Intellectuals and Romanian Communism

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This paper tries to illuminate one’s of the most important parts of the contemporary Romanian society conditions of possibility[[1]](#footnote-2) of identity, i.e. the intellectuals. The difference forms the identity and, that is why, in order to understand the contemporary condition of the Romanian intellectual, one has to illuminate the oppositions suffered by the intellectual in the communist society, when, within the society without classes, the working class was imposed as the dominant class and the intelligentsia was labeled as bourgeois. The fall of the communism brought the illusion of retrocession to the intellectuals of the roles held in the pre-communist monarchic society, but this, like the illusion of a flourishing economy without any sacrifices within the working class or the privatization by conserving the working places, caused many victims[[2]](#footnote-3).

Wheter in 1990 the intellectuals were facing the society willing to serve the democratic reforms, twenty five years after the condition of the intellectual into one of a spectator or a commentator. In my opinion the current suspicion towards the intellectuals must be linked with the differences created by the communists between the intellectual bourgeoisie and the working class.

In the following pages we will expose, by using examples of intellectuals, the social condition of the intellectual within all the three regimes that marked the Romanian modern state, i.e. the monarchy, the socialist republic and the democratic republic. In order to have a sharp contrast, we will begin with the condition of the intellectual within the Romanian monarchy and within the after 1989 democratic state, afterwards exposing the condition of the intellectual within the Romanian communist regime, all this in order to conclude on the conditions of possibility of the contemporary Romanian intellectual.

**1. Titu Maiorescu and the birth of the Romanian intellectuality**

**1.1. Titu Maiorescu and Junimea**

For the researchers of the Romanian intellectual life, like prof. Marta Petreu[[3]](#footnote-4), Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917) is the creator of the continuous Romanian cultural life, all the great intellectual generations until the installation of the communist regime being influenced by his thought and all of them being defined by an original reporting to his philosophy.

Maiorescu studied at Wien and Paris, he was a lawyer, philosopher and politician and he influenced the Romanian culture by being the leader of the Junimea Society and of the Convorbiri Literare Review.

The cultural society Junimea acomplished the sistematization of the Romanian culture by gathering the most important writers and thinkers of that time and by creating a development program, that was proposing for the Romanian culture an organic development, firstly developing the indigenuous intellectual background and afterwards the forms to contain it.

The Junimism imposes himself by Maiorescu’s academic activity and by his political actions. Hence, Maiorescu established scholarships for the Romanians that were studying overbroad; he promoted the translations and an organic synchronization with Europe. By his activities, Maiorescu broke the intellectual link with the orient and oriented the Romanian culture to the occident and, by integrating in the Romanian universities the Romanians with studies overbroad, he formed a culture which empathizes with the intellectual problems of the West and which survives only by the constant import of western literature.

**1.2. The `27 Generation**

If the members of Junimea were to construct a Romanian culture, the goal of the young interwar generation was to raise the Romanian culture at a universal level. The `27 Generation was thus called after the year of apparition of the manifesto that outlined its objectives, published by Mircea Eliade in a series of articles[[4]](#footnote-5). The generation is characterized by nationalism, anti-Occidentalism, Christian orthodoxism, antijunimism, promoting the irrational and the own experience.

The young intellectuals gather within the Criterion Association, which had the merit of being the first moment of collaboration between the arts and the letters within the Romanian culture, at the Criterion conferences being talked various subjects, from the arts to that time’s politics. At the start the generation affirms as apolitical, at the conferences speaking even communists or fascists and between the many subjects being discussed even about Lenin or Hitler, but in the 1930’s the young intellectuals divided to all the three major political views of that time. Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu or Bellu Zilber chose communism, Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica, Emil Cioran or Mircea Vulcănescu chose the Romanian fascism but by promoting a moderate way of nationalism and Eugen Ionesco or Bucur Țincu remained democrats.

Although they promote a form of Romanian culture raised at the universal level, the young intellectuals relation with the occident, or with the orient in the case of Eliade, are very important for theirs formation. All seek to study or even work overbroad, Eliade in India, Portugal, at London or Paris; Cioran studied in Germany, where he admired Hitler but he rejected him after discovering France; Noica studied in Germany where he met Heidegger and the French democratic model became normative for Eugen Ionesco. All since they were students had the opportunity to read papers in the original language and to be aware of any editorial release in occident, the Romanian bookshops importing large quantities of foreign book.

Many of these intellectuals found in occident a shelter in front of the communist danger, Eliade, Cioran or Ionesco and all the younger intellectuals which join them, like Monica Lovinescu, had a chance to escape. For others, like the philosopher Mihai Șora the exile wasn’t a solution and he returned to face the communism with those remaining in the country.

**2. 1989 and after**

This paragraph contains the second premise of this paper, an examination of the intellectuality’s situation after the fall of communism, in order to prove by describing the condition of the intellectual within communism, that the opposition toward the intellectuals and their positioning to the society as spectators have their conditions of possibility in the communist repression and exploitation of the intellectuals.

**2.1.** **1989**

Viewing the Romanian Revolution’s film, the only revolution of 1989 that was live broadcasted, we can see that a large number of intellectuals were present in the National Television’s studious, where a group was formed, which formulated a proclamation in order to clarify the regime shift that was happening. But also in Bucharest are formed many other such groups, the most important and powerful being the one ruled by Ion Iliescu, which group, containing in its majority members of the communist party, took over the power, Iliescu becoming Romania’s president. At the Romanian Television is remarked the actor Ion Caramitru, who announces Mircea Dinescu’s presence, a poet that until the days of the Revolution was house arrested for his dissidence toward Ceaușescu’s regime.

At December 31st the GDS is formed, composed by intellectuals like Gabriel Liiceanu, Mihai Șora or Andrei Pippidi, which was the first legal constituted civil society organization after the fall of the communist regime, in 1990 the Revista 22 appears, being edited by the same group. In the final days of 1989 the power was took over by FSN[[5]](#footnote-6), formed by former party members, but also by some intellectuals, like Ana Blandiana or Doina Cornea, all of them resigning in 1990. Also, FSN formed a temporarily government, prime-minister became Petre Roman and between the ministers were invited intellectuals. Hence, the philosopher Mihai Șora became the minister of Education and the writer Andrei Pleșu became the minister of Culture.

Therefore we can observe, that with the Romanian Revolution the intellectuals reclaimed their role in the society, claims that were respected, being treated by the difference between the oppressed by communism and the communists, many of them being viewed as heroes of the anti-communist fight.

**2.2. Mineriada of 1990**

On 22nd of April 1990 in Bucharest started the largest anti-communist protest after the revolution of December 1989, when the protesters occupied for 53 days the University’s square as a reaction at FSN’s policy and the governance of the same communist politicians by using the same oppressive methods. The students constituted the large majority of the protesters, but they were joined by a great number of politicians like the philosopher Petru Creția or the poet Florin Iaru. The protesters were demanding a pro-western policy, multiparty, the respecting of the historical parties and of the intellectuals that weren’t part of the former communist party and were wishing to imply in politics, and the removal from the leadership of the former party members. On 20th of May 1990, Ion Iliescu, a former close collaborator of Ceaușescu, became president. The protests continue until the 15th of June and the University’s square was named free zone of neo-communism. In order to reestablish the order, Iliescu called the miners from Valea Jiului, which violently scattered the protest and also destroyed the headquarters of the Architecture Institute and of the University of Bucharest. This was the last bloody repression of the intellectuals and students and its essence can be observed in the words of the miners, *We work and don not think!*

**2.3. After 1989**

In the years of transition from communism to liberal democracy the situation of the intellectual was a difficult one. If in the first days of the revolution the intellectuals were on the high positions, the new democratic administration forms have no space for the intellectuals. In the 90s the corruption raises and with the economy’s decentralization appeared the local influence spheres. Hence, the administration is made depending on the financial power of the supporters from the territory. [[6]](#footnote-7) In 2004 when the democrat candidate Traian Băsescu had real chances to win the presidential elections, he was sustained by many intellectuals, like Andrei Pleșu, Gabriel Liiceanu, Mircea Cărtărescu or Mircea Dinescu. Therefore the intellectual became a political propaganda instrument. The same thing happened in 2014, when the difference between the intellectual or the individual having high studies and the uneducated was high exploited by many parties, including those that took the final confrontation. Despite all this, the intellectual remains a spectator of society and of the Romanian political scene, this being observed in the low number of intellectuals within the Romanian Parliament, compared with the high number of peers from the business area. Much more, the intellectuals were affected by the shifts of power, as happened in 2012, when Victor Ponta became Romania’s prime-minister and H.R Patapievici, the president of the Romanian Cultural Institute was dismissed and the intellectuals supported by the RCI were demonized by the media close to the prime-minister’s party.

Therefore, since the fall of communism the Romanian society maintained an opposition towards the intellectual’s implication in the public matters and a dichotomy between the intellectual, the working man or even the uneducated.

**3. The condition of the intellectual as a dissenter within the Romanian communist system**

This paragraph will research the attitude changes towards the intellectual since the installation of the Romanian communism, by viewing them as conditions of possibility of the post-socialist Romanian intellectual’s condition.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault, in his book *The birth of Biopolitics,[[7]](#footnote-8)* at the pages where he presents the foundation of the capitalism over the utilitarianist concept of individual freedom, emphasizes that, because of his foundations, capitalism is in a crisis, that is a gap in society between the workers and the capital holders, between high class and the low class, neither of them being able to exceed their condition. I consider that, despite the imposition of the working class as the dominant class after the installation of communism in 1947’s Romania and the naming of the society as without classes, the Romanian communism kept his marginalized mostly for economical purposes, the most important being as a working force on their gigantesque building grounds. Therefore a new social class was formed by absorbing members from every other social class- former political enemies, priests and mostly possible dissenters.

The possible dissenter is the unintegrated in the new pollitical order, not one who expresses loudly his unintegration, but one who’s angst may press him to exclaim his resentfulness. All these possible dissenters were found between the peasants, the priests, the workers or the intellectuals. They all had the chance to work for the system, some accepted, others were manipulated and forced to do it, and in a great part were imprisoned by false reasons or even murdered.

Even though the Romanian communism marginalized the intellectuals as a bourgeois class, they still needed the efforts of the intellectuals, mostly for the ideological validation of the Romanian way of communism but also as a free physical working force. In many cases the intellectual’s anticommunist resistance sent them to terrible communist prisons where a great part of them lost their lives.

In the next paragraphs we will expose two exploiting methods of the intellectuals in the communist times, i.e. the intellectual exploitation and the physical exploitation.

**3.1. The intellectual exploitation.**

Since its installation, the Romanian communism tried to find an ideological legitimation and this effort intensified during the dictatorship of Ceaușescu, when the dislodgement from Moscow’s influence and the apparent market liberalization made necessary a legitimation for the indigenous form of communism.

Intellectually exploited weren’t only the bourgeois intellectuals, but even the party members like Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. He was one of Romanian Communist Party’s founding members, an intellectual formed in the inter-war times and collaborator with the group from Criterion. Pătrășcanu published books and articles by which he was integrating in that times cultural trend of trying to raise the Romanian culture at universal levels, only that he was using Marxist criteria of interpretation. With the turning of the arms against Germany and Romania’s entering into the Russian sphere of influence, Pătrășcanu became minister of justice. Because of his bourgeois origins and of his inter-war, after he was exploited as a speaker and a writer for the communist cause, Pătrășcanu was prosecuted as people’s enemy, condemned to death and executed. With Ceaușescu’s policy of dislodgement of USSR the image of Pătrășcanu was reabilitated.

The communists had to pay more effort when the intellectual wasn’t a Marxist, like in the case of Constantin Noica, one of Romania’s most important philosophers.

After the instauration of the communist regime, the institution for censorship formulated lists of forbidden books and authors, among them being the Romanian intellectuals that took refuge in the western world. In his naivety Noica, owner of such books, borrowed these books to fellow friends and even kept a list of the borrowers. This naivety cost him dearly, because he was condemned to hard prison along with those in his list. The communists wished for Noica to be a propaganda instrument and an example of conversion to communism, so they allowed him to read Karl Marx, and Noica read Marx for months, until the manipulation partially reached its purpose: Noica declared that he has to be a trainer of Marxism. I say partially, because after his release Noica never fulfilled his promise, but he became a free spirit and a trainer of philosophy for a great part of the post-socialist cultural elite.

In 1971 Nicolae Ceaușescu makes his first official visit in North Correa, where he is impressed by Kim Ir Sen’s communist way. Hence, 1971 marks the start of Romania’s transformation into a communist copy of North Korea.

Beside the North Korean policy and architecture, Ceaușescu copied the cult of personality. Thereby, orders a Romanian philosophy of history, which will have its fulfillment in his dictatorship. As in imperial Rome, at the official history were working obedient intellectuals like David Prodan and Ștefan Pascu, who were rewriting history school manuals and treatises. To mark this official history, the communists even organized an event, when Ceaușescu received a sceptre, as a symbol of his descendence from the old rulers of the Romanian lands.

**3.2. The physical exploitation**

After World War Two Romania is ruled by following the stalinist model of communism, which was promoting the progress by hard industrialization. Despite Romania’s enormous debt after the war and the famine in the country, the Stalinist model had to be followed. In 1945 Stalin recommends Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej to fulfill a project rejected by the former monarchic regime as unrealizable- the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Channel which would shorten the distance to the Constanta harbor by 400 km. Because the country was not having the necessary resources to build the channel, the working force was found at the margins of society, between the common law prisoners, political prisoners, students, soldiers and especially intellectuals. This was an act of social purge which would leave behind him what they named a great accomplishment of socialism. Along the channel were placed labor camps, where the workers were living in inhuman circumstances, they were improper fed and if they weren’t fulfilling their directions of work of 3 mc dug they were beaten. The number of those who died working at the channel is unknown.

Thereby, for the communists the intellectuals were possible dissenters, because their freedom of conscience could push them to scream their dissatisfaction. The Romanian communism worked as an extremely intelligent machine, its information systems preventing any exit from the communist dogma. That’s why the intellectuals, as possible dissenters, were controlled by labeling them as nationalist bourgeois, even they were having Marxist views like Pătrășcanu, or by exploiting them in the ideological machine. In the extreme cases they were controlled by sending them to death by hard working on the communist gigantesque working sites. All these practices implanted in the Romanian common sense an opposition between the intellectuals and the working class, and, even though the regime that was oppressing both classes was destroyed with the help of the intellectuals, the opposition survived in the society, mostly with the help of the still holding power communists, or in our days with the rhetoric gun against the efforts of intellectuals willing to imply in the administration or politics.

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1. M. Foucault introduces this concept in the book *The Order of Things,* in relation with the concept of *episteme.* Episteme refers to the orderly ‘unconscious’ structure underlaying the production of scientific knowledge in a particular time and place. It is the ‘epistemological field’ which forms the conditions of possibility for knowledge in a given time and place. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. See Verdery, Katherine, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?,* Princeton University Press, 1996 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See Petreu, Marta, *De la Junimea la Noica: Studii de cultură românească,* Polirom, Iași, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Eliade, Mircea, *Itinerariu Spiritual,Scrieri de Tinerețe 1927,* Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest, 2003 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. *The Front of National Salvation* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See Verdery, *What was…*, chapter *A Transition from Socialism to Feudalism? Thoughts on the Postsocialist State.,* pp. 204-238 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Foucault, Michel, *The Birth of Biopolitics, Lectures at the College de France,* Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. See the second and third lecture. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)