (Horizon Literature, Art, Culture, Social Thought), came out from November 1944 to 1st of March 1947. Săsă Pană was the editor in chief and many other writers took part in this project, but all of them were abandoned by the power when the Communist Party gained the political power through violence against historical parties. The literary vanguard was used in the ideological battle because its social thought was a critical one against the established social order. The communists used the vanguard writers as comrades in the travel from pluralism and democracy to dictatorship and not from dictatorship to democracy as many writers believed. With a purified board, in accord with the new stage of the class struggle, this magazine changed its name in Revista literară (Literary Magazine), then, from 1948, in Flacăra (The Flame).

Generally speaking, what happened in literature was very important for philosophy because the Romanian culture was centered on literature and the main public critical press organ was the literary magazine. The genuine interference between literature and philosophy gave to literary critique the front position in Romanian culture. The Romanian philosophers published their articles in literary magazines, the most important philosophical debates were hosted in literary magazines, and when a magazine was set up as a philosophical one, like in the case of Gândirea (The Thought), it became quickly a mixture because the professional community was in fact a mixture.

Some magazines suspended in the time of war came out again and the new literary groups could set up their own magazines. The third series of Viața Românească (The Romanian Life) came out in Bucharest from November 1944 till June-July 1946 under the direction of Mihai
Ralea and D.I. Suchianu. From September 1945 till December 1947, under the directorate of Al. Rosetti, was printed a new series of Revista Fundațiilor (Foundations Review), representing an important cultural magazine before the war.

In the same time, were launched new journals. From the 23rd of September 1945 to the 16th of January 1946, what came out in Bucharest, with George Călinescu editor in chief, was a new magazine with a neutral title, Lumea. Săptămânal literar, artistic, social (The World. Literary, Artistic and Social Weekly Magazine). But here the word ‘social’ is the key, because it means that this magazine has an orientation toward the left wing of political spectrum. Starting with 20th of September 1946 came out Contemporanul (The Contemporary), also a political, social and cultural weekly magazine. From 1955 the editor in chief was George Ivașcu, an important person in that times. From January to August 1945 came out in Sibiu Revista cercului literar (The Review of Literary Circle) under the directorate of Ion Negoițescu, a monthly magazine devoted to literature, philosophy and arts. Beginning with 1st of July 1945 came out a weekly magazine important for the cultural strategy of the newcomers in politics, those self-entitled the people of the progress, the communists. This magazine tried to draw youth attention over the so called generous political project for a new world of justice and equity, a chance for youth people in order to manifest their preferences. With Gh. Nichiti editor in chief, Tinerețea. Săptămânal de atitudine și cultură progresistă (The Youthfulness. Weekly magazine for attitude and progressive culture) was stopped on 24 of April 1947 when another stage of political fight was prepared in communist propaganda laboratories.

The publishing houses took their activity again after the war, but the editorial policy were changed according with new political and ideological trends. For example, soon in 1945 was published the volume Scrieri alese (Selected writings) by Karl Marx and the first Romanian contribution to the historiography, Un veac de frământări sociale (A Century of Social Worries) by Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, one of the most important communist leaders. He proposed a new approach of Romanian history based on the class struggle concept. His vision was a moderate one if we compare it with the extremist standpoint of view claimed by I.V. Stalin.
But there was a great degree of liberty yet, at least for the poets. In 1946 were published some of the most important books in Romanian poetry: *Bilete de papagal* (*Parrot tickets*) by Tudor Arghezi, *Stanți burhze* (*Bourgeois positions*) by George Bacovia and *Libertatea de a trage cu pușca* (*Liberty to shoot*) by Geo Dumitrescu. In the same time, one of the poets who will be devoted to the communist ideology, Mihai Beniuic, published a book with a title which is the correct expression for his political aim, *Un om așteaptă răsăritul* (*A man is waiting for the sunrise*), where the word ‘the sunrise’ is used to denote the political influence from our great eastern neighbor, the USSR. Camil Petrescu published his theatre plays in three volumes and some literary critics published their works: G. Călinescu with *Impresii asupra literaturii spaniole* (*Impressions on Spanish literature*), Șerban Cioculescu with *Introducere în poezia lui Tudor Arghezi* (*Introduction to Tudor Arghezi’s poetry*) and Perpessicius with a new volume from *Mențiuni critice* (*Critical mentions*).

I need to mention that the degree of liberty or the illusion of it and of a real public debate of ideas was so high that our few thinkers tried to pay attention to originality in their works. The best examples in philosophy for the year 1946 are Lucian Blaga, who has hurried to publish *Trilogia valorilor* (*The Trilogy of Values*), and Petru Comarnescu, who was ready to hope that his fine essay *Kalokagathon* was fitted for that times.

But the new Marxist framework was put forward step by step. Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu published *Curente și tendințe în filosofia românească* (*Currents and trends in Romanian philosophy*) an ideological analysis of some thinkers and their historical context. Anyway, Pătrășcanu thought, he said so, that he is the author of one interpretation among others. The dialogue and the plurality of ideas are still possible. From this point of view Pătrășcanu was vulnerable and he became himself a victim of communist party. The new power needs his own thinkers, ready to neutralize any ideological enemies and to punish them. We need only one ideological line, an official one, the others are just mistakes and must be cleaned. Some young intellectuals made this job. Of course, it was an opportunity for them to have a career, but nobody asks them to be ideological servants. For example, one of them published in 1946 the book *Introducere în etica nouă* (*Introduction to the new ethics*) which is a narrow Marxist approach of morality based on the ideological
The term obsessive decade for the ‘50 was used for the first time by Marin Preda in his novels before the ‘89. But how long was this decade? It began in 1948 and finished in 1960 or in 1964, the year when Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej denounced the friendship with the USSR. Because I think that this decade was first of all an ideological one, dominated by propaganda, I will mention some of its main ideological trends and I will try to find a place for philosophers in this history.

The social purification and popular democracy

On 19th of September 1944 the new power approved the Law no. 461 regarding the purification of public administration. This law was used in an abusive manner by the communist activists who took positions in administration. The effect was that of a snowball. The activists doubled or occupied themselves many lead positions in all institutions and many civil or public servants with a long career, good experience and skills were changed with uneducated people devoted to communist party and with healthy origins. Those who belonged to middle class or to bourgeoisie were declared incompatible with the so called humanistic aims of popular democracy and were canceled from their public positions.
On the 19th of January 1945 Scânteia published the new governmental programme of National Democratic Front, a political mixture in which the parties lost their identity and the communists had the power to control all the decisions. In fact, the affiliation to this new force or the membership to communist party became the criterion for a public career. The new bright aim is to build the popular democracy, a social order without the enemies of proletariat. “All is old is bad and must be destroyed” was the principle for the new social order. The system of values was restructured according with the new popular democratic aims and needs of communist activists. Really, it was a revolution, wasn’t it?

Were there enough human resources for such a mission? The party find easily the way. On 21st of March 1945 was founded the Working Class University of Communist Party which became lately “Ştefan Gheorghiu” Academy for Social and Political Education, subordinated directly to the Central Committee of Romanian Communist Party. Somebody could have a top responsibility anywhere in a hierarchy, in a school or in a factory, only if he or she graduated this high political school. For the lower positions in administration or other state institutions were founded evening schools subordinated also to the communist party. But who were the teachers? There was some good news for some intellectuals with large visions who became on time supporters of the new political order. In the same time, some activists became over night the ideologists.

The light comes from the sunrise

The model for all the changes was the USSR. When Mihail Sadoveanu wrote in 1944 that the light comes from sunrise he made a prophecy. For half a century Romania was almost one hundred per cent in the political influence area of USSR. In fact, the popular democracy was applied in Romania and other eastern countries starting from the soviet model.

The political changes were doubled by a cultural movement. On 11th of November 1944 was founded Asociaţia Română pentru Strângerea Legăturilor cu Uniunea Sovietică (The Romanian Association for Friendship with Soviet Union), and the leaders of the communist party, Gheorghe
Gheorghiu-Dej among them, become to mention very often in their official discourses the need to follow the Soviet Union as a model.

The light came from the East also in culture. The communist ideologists and propaganda selected from the Russian culture, one of the greatest cultures of mankind, only those literary and artistic works which express ideas and feelings in accord with the official political doctrine. The soviet propaganda was institutionalized year after year: *Editura Cartea Rusă* (*The Russian Book Publishing House*) was founded in 1946, but it published only the writers officially recognized, the so called working class literature; *Institutul de Studii Româno-Sovietic* (*The Romanian and Soviet Institute for Studies*) was founded in 1947, but all its work was only to translate into Romanian some propaganda materials about the soviet science and not to support the researchers; *Muzeul Româno-Rus* (*The Romanian-Russian Museum*) and *Institutul de limba rusă Maxim Gorki* (*The Institute Maxim Gorki for Russian Language*) were founded in 1948. The Russian language became compulsory in all educational levels, from the fourth class in elementary schools to the third year in universities, all the other foreign languages were eliminated. Finally, beginning with 1953, the name of Romania is written in accord with the rules of a Slavic orthography: instead of ‘România’ we wrote ‘Romînia’.

Above all, the communist leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej uttered in the year 1951, in a public conference, the key sentence (in the two meanings of the word ‘sentence’, as a proposition and as a verdict): our head light, our guide is the most advanced country, the Soviet Union. Last but not least, our national anthem was changed. The new one spoken about the brotherhood with soviet people, our liberator.

The cultural Stalinism and Romanian minds

One of the most powerful requirements of the new regime was to mould all the people according with the so called *the new man*, in other words, *homo sovieticus*. This is a person with a thought structured by the communist ideology principles, a person ready to accept and to support the decisions and actions against the old bourgeoisie regime, against private property, liberty and political pluralism.
At the interference between cultural and ideological levels a new large space was created for the cult and worship of Stalin and working class (the so called proletcultism). Because the working class was the leader, then the leader was the communist party and the supreme leader was Stalin, the greatest historical personality of all the centuries, the most important scientist and the first teacher for everybody. Stalin was everywhere, on the first page of all newspapers, in the songs of children, on all the walls. In fact, Stalin was like a father for our people. Wasn’t he?

The Soviet Union became our guide in science, education, literature, in all cultural activities. The scientific theories were evaluated on the basis of ideological criteria and the scientists were encouraged to follow soviet scientists in their claims about reality. The objectivity of science was suspended, and the accepted truth was that of the Soviet science.

In social sciences the wind of changes was, in fact, a hurricane. The history was interpreted from the new standpoint of view. The national history was rewritten. In the year 1947 was published Istoria Romîniei (The History of Romînia) by M. Roller, the official guide for historians and teachers. In the same year Leonte Răutu published “Against cosmopolitism and objectivism in social sciences”. He wrote about the application of Jdanovinism at national level, about the fight against those who try to hide the cosmopolitan rot in a discourse about national specific. All the links with Western countries were interrupted. On the other hand, the appeal to national values became dangerous in the communist part of the world, behind the iron curtain.

In June 1948 the Romanian Academy was suppressed and replaced with a new one, composed by different kinds of people, some of them, obedient persons, helped by the communist party to grow up in the academic hierarchy, most of them with doubtful merits. The old research institutes were cleaned and replaced with the new ones under the patronage of the new Academy of Popular Republic. A new law of education was adopted in the same summer. The entirely system of education was rearranged in a soviet style and many teachers were compelled to go out from the system.
A new way of life for the intellectuals

Probably the root changes produced by the new communist regime were more impressive for the intellectuals. Practically, the communist political regime was like a new world and they had to try to survive. We can speak now about compromises and treasons, but it’s difficult to make a single global judge for all situations. Their attitudes were different. Some of them were quickly retrieved by the communist party, for example, Mihail Sadoveanu, others only after a time of purification and reflection, for example, George Călinescu, Tudor Arghezi sau Tudor Vianu. The last was an interesting case at least for two reasons. He kept his academic attitude with dignity, but he paid a price because he was forced to pass from *Philosophy of values* and *Esthetics* to *Literature*. On the other hand, the Party decided his academic career starting from the need to have in our cultural life some intellectuals with a strong academic background. Later, after the furious years passed, Călinescu said ironically: “I am not near the party, I am in it”. D.D. Roșca was a lucky man, because he had a good friend, Mihail Ralea, and wrote in 1945 an article about Lenin. Others, very many, were placed by the party at the edge of academic life, for example, Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Simion Mehedinți, Dimitrie Gusti, Mircea Florian, Lucian Blaga. The doors of new Romanian Academy and of all Romanians universities were closed for them. And others were judged by a political justice and for political reasons spent many years in prison. This is the case for I. Petrovici and C.C. Giurescu. Forty four writers and philosophers had a new address: the cells of Aiud prison. Among them, Radu Gyr, Sandu Tudor, Petru Pandrea, Petre Țuțea, Vasile Voiculescu, Al. Marinescu, Nichifor Crainic. Unfortunately, some of them died in prison left in prison till the end of their lives: Gh. Brătianu, I. Lupaș, A. Golopența, M. Vulcănescu.

The most oppressive in daily life was censorship. In July 1946, were forbidden approximatively 2000 titles of books and magazines, then, beginning with the summer of 1948 more than 8000 titles were under interdiction. A big volume, entitled *Publicații interzise (Forbidden books and magazines)*, with more 500 pages contains all the titles. The works of two great Romanian historians, Nicolae Iorga and Vasile Pârvan, were strictly forbidden. Toggether with them, Mihail Kogălniceanu and
Dimitrie Cantemir. The last, especially for Hronicul vechimii româno-
moldo-vlahilor (The Chronicle of Romano-Moldavo-Wallachians ages). It is
easy to understand that the aim of the censorship was to delete from the
Romanian minds the idea of national history and identity. The writers
and poets forbidden were Vasile Alecsandri, Grigore Alexandrescu,
Costache Negruzzi, Petre Ispirescu, Panait Istrati, Liviu Rebreanu, George
Coşbuc and many others. This list is terrible shocking for somebody
who knows just a little from Romanian literature. For example, Ispirescu
wrote fairy tales for children. Harap Alb, one of his heroes, fighting with
Zmeul Zmeilor, the worst of all, was probably perceived by the
ideological censorship as a dangerous personage. Our national poet,
Mihai Eminescu, was mentioned with only one poem, ideologically
acceptable, Împărat şi proletar (Emperor and proletarian). Also, the literary
critique was on the list. The head of the list with bad men was Titu
Maiorescu, declared guilty for his cosmopolitan attitude. Paradoxically,
he was identified with one of the enemies of liberty and culture.

Between 1956 and 1959 after the Hungarian movement for liberty,
the ideological campaign was intensified. It was a new stage of cultural
dogmatism with many ideological excesses. The group formed around
the philosopher Constantin Noica was arrested and judged, as an
example given to other intellectuals who might have the same fate. The
communist party organized, in universities, especially in 1958, many
public meetings where many professors and students were forced to
show up their real bourgeoisie origins and options, then they were
judged, expelled or arrested. The Romanian citizens discovered that
every person had a dossier in the archives of Securitatea, the new
Intelligence Services, in fact, the political secret police of communist
party. Ironically speaking, many Romanians had a new passion, namely,
to inform the authorities about the others.

A short conclusion for a future research

In this study I have tried only to establish the historical framework and
to trace some lines for a future research. A detailed study needs a long
stage of documentation in libraries and archives and I think that this
effort can’t be the mission of a single man. We spoke last years, in political and intellectual circles, about the lawsuit or the trial of communism and some well intentioned persons thought that we are ready. I think, on the contrary, that we are just at the beginning, at least in philosophy. I don’t know if such of research is useful for the researchers themselves. It is possible to obtain unexpected effects. But if we have a memory, we need to know the past in order to have an identity. I know, many intellectuals still have the habit to work under a false identity, with a false knowledge and conscience, in other words, they are in the cells of the new ideologies.