THE CULTURAL COLD WAR IN ROMANIA

Nicoleta SĂLCUDEANU[1]

Abstract

The most important strategies, in Romanian culture, after the World War II, were designed at Paris. Communist ideology being rightly considered the main enemy of culture, the answer of exile, through its peaks, was also ideological, but opposite in sign. If the intellectuals from the country were "resisting through culture", the exile abroad assumed the role of a strong anti-communist militancy.

Keywords: communism, exile, literature, Cold War, Radio Free Europe

Although, as Dumitru Ţepeneag says, „major Romanian literature is written there where Romanian language ia at home", is no less true that the most important strategies, in Romanian culture, after the World War II were designed at Paris. As the totalitarian political climate tended to contaminate any nook of spiritual space, literary exile worked in its mirror control. As aesthetic performance was fully represented in the country, with the disappearance of the socialist realism without notice, exile especially incumbent upon ethical performance. Communist ideology being rightly considered the main enemy of culture, the answer of exile, through its peaks, was as well ideological, but opposite in sign. If the intellectuals from the country were "resisting through culture", the exile abroad assumed the role of a strong anti-communist militancy. After the euphoria of recovery of the exiled component of Romanian culture was also scattered, there are already increasingly more evidence of political contamination of their aesthetic valuing actions. The testimony of Dumitru Ţepeneag here: "I would not like someone to believe that I was wrong welcomed in exile by its leaders, when I arrived in Paris. On the contrary, I was greeted warmly, with a slightly exaggerated kindness, with admiration for my political courage. That I haven't understood immediately that everything, in exile, was interpreted politically. The "Onirism", for example, was to exile and RFE (Radio Free Europe) an aesopic language and nothing more[2]; with accents somewhat bluntly, the same Dumitru Ţepeneag speaks of "political fanaticism of the Romanians in exile who in their justified fight against communism tended to «punish» the writers from the country that accepted the compromise with power. It could be called also the primacy of politics and its consequences". Speaking of indisputable quality of written literature in the country, the writer believes that, definitely lower, exiled literature tended to

[1] „Gheorghe Şincai" Institute for Social-Human Researches of the Romanian Academy

[2] Dumitru Ţepeneag, *Războiul literaturii încă nu s-a încheiat*, Interviuri, Ediţie îngrijită de Nicolae Bârna, Editura Allfa, Bucureşti, 2000, pp. 260-261.

BDD-A3076 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 11:01:05 UTC)

obscure the path to international perception, and therefore illusory, occupying the outpost, with a «lower-quality Romanian Literature».[3]

It happened that, unlike other Eastern exiles, ours was far less concerned about the translation and promotion of writers in the country. True, interest to Eastern literatures there was little in the West, maybe since the second half of the decade eight and only regarding the dissenting literature. Poles and Czechs have taken advantage of this opening, promoting "Solidarność" and Charter '77 by prompt translation of the writers of these movements. "The reason of the immediate appearance of translations in the West is interesting - historian Tony Judt points, illustrating the Polish example. This is because an entire generation of Polish intellectuals, from 1968 until the late 70s, begin to hold positions in western universities, Yale, Columbia, Berkeley, Oxford" and gives example Kolakowski and his followers, Hus and his followers like Alex Smolar, who is the founder of Bathory Foundation, "equivalent Soros Foundation in Hungary. Alex Smolar was a student in Paris in the early '70s, I did not know him, but it was one of those who translated Michnik. They all lived in the West, and were the chain by which the Pole dissidents were heard in the West".[4] Romanian exile has chosen another way. Probably lacking the same means that have enjoyed their Czech and Polish counterparts, did not support the Romanian literature abroad, but for Romanians, aiming especially political purposes. The small number of dissenters was again an impediment, but when they were there, exile has made every effort to make them visible.

Located differently in the emergency of the political command, the exile, through its leaders, focused almost exclusively on directing its message to the country, in some cases with propaganda purposes. Oriented towards the country, the militant exile exercised its influence on the inside hierarchy of literature, primarily by ethical criteria, the aesthetic platform falling on a secondary background. Simultaneously, the approach only aesthetically of the most important critics in the country converged with the ethics of exile, aligning their platform to the ethical one, so they finally meet. The two views were in fact faces of the same reality, and their joint action concerned a same common enemy: the literature subservient to the regime. However the hierarchy made in the country did not overlapped on the one made outside so authors with real talent and aesthetic merits, because of their alleged "collaborationism", not always real, was concealed, while the merits of the "brave" were sometimes exaggerated. But - it must be said - the differences were not as pronounced as to prevent axiological perception closer to reality. Small distortions still had a role, insidious, it is true, with considerable effects in the long term upon literature, and especially on its policies. This does not mean, of course, that the ethical attitude of Parisian critics would have an intentional dogmatic position against the cultural act. To understand the historical and political circumstances that led to their political

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 244.
[4] Tony Judt, *Europa iluziilor*, Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 2000, pp. 19-33.

BDD-A3076 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 11:01:05 UTC)

responsiveness, beyond their natural anti-communism against the Soviet occupation regime that had taken possession of their land, in their first two years of exile they faced with political circumstances designed to discourage all their hope to be heard.

France after the War was keen to erase from their consciousness collaborationism with the German occupier, much larger than the French resistance, and also, the "sins" of the Vichy government. On the other hand, for the French democrats the fascist regime was a still an open wound, still unhealed. The main currents of ideas in postwar France were as predictable as possible, anti-fascist and Marxist. In addition, the Soviets were allies. This Marxist period was extended until Solzhenitsyn's case became well-known. Until then, as Tony Judt points out, "different histories of anthropology, political science (not yet appeared in France a separate discipline of political science) were dominated by people trained after the war. People who studied at the Superior Normal School between - say - '48 and '55 ". It left all visible. In addition, the entire West seemed blind and deaf to the problems of captive countries behind the Iron Curtain. In addition to "forget ethics" - the war left behind an unbearable memory, as beneficiaries of prosperity due to the Marshall Plan of economic rehabilitation, funded by U.S., Western Europe had no mood no curiosity to know what is really happening in the new communist countries. Is there a selfishness of the developed countries of Western Europe. For example Judt had appeared shocked at the time, that "after what happened in Prague in August 1968, almost no one talked about these events. There was not, of course, total silence, but for most "Prague Spring", as Dahrendorf said, was a bourgeois spring. That does not really have anything to do with Western revolution ". In fact, the Prague Spring and the May '68 revolts in Paris, as complaints were justified, as legitimate as the seemingly antithetical. Yudt was shocked by "indifference, and cynicism about what was happening in Eastern Europe". As a reflection of a guilty conscience or not, "from 1956 to the mid-60s", French intellectual's interest would rather heading to Third World problems and the war in Algeria.

"After '68 world realizes, however, that something is moving in this area (Eastern Europe, NM, NS), but - says Judt - a whole tradition of forgetting had already established". Solzhenitsyn's arrival will change the perception. After his interviews, books translated into French, a small earthquake occurs in consciousness. In "Nouvel Observateur" is an editorial by Jean Daniel, "Oh! How I could not figure out what happened?" Not that he didn't know what happened, but "only Solzhenitsyn gave us a vocabulary to talk about all this." Until then, interest in the situation of the East was almost zero. Yudt speaks of a "Yalta of mind", that after 1945 "this part of the world becomes less interesting, included automatically in the Soviet world to simplify the analysis" and "area east of Vienna was a nebula." Politically, on the other hand, in the view of Yudt, "the second element of the postwar situation that facilitated the construction of" Europe "was the Cold War. Since 1947, for most European leaders became clear that the Soviet Union was a serious threat to Eastern

BDD-A3076 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 11:01:05 UTC)

Europe and that, if only for their own protection, Western European countries had to create some kind of alliance between them first, then with the U.S."[5]

It is easy to guess the frustrations of Parisian exiles being unable to make their voices heard, to make known their own country drama in the hands of the Soviets, voices drowned, lost in a Marxist intellectual tumult. This frustration led to a kind of radical political intransigence, unable to understand French policy, no longer able to perceive nuances, even after left-wing French political language begins to differentiate. Idiosyncrasy to the political left will always remain, even despite the fact that another feature explained, but no less paradoxical, as evidenced by the exiled Romanian memoirs and diaries (Lovinescu, Dumitru Țepeneag, Sanda Stolojan, Paul Goma, Virgil Tanase) , political struggle was supported, in utmost, just by press of the left, "what is even more humiliating for the communist regime in Bucharest" - says Mircea Iorgulescu, in a chapter from his volume *Tangențiale* dedicated to the diary of Monica Lovinescu. An explicable peculiarity, being known that the policy of left was more open to the pronounced problems of political or social injustice. The fact is that Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca, the Parisian outstanding literary critics, pushed by circumstances, will despise pluralism of political debate in France, choosing the right sort of an inflexible, suspicious radicalism. Something as possible "exotic" for those years of post-war Paris.

In part, the intransigence of anti-communist post-communism after 1989, among Romanian intellectuals, phobic to any shade of left through to deny any legitimacy to all came from this doctrinaire area, even with the risk of contradicting the idea of political pluralism. But we must say that this political inflexibility comes from a great solidarity. For that, referring to the political intransigence of Lovinescu-Ierunca spouses, Mircea Iorgulescu noted that not this intransigence will govern their relations with the writers from the country, but a sublime brotherhood; "A fraternal shared struggle unites Lovinescu and her visitors from Romania, even more than the directions of the great planetary confrontation in which this fight is just one episode. Not only intellectual and literary affinities or differences are listed in the background, but also the ideological and political ones. One of the great revelations of Monica Lovinescu's diary is that one is unable to specify the political identity of all his characters, except the author and Virgil Ierunca. They both are, without doubt, definitely anti-communist, and definitely anti-left. But as such are defined almost exclusively by reference to the French political space. Reflections and observations about the socialist president François Mitterrand, about the socialist government, about the various socialist leaders are distinguished by a radicalism often pushed to cruelty ("I do not know what injury would fit better," notes Monica Lovinescu at a time about Mitterrand); instead, when right-wing opposition wins the municipal elections in Paris the event is recorded with apparent satisfaction: "we vote and we win for the first time. Chirac's list won the first round and we get rid of the

[5]*Ibidem,* p.153.

BDD-A3076 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 11:01:05 UTC)

communist mayor that we have since we live here. (...) Opposition becomes majority in the rest of France also. Perhaps with no trace, but comforting." However the anti-left attitude, constant and virulent, does not alter the judgment on events. Monica Lovinescu "hates" François Mitterrand, but notes honestly every situation when the French Socialist president takes a position against the regime in Bucharest, against Soviet policy or in favor of dissidents. Even if she can not control amazement, as happens during a visit made by Mitterrand in Moscow. "Incredible surprise" exclaimed Monica Lovinescu, "Mitterrand during the talks with Chernenko spoke about Sakharov, and on Afghanistan, and the need of Pershing missiles," he was "the first Western head of state who does!". Surprise or perhaps misunderstanding of the fine policies pursued by the «Florentine», as was said, the French president, a great lover of literature and writers, let us remember…"[6] Moreover Mitterrand will be one of the few French politicians who will be involved - we see - rather than formal, concrete as possible even in matters of Romanian dissidence. One thing is clear. As shown in the diary of Monica Lovinescu, although their action politicized and fierce anti-left allowed and even recommended boundaries, as observed Mircea Iorgulescu, "guidelines, options and political sensitivities of the" illegal entrants "come from Romania", and, moreover, the exiles, appear as "colorless". Iorgulescu explained this by the strategic concept of *containment*, a concept "thought it essential to Cold War historians", the incredible solidarity that united the Romanian intellectuals against the regime, a solidarity that managed to short-circuit "many Romanias", that many Romanias in which we are divided because, for example, Marin Preda, although congener with Monica Lovinescu, obviously do not share the same single Romania. The miracle of coagulation comes from a common "widely shared adversity upon the communist regime, and probably should be extended to writers and intellectuals who do not travel to Paris or not enough". It makes up such a united front, very broad, and his goal is one: blocking policy regime. Lovinescu recorded in her Journal on 22 October 1983: "the impression that there and here we are - on the same barricades to defend the same culture. I welcome them ... from the front ". Because, really, this joint action of the critics in Paris and the "illegals" was a front because - says Mircea Iorgulescu - "images and language of fight are in fact perfectly proper, not" rhetorically inflated!". The fight involves, both sides, tactical movements, strategic maneuver, retreat, attack, concealment, enveloping, concessions, all to the interest of the unique cause. The evaluation criterion is efficiency. Consciously or not - notes Mircea Iorgulescu, this action falls within the boundaries defined since the launch in July 1947 by George Kennan of the American strategic concept of *containment* (...). Restriction, limitation, impoundment of the actions of the communist officials, first of all in their cultural actions, but also in the social and political ones, was the priority of the campaign ... "[7] The containment strategies, which bowed on various

[6] Mircea Iorgulescu, *Tangențiale*, Editura Unstitutului cultural Român, Bucureşti, 2004, p. 141.
[7] *Ibidem*, p. 142

BDD-A3076 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 11:01:05 UTC)

researchers[8], the Cold War, applied within the culture, seem to belong to a conscious, coordinated approach, although Mircea Iorgulescu slips a margin of doubt, because we will see, cultural cold War indicates a concept for a reality orchestrated by the U.S. to a remarkable level. Otherwise, both concepts have come to the attention of prominent historians and researchers after the fall of communism, especially since the Cold War archives became available.

Acknowledgement: „This paper is suported by the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed from the European Social Fund and by the Romanian Government under the contract number SOP HRD/89/1.5/S/59758"

[8] See also John Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: Acritical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*, Oxford University Press, 1982.

BDD-A3076 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.77 (2026-11-18 11:01:05 UTC)