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**VIOREL ANĂSTĂSOAIE, CSILLA KŐNCZEI,  
ENIKŐ MAGYARI-VINCZE, OVIDIU PECICAN  
(editors)**

**BREAKING THE WALL**

**REPRESENTING ANTHROPOLOGY AND  
ANTHROPOLOGICAL REPRESENTATIONS IN  
POST-COMMUNIST EASTERN EUROPE**



Cluj-Napoca, 2003

THE TYRANT, THE TERRORISTS AND  
"DISRUPTIVE ELEMENTS": ALIENS  
IN THE ROMANIAN REVOLUTION OF DECEMBER 1989

László FOSZTÓ

*"In comparison with the velvet revolution of the Czechs our revolution was a bloody velvet revolution. (...) It was a characteristically Romanian revolution, during which, as we realized later, we made fools of ourselves again. That is the way these people are."*

*Mircea Dinescu*

**Introduction**

In this paper I will try to analyze some aspects of the social imagery that surrounded the events of December 1989 in Romania. The problem area is much debated especially the issue of whether a revolution indeed happened in Romania, or was it a coup, a popular uprising etc. The debate is an important element of the Romanian and international public and scientific discourses, though most questions are unanswered even today, after ten years. Although I consider these questions important, in my paper I would not like to enter this debate. I will rather focus on the ways the events were perceived and interpreted in the period immediately following their occurrence.<sup>1</sup> I argue for an approach that focuses on the reception of the events instead of investigating the way they happened in reality. The basic hypothesis I propose here is that the way in which the actors were identified and the events interpreted in the midst of revolution defined the terms they were described later. So the way of perception and interpretation of the events in that short period became decisive for the consequent longer period.

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<sup>1</sup> The tenth anniversary of the events is opened up a large problem area that worth examination on its own right, in this paper I will be not able to cover this topic.

The Romanian Revolution as an event became the obstacle of the Romanian Revolution as a process. The basic mechanism that made this possible is a semantic process by which the main actors of the events ('the terrorists', 'the tyrant' and sometimes even the revolutionaries) were transformed into "aliens" and the events were surrounded by rumors and myths. This semantic transformation is not particular to the revolution, it was often used in the previous era, but its occurrence during, and immediately following the events made it a dominant strategy for another long period.

#### Previous research

There is a growing literature, both commemorative accounts and academic approaches, concerning the Romanian Revolution. Most of this literature is engaged in the revisionist debate around the perception of the revolution. Although some of them give a good assessment of the early understanding of the events (Milin 1990, 1997, Ratesh 1991) and can be used as comparative material facing the later developments, few of them mention the process of how the initial assessment of the revolution was overwhelmed by theories of conspiracy and rumors. Richard Andrew Hall addresses explicitly the emergence of this situation and observes the striking similarity across the post-Ceaușescu political spectrum: both the direct beneficiaries of the changes, the emerging opposition, and even the victims endorsed some variant of the 'staged war' or 'stolen revolution' theory.<sup>2</sup> Hall traces the roots of these narratives in the disinformation campaign started by the Secret Service (securitate), which tried to diminish or deny its responsibility in the bloodshed. Dennis Deletant makes a rather similar argument, the myth making is orchestrated by political actors interested in confusing the terms of the events, (Deletant 1994) and he also emphasizes the Securitate's responsibility in the bloodshed.

Beyond the identification of the potential actors I consider it worthwhile researching the circumstances under which a potential disinformation campaign could be so successful. The question of the dissemination of information and representation of the Revolution in the mass media attracted less attention, although this element played a crucial role in the perceptions from the very beginning. The loss of confidence in the mass media became a favorable environment for the further spread of the rumors and conspiracy theories, moreover these appeared in the shape of 'true' information uncovering the staged and manipulated nature of the events. I will try to avoid the myth of 'the stolen revolution' or blaming somebody by abusing the events. Moreover I would like to demonstrate how

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<sup>2</sup> Hall, Richard Andrew 1999, *The Uses of Absurdity: The Staged War Theory and the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, East European Politics and Societies*, Volume 13, No.3. Fall 1999, p 503.

the survival of a xenophobic discourse at the popular level contributed to the conservation of a semantic strategy, making social change so difficult. I would not be able in this paper to cover all the elements of this rhetoric, therefore I chose only one, but a rather central case: the transformations of the perception of Nicolae Ceaușescu and of his wife. This analysis gives opportunity to gain insight into the function of the xenophobic way of speaking on a level that is very close to the everyday speech.

The case study of the post-mortem fate of the Ceaușescu couple in the popular perception in the early period of 1990 is an example of this process that ironically fulfilled itself through the representation of one of the major proponents of it in the previous period. Ceaușescu often called for *closing the ranks* around him ("Să strângem rândurile!") not only against the internal enemies, but also against their external allies. These external forces were often labeled as irredentists and fascists whose intention was to undermine the independence, integrity and sovereignty of the state. This rhetoric had its appealing force even in an increasingly atomized society, where few other things would have been successful. This paranoid rhetoric survived Ceaușescu, and became a dominant strategy of the first freely elected government in dealing with the opposition. Its appealing force should not be underestimated. The popular anti-foreigner sentiments often could be (and were) instigated by the help of this discourse. As if an ironic reply to his official xenophobia after his fall, Ceaușescu himself was expelled from the regular members of the nation with the very same argument, this time coming from "above".

I think a cultural anthropological approach to this period can shed some light on the function of this popular tread of the imagery. Even if I strongly disagree with the political use of such devices, the existence and effectiveness of them demands explanation. The sources I am able to use are of three categories: there are many materials of printed press from the period in the archives<sup>3</sup>. A second category of sources is the instant interpretations of the revolution coming from Romanian and foreign scholars.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, but to a significant degree I can rely on my own memories of the Revolution<sup>5</sup>. There is a vast and ever increasing body of secondary literature on the revolution that has remained mostly unexplored, as I have decided in favor of a more empirical discussion here.

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<sup>3</sup> Here I would like to mention Dan Ionescu and Vladimir Socor who gathered much of the material on this period of Romania.

<sup>4</sup> I am referring here on reports written by Vladimir Socor, Dan Ionescu, Michael Shafir and Vladimir Tismăneanu.

<sup>5</sup> I was 17 in 1989, and I spent the period in my native town Saint George (Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsiszetgyörgy).

### Aliens in the myths of the revolution

The *myths of anti-Ceaușescu conspiracy* (involving members of the party, officers of the army, the *securitate* and the KGB or other foreign agencies, in various combinations) are always the obscure background of the narratives about how the masses were persuaded/manipulated in order to overthrow the dictator. Another category of myth is "*the stolen revolution*", that admits a real popular uprising happened, but this was immediately appropriated by a clique that later became the new center of power. The latter is typically a myth proposed by the opposition that questions the legitimacy of the new government, while the former variant leaves more room for a legitimate claim to power.

If we consider the first category of myths, those of the conspiracy, they can be distinguished between conspiracy scenarios involving only internal actors, and those that claim that the events happened under external influence. This scenario was first suggested by Ceaușescu himself. A survey carried out in December 1992 shows that three years after, a significant proportion of the Romanian population (23%) adheres to this position in addition to the variants that an *internal conspiracy* (31%) or a *real revolution* (46%) happened.<sup>6</sup> Among these three the *external conspiracy* theory would be the most openly xenophobic option, but the internal conspiracy theory is not immune to it either.

Conspiracy itself as a political enterprise implies exclusion. The success of it depends on if it is organized in total secret, and the public excluded and the proper persons persuaded to participate. Therefore, the intentions of the conspirators may be shown as benevolent as it is possible their success is often looked on as something dubious. Not to speak about a case like the Romanian revolution when competitive myths immediately appeared in order to prove what it was that led to the fall of the dictator, therefore qualifying their members as legitimate successors. I would say this would not be possible if Ceaușescu was overthrown by successful internal conspiracy. Therefore the competitive conspiracy narratives are mainly a means to claim legitimacy for successors. But they are counterproductive, or even more they could have delegitimizing effects, especially if they are associated with the old-new apparatchiks or *securitate* officials, for example Virgil Măgureanu alias Asztalos Imre.<sup>7</sup> The "alien mercenaries"<sup>8</sup> and foreign

<sup>6</sup> Câmpeanu, Pavel, 1993, *De patru ori în fața urnelor*. Editura ALL, București, p. 181.

<sup>7</sup> See Măgureanu's biography in Deletant, Denis, 1998, *The Post-Communist Services in Romania*, in Hayenes, Rebeca (ed.) *Occasional papers in Romanian Studies No. 2.*, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London. p. 179.

<sup>8</sup> *Transcript of the Closed Trial of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu*, Military base Târgoviște - December 25th 1989, <http://www.timisoara.com/timisoara/rev/trialsript.html>. Also available in Romanian, <http://timisoara.com/timisoara/rev/proces.txt>. Though the differences between the original and translation are inadmissible.

terrorists (especially Arabs<sup>9</sup>) form an even more dubious company. Allegedly, they were brought to Romania and trained as sharpshooters and urban fighters in secret camps and then they formed the bodyguard unit for Ceaușescu. During the revolution they were involved in the killing of civilians, women and children.

On the eve of the protests at Timișoara, Ceaușescu labeled the demonstrators as hooligans and fascists, instigated from abroad, and ordered bloody repression. Following the spread of the uprising all over the country the slogan often used by the participants was: We are the people! ("*Noi sîntem poporul!*"). It seemed like the Revolution merged the nation into a united social body. The radical rejection of exclusionist rhetoric was the fresh breeze of December 1989.<sup>10</sup> But *fraternity* did not remain among the symbols of the revolution. *Equality* was compromised by the previous regime, after communism it was impossible to mobilize with the notion they used and abused so much. *Liberty* remained the only functional symbol from the famous triumvirate. The freedom as opposed to dictatorship was indeed a valid principle, but it was conceived largely as a liberation process, as a destruction of tyranny, that does not imply any kind of social structure afterwards.<sup>11</sup> Therefore the identification of the main actors and the projects according to which they should behave, followed a rather spontaneous and contradictory, even conflicting pattern. The question of who is a revolutionary, often could be answered by separating them from the disruptive elements, trouble makers like "Gypsies and hooligans" for example, who simply abuse the disorder for selfish or vandal intentions. Therefore, even the 'true revolution' scenario allows some room for aliens.

Paradoxically those opponents of the first "free government" of Romania who claimed continuity with the Revolution of December were not able to maintain a clear identity of who they really were. This could happen not only because the new government labeled them as destabilizers and hooligans incited from abroad, but also because they perceived the aftermath of the revolutionary events as a *masquerade*. On the one hand, the new power

<sup>9</sup> Denis Deletant (1994: 491) cites Silviu Brucan's statements, that some 30 Palestinian students were trained in *securitate* centers. These 'Arab students and officers' assisted the terrorists. One of them was killed, some others wounded, but the corpse disappeared from the morgue, and the wounded also left the country on a Libyan plane.

<sup>10</sup> I can recall from my personal memories how impressed our family was when on Christmas Evening the Romanian Television broadcasted Hungarian songs. The greetings were written on the screens also in Romanian, German, Hungarian and even Romani languages.

<sup>11</sup> Pavel Câmpeanu reaches to similar conclusions analyzing the relationship between the three principles in the case of Romania. Câmpeanu, Pavel (1996) *The Symbolic Discourse of the Romanian Revolution*, in Forsgren, T. (ed.) *Cultural Crossroads in Europe*, Forskningsradnamnebdn, Stockholm.

used the deaths of the revolution to legitimize itself; on the other hand, the demonstrators against the Iliescu government could not claim total continuity with the victims, because they died without knowing whom they were really fighting against. Total identification with them wouldn't have meant nonviolent innocence alone, but a kind of naiveté or simple mindedness that the demonstrators on the University Square could not accept. Therefore they could not lay claim, as students and intellectuals in opposition, to being *the people* when they obviously were not. They claimed instead that they were in the first line of the revolutionary fights, and they maintained their anti-Communist stand.<sup>12</sup> Their marginality was balanced with the physical occupation of the space. But this heroic though skeptical attitude could not protect them from the retaliation of the Iliescu government.<sup>13</sup>

The relationship between the historical processes and their popular stereotypes and myths is not simply that the stereotypes mirror in a deformed way the historical facts, but events often happen as they are seen through the distorting mirror of the stereotypes and prejudices. The possible aliens listed here are all both the products and protagonists of the early history of the events. In the following section I will take a look at a caricature as it was shown in the early press of the Romanian Revolution.

#### A Tartar-Gypsy

One of the most visible changes in the first weeks after the revolution was the restructuring of the public sphere. In urban settlements, this mainly meant the change in the habits of usage of the public spaces, squares and streets. People spent more time outside and discussed with neighbors, acquaintances and even unknown passers by. These discussions were partly about interpreting already known facts, but this was also a way of obtaining new information. The free television in the early period was an important source of knowledge, but than gradually became suspected of bias on the part of the new power. The printed press experienced an unprecedented explosion, by mid-April 1990 in Bucharest alone, over 900 titles of newspapers and magazines were published.<sup>14</sup> People queued for

<sup>12</sup> see, Beck, Sam (1990) *Opposition and Dissent: The Romanian Opposition's Symbolic use of space in June 1990*, Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies No. 90.9, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

<sup>13</sup> "I never could have anticipated the outburst of reactionary populism – indeed, a Stalinist-fascist orgy – I saw in Bucharest between June 13 and June 15." (p.16) noted Vladimir Tismăneanu, who visited Romania in that period. Tismăneanu, Vladimir, 1990, *Homage to Golan* (The Romanian opposition gets bashed), *The New Republic*, July 30 & August 6. p.16-18, HU-OSA, 300/506/49.

<sup>14</sup> Călinescu, Matei and Tismăneanu, Vladimir, 1992, *The 1989 Revolution and Romania's Future in Nelson, N. Daniel (ed.) Romania after Tyranny*, Westview Press. p. 36.

newspapers like they used to do for bread before. The curiosity and the hunger for information was very acute, it could have been satisfied only with new and new uncovering, sensations and interpretations about the past.

This abundance of information produced waves of rumors and misinformation, but another effect of the increasing number of printed material was a convergence of the written texts with everyday speech. Professional journalists were few, and trained in formalized writing; they had also to learn the style of the "free press". Means of control of the validity of the information approached the verbal pattern, news worth trusting was reinforced from more sources, and the importance of the "local knowledge" increased.

In this atmosphere, extraordinary information was published in two consecutive issues of the newspaper *Viața Capitalei* (The Life of the Capital City) under the generic 'From the past and present of the big criminals of humanity':

Ceașescu has not but a drop of Romanian blood in his veins, because both his father Andruta (a typical Gypsy name) and his mother Alexanrina were of Tartar-Gypsy origins. The great grandparents and the grandparents of his mother's side spoke better Tartan and Gypsy than Romanian language.<sup>15</sup>

The text was an interview that, as the commentary specified, would have been made in 1988, but remained unpublished. It was circulated between various social circles in typewritten format until somebody brought it to the redaction. The interviewee is "an old intellectual from Scornicești", Ceașescu's native village, a certain A. B. Cornea, a kind of wise man of the village. The interviewer's identity remained covered, for "easily understandable reasons".

The alleged interview is a collection of beliefs regarding Ceașescu, and his criminal activities during his life. Mr. Cornea, using his authority as a person from Scornicești makes statements about the dictator as if Ceașescu would have lived his whole life under the gaze of the village. The account about the Ceașescu family is an oral history of the immigration of his ancestors from distant and strange lands.

After the revolution of Tudor Vladimirescu under the crest of the hill near Scornicești, between 1821-1830, some hordes of Tartars took refuge after they were disarmed and expelled by the Romanians. Over the Tartars the authorities deported some bands of nomadic Gypsies who mixed with

<sup>15</sup> "Ceașescu nu are nici un pic de sânge românesc în vine, fiindcă atât taică-său Andruța (un nume tipic țigănesc), cât și maică sa Alexandrina, erau de origine tătar-zalatară. Străbunicii și bunicii dinspre mamă vorbeau mai bine tătărește și țigănește decât limba română.", "Din trecutul și prezentul marilor criminali ai omenirii" *Viața Capitalei*, no. 3, 03 ianuarie 1990, p.2, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51.

the Tartars. They spoke a strange dialect of a Tartaro-Gypsy language. Romanians had very little to do with this horde lost and isolated from the rest of the country.<sup>16</sup>

But the chronicler does not stop at telling the story of the sinister history of the family. He enters into deep explanation of the psychology of the dictator based on his "Asiatic" heritage. The explanation is a mixture of racial, linguistic and "occupational" determinism. According to this explanation the face of Ceaușescu displays traits of the "Asiatic race", that can be observed if we look at the early photos without retouch. He could not speak proper Romanian, but more generally, his ability to speak any of the languages is denied to emphasize his true barbaric nature.

His family name comes from the Tartar/Turkish noun "ceaus" or "ceavus" that would mean 'servant' or sometimes 'sergeant' that can explain his moral character. His grandfather was called Ceaus-oglu, 'son of servant'. They were Christianized by the end of the last century but they kept their superstitious mentality. Mr. Cornea in the final stages of the interview, uncovers the source of the Ceaușescus' power. The authors of many murderous acts and the "decay of the nation" are represented as true blood sucking vampires. Following this folktale, designed to be taken as reality, the question could be asked who is more superstitious?

Several times in a year both of them make transfusion, with blood that was gathered from extremely healthy young people, kept carefully in a special way. They are convinced that this is the sure remedy in order to keep "youth without age, and life without death..."<sup>17</sup>

Elena Ceaușescu, who was thought by many to be worse than her husband, gains little attention. In this interview, she is simply enrolled among the Gypsies: "She also originates from behind a cover of tent..."<sup>18</sup> Her 'scholarly merits' and academic titles are ordinary lies that are given no attention.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> "După revoluția lui Tudor Vladimirescu sub o coastă de deal, dincolo de Scornicești, între anii 1821-1830 s-au adăpostit niște hoarde de tătari dezarmate și alungate de români. Peste tătari au fost deportați de autorități câteva cete de țigani nomazi care s-au amestecat cu tătarii, vorbind un dialect ciudat de limbă tătaro-țigănească. Românii au avut foarte puțin de-a face cu această hoardă răătăcită și izolată de restul țării. "Din trecutul și prezentul marilor criminali ai omenirii" *Viața Capitalei*, no. 3, 03 ianuarie 1990, p.2, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51.

<sup>17</sup> De câteva ori pe an, își fac transfuzii cu sânge recoltat de la tineri foarte sănătoși, îngrijiți și supravegheați într-un mod special fiind convinși că aceasta este remediu sigur pentru a-și păstra "tinerețe fără bătrânețe și viață fără de moarte..." "Din trecutul și prezentul marilor criminali ai omenirii", *Viața Capitalei*, no. 4, 01 februarie 1990, p.2, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51.

<sup>18</sup> "Și ea provine tot din coviltir de sațră...", "Din trecutul și prezentul marilor criminali ai omenirii", *Viața Capitalei*, no. 4, 01 februarie 1990, p.2, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51.

<sup>19</sup> Even in the judge Gică Popa who condemned the couple to death penalty deluded Elena as an academician illiterate. see, the Romanian Transcript of the trial.

In another newspaper 'A shocking discovery' (A version of the origins of the Tyrant) appeared, that pushed even further the possibilities of the diversification of the ethnic origins of Nicolae Ceaușescu. The author also refers to an interview he made in 1983 in Scornicești, a prototype settlement for systematization at that time. The interviewee is another person from the village, Mr. T. He has a distinct theory about the origins and a clear explanation for the character of the dictator.

"Andruta's parents originated from Caliacra according to some. But according to others they are from the North of Albania – they came here as minor ottoman-mercenaries, administrators of estate, after the revolt of Tudor. Because of their cruelty as bailiffs, they were in conflict everywhere. Therefore they couldn't live too long in one place, so they moved on. So they arrived in Scornicești!... The great grandfather of Ceaușescu wasn't of Christian faith." (emphasis in the original)<sup>20</sup>

The professional deformity of the Ceaușescu<sup>21</sup> family, being administrator of estate and bailiff at the same time can explain the cruelty of these people. This cruelty is also a functional explanation for their nomadic habits, that forced them to migrate unlike the rest of the population (the Romanians), which was staying put trying to live its quite peasant life, but suffering because of the foreign oppression.

The Muslim religion that would be the heritage of this family is also an organic element of their character. The author admits that it is not so sure that they were Albanians but that Andruta, Nicolae's father, was a "turcit" (Turkishized) spirit and mentality. The *turcit* is, as the author explains, a special person who left his Christian faith taking another or leaving all faiths, and living outside all laws. He has the "soul of a foreigner", that is compatible with the servile and cunning character of the Ceaușescus. In this article we can see a similar denial of all kinds of religious affiliation by Nicolae, as he was denied the capacity to speak in the previous. On the other hand his close relationship with the Muslim world is understood as a deep spiritual kinship. In this frame the cordial meetings with some Arab and African political leaders is viewed as uncontested proofs.

<sup>20</sup> "Părinții lui Andruță erau originari după unii din Caliacra, după alții însă, din nordul Albaniei – și au venit aici după revolta lui Tudor, ca mărunți administratori mercenari-otomani de moșie. Intrând în conflict pentru asprimea lor armăuțească nu puteau să stea prea mult într-un ținut și, atunci se mutau în altul. Așa au ajuns și până în Scornicești!... Străbunicul lui Ceaușescu nu era de rit creștin.", "O dezvăluire șocantă (O variantă a originii tiranului)", *NU - Revistă Independentă*, 4/1990, p.6, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51.

<sup>21</sup> The journalist is writing without capitals the name of the tyrant, emphasizing his contempt to him. But this way of speaking and writing about the death dictator can be included to a larger mechanism, that made all references to him being euphemistic or metaphorical: odiosul (the hated person), raposatul (the dead person), impuscatul (the shot person)...

In the next issue of the same newspaper (*Viața Capitalei*) a letter is published. Genan Bolat, a Muslim Tartar "among those 50.000 who live in Romania", wrote the letter. It is addressed to the redaction but contains a direct message to Mr. Cornea also. Mr. Bolat decided to write the letter after discussions with his fellow-ethnics, in order to face the claim that Ceaușescu could have been a Tartar. His letter resonates with offended sentiments and indignation:

I was astonished and then indignant reading some lines in that interview. Astonished: Ceaușescu could have been Tartar, and not simply a Tartar, but a product of the more horrible combination that can happen in this area -- namely a crossbreed of Tartar and thinker Gypsy. I was indignant: Ceaușescu was a monster that could be born only from such a combination.<sup>22</sup>

Mr. Bolat accepts his stigma as a Tartar and he is horrified what a monster could be born from a "crossbreed" of Tartar and Gypsy. The myth of the monstrous birth is maintained, just its location is disputed. Bolat unconsciously deepens the logic of the rhetoric, going to its source, the fragmentation of the public life to small exclusive circles. He turns the argument from the ethnic towards the local exclusion. The local community as a unit seems to be the locus of explanation for the "ethnicization" of the dictator. However, the problem remains still, the unhappiness of a village to have borne the tyrant, not just the national question that he could have committed such deeds.

There is certainly nothing happy for somebody to be from the same village as a tyrant of Ceaușescu's proportion. I can understand the sentiments of him [Mr. Cornea], who is from Scornicești. But from these sentiments the way is very long, till he finds 'qualities' that can belong only to a Tartar-Gypsy. (...) But until then Mr. Cornea please take Ceaușescu under your parish. It is nobody's fault that such a monster was born on that land. Throwing him in our garden you can solve nothing. We, the Tartars, are stigmatized already enough by history.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> "Am avut un sentiment de perplexitate, apoi de indignare, parcurgând rândurile inserate în acel interviu. De perplexitate: Ceaușescu ar fi fost tătar, și nu un tătar oarecare, ci unul produs din cea mai cumplită combinație ce putea exista pe aceste meleaguri -- și anume un amestec dintre tătari și țigani zălătari. De indignare: Ceaușescu a fost un monstru pe care îl putea naște numai o astfel de combinație", "Primim la redacție o scisoare din parte d-lui Genan Bolat, din care spicuim". *Viața Capitalei*, no. 5, 08 februarie 1990, p.4, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51.

<sup>23</sup> "Desigur, nu este o fericire pentru nimeni să fie consătean al unui tiran de talia lui Ceaușescu. Înțeleg sentimentele scorniceșteanului. Dar de aici până la a găsi "calități" care nu puteau aparține decât unui tătar-zălătar este un drum lung. (...) Dar până atunci vă rugăm domnule Cornea luați-l pe Ceaușescu în parohia dumneavoastră. Nu este vina nimănui că pe acele meleaguri s-a născut un asemenea monstru; aruncând în grădina noastră a tătarilor și așa stigmatizați de istorie, nu rezolvați nimic", "Primim la redacție o

The linguistic "evidence" provided by Mr. Cornea, in order to prove Ceaușescu's Tartar origins, is partly refuted by Mr. Bolat. He rejects the interpretation of the noun "ceaus" as meaning 'servant', it means indeed 'sergeant' but not 'bad person' as Mr. Cornea sustains. Finally, on behalf of his community Mr. Bolat concludes firmly: "Our conviction is: Ceaușescu was not a Tartar!"<sup>24</sup>

The case of his Gypsy origins is somehow different. After a month the focus moves from Ceaușescu to the Gypsies. The semantic contamination that initially aimed at the disqualification of the tyrant turns to the opposite direction, blaming the collectivity that is supposed to give birth to the tyrant. In a letter from the public published in the offensive heading "Who is afraid of the Gypsies?" in the newspaper entitled *Libertatea* (March 8, 1990) Roma are made responsible by the writer among other crimes for having an elite for whom a person like Ceaușescu would not be alien:

Maybe it is not merely chance, as I found out from the newspapers as well, even he, Ceaușescu, wasn't alien to this band. Maybe he belonged to that 'elite' the author is talking about, an elite that could bring the future 'salvation'.<sup>25</sup>

This group is a threat to the majority society that can be, and was indeed faced only by another totalitarian regime, and its leader, Ion Antonescu. This way Fascism faces Communism on the ground of the 'Gypsy question' too.

The only person who intuitively felt this social danger was General Antonescu. He took radical measures, but from then the course of political and historical events lead them (the Gypsies) to strike roots better into this soil.<sup>26</sup>

This processes that led Gypsies to settle in Romania were encouraged by Communists who intended to degenerate more and more the society of this country. Now after the fall of Communism the positions occupied by Roma need to be taken back too, in order to base the new society.

scisoare din partea d-lui Genan Bolat, din care spicuim" *Viața Capitalei*, no. 5, 08 Februarie 1990, p.4, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51.

<sup>24</sup> "Convingerea noastră: Ceaușescu nu a fost tătar!", "Primim la redacție o scisoare din partea d-lui Genan Bolat, din care spicuim". *Viața Capitalei*, no. 5, 08 februarie 1990, p.4, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51.

<sup>25</sup> "Poate nu întâmplător aflând tot din ziare că nici el, Ceaușescu, nu era străin de această tagmă. Poate cine știe el făcând parte din "elita" de care vorbește autorul, le-ar fi adus într-un viitor 'izbăvirea'", O controversă: "Cui i-e frică de țigani?" *Libertatea*, 8 Martie 1990. p.3, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51.

<sup>26</sup> "Singurul care a intuit acest pericol social a fost generalul Antonescu, care a luat măsuri radicale, însă cursul evenimentelor politice, istorice au făcut ca aceștia să se înrădăcineze mai bine pe aceste meleaguri.", O controversă: "Cui i-e frică de țigani?" *Libertatea*, 8 Martie 1990. p.3, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51.

### Exorcism with exotization

The phenomenon labeled 'exorcism with exotization' by Nicolae Gheorghe, a sociologist with Roma origins is "the 'Gypsyfication' of the Ceaușescu". This "promises a comfortable and enjoyable social therapy. We can look after our business, the city follows its rules, the nomads left!"<sup>27</sup>

I think this strategy can be considered as a broader one. This logic of exclusion is at hand in many conflict situations, and the argument is almost ready when the tensions rise. The case of the Ceaușescu in the Romanian Revolution can be seen as a coincidence. Neither an unexpected and inexplicable coincidence, nor an unavoidable one. To resist coincidences like this is the first step to seek real solutions to the problems, not letting them slip into the ready-made pattern of avoidance.

The right to remain in the city seems easily withdrawn if one breaks the rule "who isn't with us..." No, do not alienate Ceaușescu! Let's recognize that he was and he remains "ours", let's admit that we were his accomplices and the public life of the city was not made in the "black market" only. To win, the match must be played among us, not even with... Albania!<sup>28</sup>

Gheorghe rightly observes the opportunity in the semantic of this process, explaining the 'Gypsy-like world' with the very fact that the 'first Gypsy' prepared it for us in secret, and illegal practices comparable with the black market suspected to be run by Gypsies. However, as market needs clientele, everybody was in many respects 'beneficiary' and contributor of this world.

The destiny of the alien-making strategy and Nicolae Ceaușescu now are separated, today nobody is interested in whether he was an alien indeed or not. He rather became for large parts of the population a kind of positive leader seen through the experiences of the post-Communist years.<sup>29</sup> Aliens on the other hand, can still be identified in various places and social settings in not very favorable contexts. The list of events that can be

attributed to alien instigation, conspiracy, and cooperation is not closed and the idea investigated here continues to be an agent of the politics.<sup>30</sup>

### "Wake up, Romanian!"

As a conclusion I would like to return to the question proposed at the beginning: how was it possible that the initial perception of the Romanian Revolution was so quickly and successfully overwhelmed by revisionist interpretations denying the revolutionary nature of it. Beyond the evidence that suggests that particular actors (or perpetrators) of the events had their interest in blurring the perceptions by disseminating confusing information, the problem of their success still remains to be explained. At this point the implications of some theoretical models describing socialist societies could be useful. The degree to which the 'Leninist legacy'<sup>31</sup> influences the way post-Communist regimes deal with their recent past can be analyzed in the framework of these models. The distinction between the private and public virtues, the suspicion of the state and the dependency on the informal channels of communication are elements of an explanation for the problem. Through these channels the 'information blackout' is completed with conspiracy rumors, nationalistic or xenophobic arguments.

There is an enormous theoretically oriented literature on revolutions and revolutionary movements. Instead of applying the large-scale structural and state centered theories, I find it more promising to look at "the refusal to reproduce the hegemonic appearances"<sup>32</sup> in the Romanian context. According to James Scott, under an oppressive regime the moment of rupture comes when the 'hidden transcript' previously kept carefully apart from the public sphere is intentionally revealed. This means a symbolic declaration of war. This indeed happened on December 22, when the crowd

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<sup>30</sup> "The way of action, the violence, and fanaticism shown by people against vital state institutions on 13 June, were to my generation and the elderly a remainder of the legionary rebellion of 1941. In fact, specific material evidence did not lack: clothes, insignia, and badges of fascist inspiration. Therefore, it was not the miners who were at the origin of violence in the capital city. Obviously the actions on 13th June, the true cause of what followed, were part of a broader spectrum of such planned actions with the clear intention of destabilizing the country politically. It had happen on 12th and 28th January, and on 18 February, it happened during the election campaign and after the elections, that is after the electorate, the people had made their option clear, and the parliament started to work. I hope that, in the end, all will be clear because the game is far bigger and it is both internal and external forces are involved there is no doubt about that. This is a well planned professional scenario the range of which is far reaching and whose implications go deep." said Ion Iliescu in an interview. "President Iliescu denies pursuing 'no-communism'", 4 Aug 1990, EE/0834 B/3, HU-OSA, 300/506/49.

<sup>31</sup> Jowitt, Ken, 1992, *The Leninist Legacy*, In Banac, Ivo (ed.) *Eastern Europe in Revolution*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

<sup>32</sup> Scott, James, 1990, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press (p. 204)

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<sup>27</sup> Gheorghe, Nicolae (1990) *Exorcizare prin exotizare*, 22, No. 6. 23 Februarie 1990, p. 20, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51

<sup>28</sup> Dreptul de a rămâne în cetate pare ușor de anulat dacă încalci regula lui "cine nu este cu noi..." Nu, să nu-l instrăinăm pe Ceaușescu! Să recunoaștem că a fost și rămâne "al nostru", să admitem că i-am fost complici și că viața publică a cetății nu s-a făcut numai "la negru". Ca să câștigăm, meciul trebuie jucat cu noi înșine, nici măcar cu... Albania!, Gheorghe, Nicolae (1990) *Exorcizare prin exotizare*, 22, No. 6. 23 Februarie 1990, p. 20, HU-OSA, 205/60/5/51.

<sup>29</sup> The anthropologist John Borneman and Linda Fisher, a media artist, started a joint project on the Cornell University, dealing with the fall of authoritarian leaders. The outcome of the project is a video, and will be a book. Borneman, John & Fisher, Linda: *Death of the Father*, <http://cidc.library.cornell.edu/DOF/book.htm>



that was gathered in order to listen to Ceaușescu's speech on the Timișoara events began to whistle and shout. The event was broadcast on TV and this was the beginning of the famous media revolution. The appearances of the hegemony were denied and disseminated through "live" TV transmission. "Wake up, Romanian!" a patriotic song that later became the new anthem of Romania, has been sang and broadcast often, symbolizing the national awakening and the refusal of the tyranny. Soon another awakening followed, a disillusion from the revolution, when the very same people that refused the hegemonic appearances in a similar manner refused the revolution as something "stolen", "hijacked" or never happened. The tradition of suspicion proved more effective than the short-lived trust in the media and the reality presented. Discarding the initial representation opened doors to rumors and myths as tools of revisionist interpretations.

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## THE HUNT FOR THE "WHISKY ROBBER": NARRATING CRIME, HEROISM, AND MORALITY IN POST-SOCIALIST HUNGARY

Maya NADKARNI

On October 27, 1999, a special crime squad of the Budapest police tracked down and arrested Attila Ambrus, a serial bank robber who had escaped from prison four months before. With his capture, the Budapest police closed a chapter on a story that had dominated the Hungarian media and public interest for much of that year. A Transylvanian émigré and former ice-hockey player, Ambrus had captured Hungary's popular imagination with his clever outwitting of authorities, gentlemanly behavior, and - most notoriously - his habit of gulping down a shot of whisky before each crime. Inspiring comparisons to Bonnie and Clyde, Arsene Lupin, and Robin Hood (as well as Robin Hood's Hungarian counterpart, Sándor Rózsa), the "Whisky Robber" became known as perhaps the closest thing to a Hungarian "national hero" in the ten years since the end of state socialism. As Hungarian sociologist György Csepeli commented, "The [current] Government is busy trying to revitalize old legends and found new traditions - they prepare silk flags and employ hussars for celebrations. In the meantime, a bank robber creates himself as a hero." (Hildebrand 1999)

Before investigating the implications of this statement, I should first outline the facts of the case. Although Ambrus began robbing banks and travel agencies in 1993, he was first arrested six years later, in January 1999. At that time, the police only had information linking him to eight robberies. Thanks to Ambrus's immediate confession, however, that number expanded to 27, with the total stolen ultimately estimated at 196 million forints (\$653,000). (*MTI Intraday News*, 2000) Despite his initial cooperation with authorities, Ambrus became discouraged when he learned that he would be charged with attempted murder as well as armed robbery, since he had once