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Utopia and Socialism in Romanian Historiography and Exegesis

ABSTRACT

The leading trend in Romanian historiography is the denunciation of the socialist utopia, as a predecessor of the 20th century totalitarian regimes. Any type of utopian thought has devastating effects because of the total engineering used in order to act upon the society. Utopian thought is set in a causal chain leading unavoidably to dictatorship via a violent revolution. I call this perspective *the judicial history of utopia*. A second paradigm of the historiography approach to utopia is the *explanatory* one, less present in the Romanian intellectual arena after 1989. This study aims to examine the articulations between utopia and socialism in an explanatory paradigm.

KEYWORDS

Romania; Socialism; Utopia; Historiography; Totalitarianism; Revolution; Judicial History.

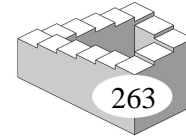
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Utopia and socialism in liberal theory and in history of the imaginary

Generally, utopia is defined in terms of a perfect or nearly perfect, nonviolent, human society, attainable in a future context. It postulates the man’s malleability through education; it is presented as a literary genre, as a philosophical or as an economic reflection; politically, it must ensure justice for all, a community of equals at a social and economic level, cooperative effort for a common goal, at least equity if not equality of income. At times, utopia is its reverse, i.e. dystopia, which implies the criticism of the society’s destruction by the “utopians”, despite the goals pursued. An important aspect: utopia entails the total transformation of society and not mere subgroup reforms¹. It is commonly accepted that, despite the fact that utopias are deemed impractical by our contemporaries, posterity saves certain utopian ideas and incorporates them, turning those radical ideas into such familiar items that are no longer considered utopian.

Karl Popper is the intellectual to have influenced most likely to the greatest extent the Romanian researchers of utopia. In *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, the causal chain – utopia – revolution – dictatorship is the reason why the utopian thought is

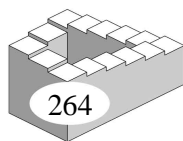


incriminated: "As opposed to that, the Utopian attempt to realize an ideal state, using a blueprint of society as a whole, is one which demands a strong centralized rule of a few, and which is therefore likely to lead to a dictatorship"². To the utopian radical engineering, a piecemeal, reformist, non-structural, particularizing engineering is opposed, whose adjustments and readjustments are predictable if it does not function within the envisaged parameters. The differences of opinions between the utopian engineers necessarily leads to violence "in place of reason"³.

For the overtly anti-utopian theorists, the purpose of utopia, as critical and visionary thinking or as literary genre, is its transposition, its application and not the formulation of potentially ground-breaking ideas; hence the criticism of utopian systems which become an extreme and rigid development, a monstrous rationalization of human actions, a fanatic enthusiasm towards the accomplishment of an impossible ideal society. The conception and description of a possible world turn automatically into its engineering. Discourse thus becomes *praxis*, there is no separation of the two: "What I criticize under the name 'utopian engineering' recommends the reconstruction of society as a whole, i.e. sweeping changes whose practical consequences are hard to calculate, due to our limited experiences. It claims to plan rationally for the whole of society, although we do not possess anything like the factual knowledge which would be necessary to make good such an ambitious claim. We cannot possess such knowledge since we have insufficient practical experience in this kind of planning, and knowledge of facts must be based upon first-hand experience. At present, the sociological knowledge necessary for large-scale engineering is simply non-existent"⁴. However, there is no explanation to why the creators of utopias, as literary genre or the theory

characterized by some researchers as "utopian", have not attempted themselves to transfer the projected world via a revolutionary political program. Utopia has a romantic, aestheticizing core; the world of harmony is typical of an artistic pursuit of perfection, specific to people; nonetheless, it is not suitable in the pragmatic and rational field of politics, Popper considers that "... aestheticism and radicalism must lead to jettison reason and to replace it by a desperate hope for political miracles"⁵. Broadly, the utopian blueprint and the historicist prophecy are identified with the arrogant certainty of a specific destiny and not with the hope for a more harmonious future society, as those supporting the utopian approach would assume.

While for Popper the project of a large-scale social reform is romantic and irrational at heart, contrasting with the piecemeal, evolving, reformist, liberal engineering, another researcher of the phenomenon, Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, approaches a seemingly differing position. With Wunenburger, utopia is described as a sample of castrating hyper-rationalism, "the tyranny of a morbid *Logos* after happiness" and it is placed blatantly and militantly opposed to the imaginary, which is the "spring of creation, of difference, of communication"⁶. Utopia is monomaniac, totalitarian, holding exclusive and limited meanings; it involves in a deterministic manner an unavoidable social progress; it is explained in pathological terms as "psychological pressure relief valves of daily existence". At a more intricate level, utopia is a philosophical discourse and political action validating "the axiom of the man's necessary and imminent perfectibility"⁷. On the other hand, the myth is complex and polyvalent as opposed to the Marxist utopian ideology which feeds itself on a "historic finalism leading to an ideal social order"⁸. Corin Braga introduces the study of



the historian of the imaginary along the lines of the research traced by Gaston Bachelard and Gilbert Durand, whereby utopia is construed as a crisis of the imaginary “because of an inflation of logical thinking, which ends in suffocating the intimate, unconscious vitality of the symbols”. Wunenburger puts utopia on *trial* because it has drained the human imaginary. The imaginary is infinitely able to feed on perfection and desire, but only on condition that the imaginary is projected as poetics of pleasure and not as politics of desire; politics being charged with distorting the tension between the real and the ideal⁹.

Utopia and socialism in Romanian historiography and exegesis

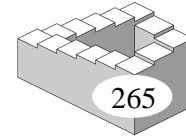
The connotation of utopia in Romanian culture is prevailingly negative. Cioran is one of the few authors of Romanian roots to partially acknowledge a merit of utopia, i.e. the denunciation of the havoc caused by property. The utopian phenomenon is described in long-acting terms, as “a combination of puerile rationalism and secularized Angelism”. Whereas wisdom recommends the given reality, man rejects it in favor of an imaginary happiness in a better future: “For we only act under the fascination of the impossible: in other words, the society incapable of generating and of devoting itself to a utopia is under the threat of sclerosis and ruin”¹⁰.

Lucian Boia in *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului* (*For a History of the Imaginary*) describes utopia in pathological terms similar to those of Wunenburger. The essay “Ordinea împotriva libertății: construcția utopică” (“The Order against Freedom: the Utopian Construction”) concisely explores the so-called progress of the genre and of the various experiments leading up to the

emergence of dystopia and signaling the decline of utopian thought. The historian’s sententious value judgments stress the dismal nature of the utopian approach: “In an open and unsteady world, people are looking for reassuring mechanisms. It is difficult to stand freedom; no wonder certainty and safety are preferred instead of it”¹¹. Utopians acted mainly along two castrating directions, in order to contain sexual intercourse and in favor of the abolition of private property, with the purpose of eliminating citizen’s autonomy: “The abolition of private property appears to be the most efficient manner of annihilating the individual’s autonomy and of subjecting him or her to the citadel”¹².

In the essay “Utopia intelectului și utopia filozofiei” (“The Utopia of the Intellect and the Utopia of Philosophy”), Gabriel Liiceanu argues that the main trait of traditional utopias (More, Campanella, Cabet etc.) is hypocrisy, since it contradicts its utopian essence by spreading out into reality. Utopia becomes “aggressive in the name of this ideal and finds a manner of materialization of the Utopian blueprint by a strategy of spatialising the future resulting in the dislocation and the evacuation of the present places”¹³. The step subsequent to the utopian speculation is the conception of techniques of moving toward this future foreseen in the utopias; such techniques become ideology and this ideology develops into a “utopia of history”, holding an obvious reference to the communist system of Bolshevik origins in Eastern Europe. In Liiceanu’s linear judgment, More anticipates Stalin, while a dream of humankind equality may foretell the Gulag. Thus, any conceptual or ideological attempt at overthrowing a given system is bound to becoming a utopia from the start.

With Bogdan Crețu, utopia, as historical *praxis*, leads “invariably to a dead end”¹⁴. In practice, utopia as theory turns

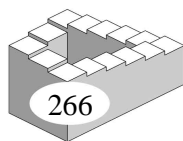


inevitably into dystopia, as implied by statements such as “Anti-utopia is utopia’s terminus” or “utopia has an unconcealed totalitarian nature”. According to Crețu, utopia was not ruined by the disappearance of the totalitarian states, rather, it diabolically wormed its way in nearly all the compartments of life. However, by counterbalancing the literary historian’s rhetoric effects, we may conclude, that this extremely insidious makeup renders particularly difficult the analysis of a quintessentially subversive phenomenon: “The utopian blueprint resembles, I’m afraid, Baudelaire’s devil: it is present precisely where we would least expect it to be. The question arises, are globalization, the project of Europe’s federalization, comfort, consumerism, multiculturalism, and political correctness not sources, disguised under the attire of democracy, of rigid Utopian thinking?”¹⁵. Hence, any doctrine opposing or collateral to a dominant thought system may be labeled as being utopian. However, as Crețu shows in a prevalently epithetic style, the subversiveness of utopia eludes liberalism, as stated by Crețu in a prevalently epithetic style, because it is the only value system able to elude utopian blueprints. Utopias conceal in fact the will to power, not the Nietzschean one, but rather one strictly pragmatic, vile, egotistic and egomaniac at the same time: “the values of liberalism reject however from their onset the idea of constraints in the benefit of the organization of good and its aggressive enforcement”¹⁶. The author’s contemporary references from the Romanian space are right wing intellectuals, either liberal or neo-conservative – Sorin Antohi, H.-R. Patapievici, Vladimir Tismăneanu or Cristian Bădiță, all thinkers who have “denounced” the purportedly evil effects of the utopian thinking.

In Corneliu Barborică’s *Utopia and Anti-utopia*, the discourse with speculative-utopian bonds, either literary writing or

social theory, is also mistaken for its application: “I have not outlined the artlessness of utopian writings only in order to take a wicked delight in showing how childish their authors were, but also because the ideas of an ideal social organization, inserted in life under the form of the Marxist-Leninist revolution, had catastrophic outcomes. Even utopian theories that rejected violence, such as the Fourierism or the Tolstoism, failed in practice”¹⁷. The language is sententious, moralist, the nuances and complexities of certain ideological systems are eluded. Thus, communism is described as a system that “had promised a society of equality and wealth, in which anyone who needed anything would reach out for something and simply take it”¹⁸. Also, the power polarizations and social hierarchies are described in a half fatalist, half cynical manner, as immutable attributes of human society: “Although proven unfortunate, the egalitarian notion cannot be condemned, since condemning dreams is futile, the more that they stay forever attainable, as the world stays forever in the hands of the powerful”¹⁹.

Unlike the majority of Romanian commentators of utopia, George Achim, in *Iluzia ipostaziată. Utopie și distopie în cultura română (The Hypostasized Illusion: Utopia and Dystopia in Romanian Culture)*, approaches the phenomenon in a more nuanced manner, holding a solid basis of references. For instance, the mere fact of showing that there are different visions on utopia, some explanatory, some incriminating (though he doesn’t present the rehabilitating ones thoroughly). As argued by him, those who appreciated utopia in the direction of a “principle of action” and granted it the status of dogma “cannot be relieved of social responsibility”, although, by exploring the variety of the genre, not all and not even the majority of the alternative social



experiments, drawn directly from writings labeled as utopian, attempted a violent translation of the imaginary community. Referring to social responsibility, Achim targets Marxist writings in particular. Achim considers that utopia should be approached from a supposed “non-ideological” and “non-dogmatic” perspective. Utopia is inherent to the human mind, bordering on the myth and the archetype and should be cleansed from the political subversive latency: “The interpretation of utopia as literature is, we believe, the only one absolving it from the misreading, which – unwittingly or not – it has known, particularly for the last century and a half”²⁰. George Achim considers Popper’s work to be the “most compelling trial” of utopianism that penetrated history, condemnable for the “abominable Pitești phenomenon”. The utopian catharsis, in order to be viable, must be worn out strictly within aesthetic limits, the political one excluded: “Therefore, the mythical pattern acts a lot more efficiently than ideology upon the modern communities”²¹.

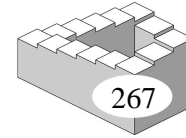
In general, far from exposing the variety of utopias, Romanian historiography and exegesis reduced utopia to an ancestor of Bolshevik totalitarianism, while, from the perspective of the history of the imaginary, it has been turned into a poorer relative of the archetype and the myth.

In what follows, I will briefly discuss two other Romanian authors and their humoral positions to utopias following their identification with the Stalinist socialist regime in Romania: Sorin Antohi to a greater extent and H.-R. Patapievici with one fragment, and then I will come to even more judicial perspectives on the association between utopia and socialism. Sorin Antohi draws an accurate causal chain, along Popper’s lines: utopia leads to revolution and revolution necessarily involves dictatorship. Therefore, the very complex processes that

engage the construction of a society that should transfigure the current order, usually a *status quo* perceived by some groups as imperfect and illegitimate, involve, according to Sorin Antohi, the immediate opening of a brutal action plan, which will essentially lead to an authoritarian state. In his essays written during the 1980s of the communist dictatorship, but published later, during the 1990s in the book *Civitas Imaginalis, istorie și mit în cultura românească (Civitas Imaginalis, History and Myth in Romanian Culture)*, it is not precisely established which of the few hundred utopian writings is discussed, since there is no distinct plurality of utopias, but only “utopia”, “revolution”, “history”, castrating generalizations. Antohi tames to such a great extent the values of capitalism and of liberal democracy as final forms of “reality” that he no longer questions his own ideological perspective, “unreality”, “ideology and “utopia” being typical for *the others*.

In a completely different approach, an explanatory, yet not a judicial one, researchers such as Krishan Kumar stressed the similarity between the descriptive and illustrative utopia and the prescriptive and abstract social theory: “All social theories, which can be easily established, operate in imaginary worlds governed by impossibly pure and ideal principles: states where sovereignty is actually operative, constitutions in which powers are actually divided, democracies in which the people actually rule. The fiction of social theory does not differ a lot from the fiction of utopia, in this respect”²².

The analysis of the utopian genre operated by Sorin Antohi is less cautious in terms of generalizations, although Hegel is blamed for the “epistemological sin of essentialization” when speculating about the “State” instead of various states, or “Revolution” instead of revolutions. The Romanian theorist assumes the same type of



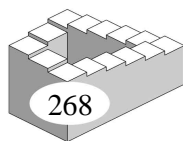
essentialising in an exalted – essayistic approach. Thus, the “revolutionary” is “this dogmatic, cruel and egotistic character, who assembles a bureaucratic governance”²³. The reader is supposed to understand what type of revolutionary he refers to: French or American, in the 18th century, Russian in 1905 or 1917, Eastern European in 1989, or probably from a different age: “Begun as *mythos*, the road to utopian image-ideas becomes revolutionary *ethos*. As shown before, the linking stage is to ideologize, to rewrite utopia in the terms of the relationship between means and purposes; ideology undertakes the double function of *expressing* the situation and the interests of a class, but only by *deforming* and *obscuring* the real relations between the classes (particularly the production relations, the main goal of the fight between classes – according to Marx); although it is a real factor of the social conflicts, ideology will operate thus via the *unreal* and the *illusory*”²⁴. We may ask whether all ideologies work by the utopian unreal and illusory or whether only Marxist ideology works in this manner. And, if it works in such manner, similar to the “phantasmal” nature of Marxist ideology, outlined by Vladimir Tismăneanu, why don’t the two historians opt for the instruments of literary criticism, more appropriate to a demonstration of the unreal and fictional character of the phenomena studied?

By stressing a state of utopian and revolutionary revelry, Antohi does not imply the acknowledgement of the anchoring in the reality of the two phenomena or the legitimacy of going beyond a certain social system. The ostentatious use of the singular by Sorin Antohi does not help the understanding of the coalescence of utopian, revolutionary or ideological phenomena. The categorical and, at times, affecting manner may be explained by the time of the writing of the book, i.e. toward the end of Ceaușescu’s regime, a period during which there

was a definite rupture between the type of egalitarian propagandist discourse and the pitiful social reality of the 1980s. For example, a simplistic dichotomy is created between the revolutionary’s mindset vs. real life, as if *real* people could actually live outside their mindset: “*Rêveur concret* (the revolutionary) or *rêveur constant* (the utopian), the intellectual fascinated with politics submits reality to an operation of abstract-rendering, of translation in the discourse of ideality and of the imaginary. Such a man cannot function within concrete limits, even when he acts: his designs are more important to him than people, than life.”²⁵

In the essay “Utopie și revoluție. Idei europene, experiențe românești” (“Utopia and Revolution. European Ideas, Romanian Experiences”), Antohi wonders rhetorically about the process by which we descend from the “azure of utopia” to the “carnage of revolution” and “where the mistake was made”. His answer is a paraphrase of Karl Popper’s writings: “Utopia *generates* violence”, since the final goals of political actions cannot be determined, whereas utopia claims to achieve a final, perfect and rational design of society. Moreover, the differences in opinion of those in disagreement with the utopian blueprint will have to be annihilated violently in order to allow for a revolutionary accomplishment of the utopian project.

As I have tried to indicate so far, the Romanian intellectual discourse after 1989 uses the word “utopia” only as a genre anticipating the totalitarian systems of the 20th century. At the same time, any attempt at a critique of the actual capitalist system, particularly of its neoliberal version, involving massive privatizations of public assets, stratified and unegalitarian societies, lack of access to decision making, problems specific to so called utopian thinking, are left to oblivion. In the article “Despre resentment



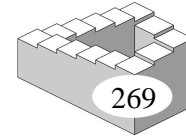
în nostalgia originilor”
 (“On Resentment in the

Nostalgia of Origins”) published in the most famous Romanian cultural periodical – *Dilema*, H.-R. Patapievici does not feel the need to explain why man’s self-consciousness in the civilization entails resentment, but the idea suggested by the article is that any criticism of capitalist civilization, which uses the “nostalgia” of “natural” harmony is in principle irrational, utopian, non-democratic and resentful: “It is enough to say that modern man’s anti-capitalist, anti-modern, anti-consumerist, collectivist, theocratic, ethnocentric mentality – i.e. the man who lives on capitalism, *by means of* consumption, in a society that has become, with great struggle, non-collectivist, laic and non-racial – is only in expression primitive, namely in the type of alternative suggested instead of the modern civilization. *For it is not primitivism that initiates the rejection of civilization, but merely the resentment which makes possible the primitive solution*”.²⁶ Vladimir Tismăneanu cites the article on his personal blog and equates the preindustrial nostalgia with a primitive utopia, that we might assume that these two public figures are focused against environmentalist and altermondialist movements because there is no clear reference about the utopians considered in the quotation above.

The denunciation of utopia as socialism in the Tismăneanu Report

Vladimir Tismăneanu discredits socialism by placing it on fictional, utopian bases, but he is often incoherent in his value judgments. For example, in the epilogue of *Mizeria utopiei. Criza ideologiei marxiste în Europa* (*The Misery of Utopia. The Crisis of the Marxist Ideology in Europe*), he announces a post-revolutionary type of politics that is “non-ideological” and “non-manipulative” and is a beneficial outcome of the December 1989 events, but in the immediately subsequent sentence he sighs over the politicians’ lack of interest in defining their *ideological* options. The theorist’s style is dichotomous, unbending, and strongly polemic. The issues disclosed in the post-revolutionary present are not *systemic*, as those of the communist regime; there are only adaptation issues of certain *individuals* to a new system (the reference to the charismatic personalities emerging from an ideological nowhere of the “transition”): “The end of Leninism coincided with the rediscovery of the values of freedom, of civism, of the responsibility and of the dignity in a project of renewing the civil society, along with the experimentation of a non-Machiavellian type of politics, frequently labeled “anti-political”. From several points of view, the 1989 revolutions reiterated the initial project of the Enlightenment by denying any form of mental or institutional absolutism and by approaching the individual non-ideologically and non-manipulatively. However, has political pluralism been achieved? Instead of authentic parties, we can see charismatic or pseudo-charismatic faces migrating from one group to another, showing little interest in defining the ideological options”.²⁷

Sociologist Max Weber suggested in his work that we cannot “totally” render



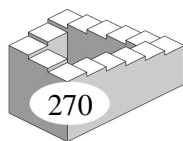
reality, by means of general laws that explain the course of history, but that we need interpretive methodological blueprints similar to *ideal-types*. Weber associated ideal-types to utopias. Ideal-types are made from the “accentuation” of one or several points of view, on the one hand, and from the synthesis of more “discrete”, “diffuse”, “more or less present”, but concrete and individual phenomena, on the other. These two aspects of the ideal-types are unified in an “analytical construct”. The mental construct, purely conceptual and empirically untraceable in reality, he states: “is a utopia”²⁸. Tismăneanu does not present the methodology or perspective in which he based his research in *The Final Report*, as in other writings, which renders the impression that the values according to which he operates are absolute and indisputable. The internalization of capitalism and of liberal democracy as the sole possible realities represents a theme explored by other critical researchers, too, in connection with the vindictive historiography present in the Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Dictatorship in Romania, the likes of, e.g. Andrei State in “Iluzia anticomunismului” (“The Illusion of Anti-Communism”): “Even if typical to communism was the “destruction of market economy” and the “systematic attack against private property” (p. 15), i.e. against the social capitalist relations, we cannot find anywhere any explanation to how this would imply the fact that a communist regime is actually an “obsessive pursuit of the construction of an impossible utopia” (p. 10). Only by the naturalization of capitalism could we immediately infer that the suppression of private property (on the production means) – is a dream and a utopia, which will necessarily lead to a ruin similar to real communism”²⁹.

Utopia is perceived by the “realist” intellectuals as an irresponsible fiction, generating intolerant or totalitarian attitudes

when its translation in practice is attempted, as if the goal of utopian discourse were its application. Agreeing with Sorin Antohi who considered that “all utopias are dystopias”, Tismăneanu states in the preface of an anthology of essays written for Free Europe Radio during the 1980s: “No utopia was proven more brutal and more perverse than the Bolshevik experiment of renovation of the human condition and instauration of a long-dreamt society without classes. I am calling it perverse, because this mythology abused the naïveté and altruism of millions of individuals”³⁰.

In *Mizeria utopiei*, Tismăneanu writes that the ideological distinction between the left and the right is “pointless” in the new liberal democracies, while the 1989 Revolutions have a “post-ideological and anti-utopian” scent. In a Manichean approach, the movements that denounce “liberal democracy” are labeled non-democratic extremes (from nationalism to fundamentalism). Thus, it is shown that critiques of the new capitalist system in post-1989 Romania, described as liberal democracy, which accentuated an extreme social stratification and the private appropriation of the public resources and assets, can only be non-democratic, or utopian, consonant with the assumption that a Marxist ideological position is identical to intolerance of thought: ‘Marxism was the greatest phantasm of our century’. This is how Leszek Kolakowski described the mythical ambivalence of historical materialism, its inherently utopian nature and its aspiration for a new foundation of reality”³¹.

One of the dangers of underestimating the various utopias and of constantly equating utopia with Stalinist socialism implanted in Eastern Europe is given by the marginalization of egalitarian or libertarian goals, by the diminution of the pursuit for social harmony, as they are rendered in different

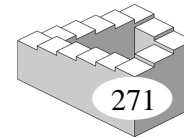


writings of the utopian genre or even in the social theories that involve intrinsically utopian dimensions (considering here Weber's approach of the ideal-types). One of the functions not at all approached by Vladimir Tismăneanu's, Sorin Antohi's, H.-R. Patapievici's and other discourses is their visionary dimension, as underlined by many exegetes of the genre (for instance, Lamartine with his famous saying: "Les Utopies ne sont souvent que des vérités prématurées"). If we agree with Walter Benjamin in *Illuminations* who considers that any image of the past, not recognized by the present as one of its preoccupations, is in danger of disappearing irremediably, the effect of the diminution of the importance of utopian projections and of the ideological criticism of capitalism leads to an unconditional acquiescence of the political and social status quo. One of the defining traits of utopia since its constitution as literary genre, but also after its penetration in the area of social theories, is the illustration and the construction of a more harmonious and cooperative society by the common use of resources. Such "utopian" mechanisms are constantly left to the risible by a neoliberal and neo-conservative discourse, highly present in the Romanian intellectual sphere during the last two decades. Thus, the common use of resources is equated in the Romanian space with the inefficient management and abusive appropriation of „public" property during communism and attacked for its alleged lack of feasibility. Therefore, such "utopian" concerns are no longer acknowledged as present apprehension, while opposed resource management is obviously favored, namely competitive corporatist and private ownership.

Vladimir Tismăneanu and other researchers who took part in drafting the study of *The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Dictatorship in Romania. Final*

Report, which focused on "condemning" the communist regime, fails in undertaking an interpretive plan, an epistemological basis for the implementation of such a declarative penalty of communism. Claude Levi-Strauss gives the example of a researcher who writes a history of the French Revolution and who knows or should know that the written history would look different for a Jacobin and different for a nobleman. In the French anthropologist's opinion, there is no pure history, but only "history-for", a history that is "biased" even when it claims not to be, since the selection of facts is made from a certain perspective, the perspective as such being incomplete and partial. Impartiality might be possible only after a prolonged and strenuous collection of different parts. In the case of Commission, the perspective is not clearly described, the analysis being, at times, "objective" and "empirical" and, at yet other times, bearing moralizing overtones, disguised in a language of metaphorical demonization of the past regime. Levi-Strauss, similar to other theorists during the 20th century, after the change of the positivist absolutizing paradigms, shows that there is no possibility of rendering a total history by means of general laws, but only the possibility of interpreting certain historical sequences with the help of *codes*. The *Codes* are not presented in the *Final Report* simply because the plurality of codes and interpretations does not allow a final, univocal, judicial analysis of the past³².

Another example of the authoritarian and emphatic manner of the historical discourse of Vladimir Tismăneanu is one of the measures proposed in the conclusions of the Final Report, chapter Education, "in order to remember, in order to condemn, in order not to repeat it". Thus, the following is required: "The presentation of the truth concerning the pre-communist, communist and post-communist period in school textbooks and higher education history courses". The



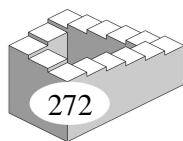
claim is made as if the schools were to teach lies or half-truths about communism, but the hallucinatory aspect of the demand is that “describing the truth”, a single truth, is an uneven requirement when compared with the plural approaches of history and with the undertaking of methodological and conceptual perspectives and, therefore, of a historical bias. What does the truth of the “post-communist” period encapsulate that applies to both the “Jacobin” and for the “noble”, as long as Tismăneanu does not assume a single perspective, let’s say, the “noble’s”,^{33?}

However, even for a judicial and less explanatory historiography, which does not evince an epistemological basis and clear interpretive methods, the scientifically embarrassing nature of the report is worth noting. Validating certain political forces of the present comes at the expense of invalidating others. For instance, the most emblematic personality of the Socialist Democrat Party, Ion Iliescu, gets six mentions in the conclusions of the report that denounces and condemns communism. However, his role during the communist regime was a lot less important than, for instance, the role played by Alexandru Drăghici, minister of Internal Affairs during the 1950s and chief of the Securitate (Romanian Security), supporter of extremely repressive measures on the population, mentioned only twice in the conclusions of the report. The same Alexandru Drăghici is previously described in *Arheologia terorii (Archeology of Terror)* written by Vladimir Tismăneanu as “criminal and executioner, a man guilty of the most abominable abuses of Stalinism in Romania” (Pitești Experiment, for example), whereas Ion Iliescu is not “praised” in the same manner, but however is present three times more in the conclusions of the Final Report.

Explanatory paradigms of utopia

Contrary to the dominant direction in Romanian historiography, I will describe three other perspectives that nuance and diversify the potential of utopia as literary genre or as social theory and its alleged effects. The four utopias identified by Karl Mannheim in his reference work *Ideology and Utopia* are Chiliasm, the Liberal-Humanitarian idea, the Conservative idea and the Socialist-Communist idea. According to him, utopias are dialectically connected to ideologies, meaning that the imperfection of the existing order results in utopias that penetrate the social system in order to reach the next social order. *Grosso modo*, the Chiliastic utopia is temporary and ecstatic-religious, the liberal one is normative, in a gradual and evolving program, wellness expected to arrive at some time, but at an undetermined moment. Conservative utopia, a counter-utopia at heart, accentuates the social and historical determination of human behavior and agrees with an existing social background, to the disadvantage of uncontrolled changes. Finally, the Socialist-Communist utopia projects its anticipations again in the future, similar to the liberal one, the essential difference residing in the fact that the socialist utopia identifies the formation of a more harmonious society only by the disintegration of the capitalist regime.

In this paradigm, utopias are ideas holding a transcendent essence and a potentially transforming effect on the social and historical order. The essence of the mentality of a social group is easier to understand when an attempt is made to identify its concept of time in relation with the aspirations, goals and wishes of the group under analysis. According to these aspirations, it is not only future events that are set in order, but also past ones. The sociologist writes



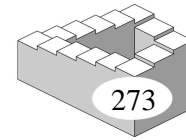
that the interpretation of history is impossible in the absence of hope and goals, on mere empirically established fundamentals. We are able to formulate value judgments on the current and past situations only on necessities that should lead us further. Nevertheless, the challengers of an ideology or of an opposing utopia, holders and supporters of the “truth” of a certain order will try, Mannheim states, to discredit the opposing ideas by blaming them for “ideologization”, lack of anchoring in reality and for utopian, fictional projection. Utopia, as transcendent blueprint of the society, is necessary, according to Karl Mannheim, because it is naïve to believe that we can live “realistically”, without projections, in “absolute congruence” with the realities of the surrounding world³⁴. Mannheim considers that it would be a more honest approach for researchers if the ideological analysis contemplated not only the opponent’s points of view, but all points of view, including the questioning of the proper perspective and of the epistemological basis of the researcher. The ensuing knowledge would thus not be *relative*, but *relational* by the assumption of the existence of spheres of thinking in which it is impossible to conceive the existence of an absolute truth outside the values and position of the subject operating the questioning, and in absence of the relation to a particular social context.

Furthermore, from a similar non-judicial perspective of relation to the history, Krishan Kumar briefly presents utopias in *Utopianism* and shows their creative and projective function. Following Weber’s line of thinking, the researchers stress the connection between the idealizations effected in various social theories and utopias, hinging on the fact that they share “the desire and the design, the harmony and the hope”: “One of the most important innovations in the theory of the 18th and 19th centuries was

precisely the promotion of certain concepts to the utopian rank. It is not only in the utopian theory, but also in the popular language that «democracy», «freedom», «reason», «science» and other similar terms could become more than components of the utopian societies, but actual utopias”³⁵.

Kumar asserts that utopian projection must not be mistaken for its practice. However, even if the majority of the transplanted “utopian” communities disappeared quickly, the small societies claiming explicitly utopian writings communicated values that superseded the radical *eutopian* experimentation with respect to education, sexuality, work, non-stratified social relations etc. Such issues are obvious in the political and ideological currents related to utopias: feminism, social egalitarianism, environmentalism, labor unionism, urbanism, sexual emancipation etc. Moreover, Kumar states, “the utopian social theories” relating to the subsequent communist society are not condemnable since they enter a broader frame of human aspiration toward perfection. Thus, a difference is made between Marxian social theory and the various possibilities of implementing Marxist ideas, which is often obscured in Romanian historiography, where a direct lineage is drawn between the utopian socialist designs (diversified, in their turn, from centralized to decentralized versions) and the Bolshevik regimes in Eastern Europe: “A society of material wealth, a society that eliminated alienation and exploitation, a society in which all men and women would get attached to one another and to nature just as the artist gets attached to it work: such a conception is utopian at its very core (and there is nothing wrong with this)”³⁶.

Zygmunt Bauman defines utopia as an image of a better future world, a future perceived as desirable. Utopia is radically critical of the current system of affairs: “in fact, a system of ideas remains utopian and

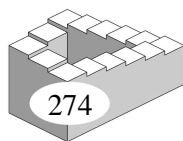


thus able to boost human activity only in so far as it is perceived as representing a system essentially different from, if not antithetical to, the existing one”³⁷. Furthermore, it involves a measure of hazard and a system attainable only in the conditions of collective action. Whereas the conservative, realist perspective places the future in the sphere of the probable, building around pre-established, conditional patterns, the utopian one places the future in undetermined sphere of the possible, of the ideals and of self-emancipation. Bauman considers that an essential trait of humanity is the possibility to transcend the existing order, while seeking a better world, which should generate less suffering and injustice. If the possible is also included as rule of rationality, and not only the (factual, calculable, numerable) probable, utopia is not a measure of irrationalism, “but a measure of the vitality and creative vigor of the epoch”³⁸. Bolshevism is labeled as the utopia of Industrialism, of capitalism without capitalists, of the bourgeoisie replaced by bureaucracy, of work slavery and not liberation from it. From his point of view, the Soviet caricature of socialism diminished human problems to “economic efficiency”³⁹, the society’s capacity of progress was managed according to “bourgeois”, economic standards: the number of factories built, labor discipline and puritan morality. According to Bauman, an error of the Marxist project was that it had tried to censor, to eliminate other utopian prospects: anarchist, of utopian socialism, proto-environmentalist and other potentially emancipative, but “unrealistic” at the outset.

The dominant culture marginalizes the utopian prospect as a “foolish” and pitiful fantasy; it draws a clear border between reality and truth vs. insanity & irresponsibility. “Utopias born of one reality are many and often at variance with each other”, states Bauman. They are different in the

terms of audacity, distance of the horizons drawn, while new utopias replace former ones without waiting for materialization. While Bauman acknowledges the utopian roots of the Soviet experiment, he also admits their diversity and lack of the necessity of a catastrophic, violent and negative transposition. One trait of the utopian thinking is to find peace in a remote, barely visible horizon, an immemorial human trait; this is why Bauman ends *Socialism: The Active Utopia* with a letter of Saint Paul saying to the Romans that hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he already sees?

As a final point, the greatest problem with the invalidation of the function of utopia by a large part of the Romanian intellectuals resides in the fact that it is impossible to imagine any larger comprehensive horizon, any social project meant to exceed the imperfections of the existing capitalist order, an order characterized, among other things, by strong social inequality because of the private appropriation of resources. From the perspective of Karl Mannheim’s model, Romanian society is quartered in an ideology of the *status quo*, holding utopian premises of social stability with (neo)conservative and (neo)liberal roots, disguised however as “pure reality”. Moreover, the capitalist economic regime and the political system to validate it are acknowledged as the only possible reality since “the representatives of a given order will label as utopian all conceptions of existence which from their point of view can in principle never be realized”⁴⁰. Thus, along the same judicial line of denunciation of the communist regime, we may propose the rehabilitation of utopian thought and of its specific trends of illustration and projection of a more harmonious society, from which more people should benefit. However, by going beyond the judicial logic of the relation between historiography and the past, one



may simply describe the processes and impulses of past and present utopian thinking. Alternatively, one can explain the complex mechanisms underlying another mental *topos* both at a literary level and as social theory. The result may be an emancipative one.

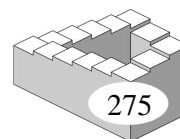
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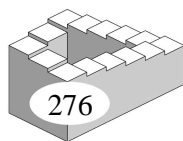
Notes

¹ James M. Morris, Andrea L. Kross, *The A to Z of Utopianism*, Scarecrow Press, Plymouth, 2009, p. XXIII – XXIV.

² Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, , Routledge, London, 2011, vol. 1, *The Spell of Plato*, p. 149.



- ³ *Ibidem*, p. 148.
- ⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 151.
- ⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 157.
- ⁶ Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *Utopia sau cri-za imaginarului (Utopia or the Crisis of the Imaginary)*, Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 5.
- ⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 19.
- ⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 137.
- ⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 276.
- ¹⁰ Emil Cioran, *History and Utopia*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2002, p. 97.
- ¹¹ Lucian Boia, *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului (For a History of the Imaginary)*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p. 144.
- ¹² *Ibidem*, p. 145.
- ¹³ Gabriel Liiceanu, *Cearta cu filozofia (The Quarrel with Philosophy)*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p. 111.
- ¹⁴ Bogdan Crețu, *Utopia negativă în literatura română (Negative Utopia in Romanian Literature)*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 2008, p. 21.
- ¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 30.
- ¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 22.
- ¹⁷ Corneliu Barborică, *Utopie și Antiutopie (Utopia and Anti-utopia)*, Editura Universității București, 1998, p. 149
- ¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 11.
- ¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 9.
- ²⁰ George Achim, *Iluzia ipostaziată. Utopie și distopie în cultura română (Hypostasized Illusion. Utopia and Dystopia in Romanian Culture)*, Limes Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 71.
- ²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 68.
- ²² Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism*, Editura Du Style, Bucharest, 1998, p. 6.
- ²³ Sorin Antohi, *Civitas Imaginalis, istorie și mit în cultura românească (Civitas Imaginalis, History and Myth in Romanian Culture)*, Editura Litera, Bucharest, 1994, p. 74.
- ²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 77.
- ²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 67-68.
- ²⁶ <http://tismaneanu.wordpress.com/2009/08/29/h-r-patapievici-despre-resentiment-si-utopia-primitivista/>
- ²⁷ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Mizeria utopiei. Criza ideologiei marxiste în Europa Răsăriteană (The Misery of Utopia. The Crisis of the Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe)*, Polirom, Iași, 1997, p. 155.
- ²⁸ Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences, cap. Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy*, trans. and ed. E. Shils and H. Finch, Free Press, New York, 1949, p. 89-103, in Robert M. Burns & Hugh Rayment-Pickard (ed.), *Philosophies of History. From Enlightenment to Postmodernity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, p. 211.
- ²⁹ Andrei State, "Comunismul la raport. Istorie și ideologie" ("Communism Reported. History and Ideology") in *Iluzia anticomunismului: lecturi critice ale Raportului Tismăneanu (The Illusion of Anti-Communism: Critical Readings of the Tismaneanu Report)*, edited by Vasile Ernu, Costi Rogozanu Ciprian Șiulea, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, Editura Cartier, Chișinău, 2008, p. 217-218.
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- ³² Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Weidenfield & Nicholson, Londra, 1966, pp. 256-262, in Robert M. Burns & Hugh Rayment-Pickard (ed.), *Philosophies of History. From Enlightenment to Postmodernity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, p. 285-288.
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³⁴ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, Harvest Books, New York, p. 256-257.

³⁵ Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism*, Du Style Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p. 71.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 96.

³⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Socialism: The Active Utopia*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1976, p. 17.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 100.

⁴⁰ Karl Mannheim, *op. cit.*, p. 197.