

ABSTRACTS ITALIAN SPEAKERS

Elena Dundovich

Reflections on the memory of Stalinist repression and GULag in Italy, USSR and Russia.

The paper is focused on the memory of Stalinist regime and its repressive policy in Italy, Soviet Union and Russia after 1991. The myth of the Soviet Union after the Second World War in many of the Western European countries and the presence, in Italy, of a very strong Communist Party delayed a serious reflection upon the brutality of Stalinist period and the destiny of the Italian victims of the "Great Terror". More than a decade after the opening of the Russian archives and the fall of the Soviet Union, the paper provides an overview of publications, open debates, meetings and conferences about "memory" in El'cin and Putin's Russia compared with Italy experience on the same themes.

Antonia Grasselli

"No, I won't give you my soul" is the desperate cry that can be found at the end of a short story by Varlam Shalamov in his collection "Kolyma Tales". It is when a man is dispossessed of his own humanity and when the risks of losing one's last chance to live become really dramatic that he discovers he still has his soul and an unexpected capacity of resistance against evil both inside and outside him.. This desperate cry is similar to the denial made by the Righteous against any form of totalitarian power: "No, I shall not do it". Becoming aware of the impossibility to collaborate with evil helps us understand that there exists a 'somebody' in front of whom we are inescapably supposed to justify our actions: ourselves: In Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates claims that it would be better to disagree with the majority of men rather than being simply "Me, however alone, in disagreement and in contradiction with myself"

This is the point of arrival of that journey into Memory that was like an ideal walk through the paths of the Remembrance of Good, a project that we have carried out in our schools in the last few years. We followed a precise methodology, with a specific programming and particular tools. The beginning, the different stages, the characteristics and the results of this real, as well as metaphorical, journey along those paths, are to be told and described by the point of view of those who experienced them directly as protagonists and witnesses who, meeting the Righteous, were able to find themselves.

Sante Maletta

Totalitarianism A Guide for the Perplexes

Answering the question 'Totalitarianism or totalitarianisms?' first needs a clear definition of totalitarianism itself.

'Totalitarianism' has always been a controversial word. Some scholars not even use it. Some say it is a by-product of the Cold War.

I hold that it is impossible to set aside the notion of 'totalitarianism': we cannot really understand what happened in the last century (and is still effective now) without it.

Actually scholars belonging to different fields reached a general agreement on the basic factors of totalitarian regimes: the *a) only party b) monopolizes the government* and tends to *c) subdue the whole society* by using *d) terror* according to the guide-lines of the *e) official ideology*.

On the ground of this definition, we have three general viewpoints (strictly interwoven) on totalitarianism.

1) Philosophers and novelists tend to stress the primacy of terror as a means to the **transformation of human nature** (ORWELL, ARENDT).

2) Historians and sociologists (TALMON, EISENSTADT, GENTILE) highlight the presence of a totalitarian trend within modern democratic movements (such as the Jacobins) and the importance of official ideologies considered as **political religions**.

3) Political scientists (FRIEDRICH, BRZEZINSKI, LINZ) analyze the peculiarities of Eastern European socialist regimes and work out the notion of '**post-totalitarian regimes**'.

The very notion of 'post-totalitarian regimes' is present in the writings of the so-called '**dissidents**' (HAVEL) where it plays a crucial role as it connects totalitarianism with the crisis of Western democratic regimes and explains why we still need the **Righteous** today.

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Anna Maria Samuelli

Resistance to totalitarianism: Righteous among the Nations and Righteous in the Communist totalitarian experience?

Analyzing the resistance to totalitarianism means looking for examples of people who have been able to oppose evil and to exert a responsible choice, in harmony with one's own and the other's belonging to humankind. Every situation where crimes against humankind are committed presents common characters and peculiar features and the resistance of those whom we call Righteous gained different shapes in the different genocidal contexts. The figure of the "Righteous among the Nations", which descends from the biblical tradition, was developed in the context of the Shoah's memory and enriched the historical framework by highlighting the interlacement of good and evil characterizing it. The "Righteous" is the non Jew who saved the Jews during the Nazi persecution. The Righteous Committee at the Yad Vashem Memorial in Jerusalem under the lead of Judge Landau's and, in the following years, of judge Bejski's, filed proofs of the existence of 21.310 "Righteous among the nations" to-date, gradually changing the criteria for singling them out and finally acknowledging the complexity of the choice: the Righteous is revealed by his actions.

The Communist totalitarianism experience presents peculiar features both for duration and pervasivity of the evil at public level and in individual lives. The Messianic collectivist ideology produced a total social atomization. Inside and outside the gulag, interrupting the chain of evil by an individual action became the mark of moral resistance. It consisted in keeping one's own dignity by refusing to act against the other to get an advantage, by denouncing the lie, by activating aid networks, by keeping family relations, by refusing to "sell one's soul" (Varlam Šalamov). The Righteous within the Communist totalitarianism showed that there is no determinism in human actions. Neither terror nor survival instinct have wiped out the ability to react in all human beings. Some intellectuals, politicians, educated and common men have fought in loneliness and surrounded by general indifference without the possibility to see a result. The idea of future was inconceivable and acting without any hope in the future meant going on believing in the humanity that is inside us.

ABSTRACTS ROMANIAN SPEAKERS

Violeta Barbu

Cross-culture memory of totalitarianism, a theoretical tool

In terms of political theory, since almost sixty years, the theoretical debate on the patterns of fascism and communism, as two versions of the totalitarian dictatorship, set up some basic features or traits which are generally recognized to be common: *an official ideology*, consisting of an official body of doctrine covering all vital aspects of human existence to which everyone living in that society is supposed to adhere at least passively *a single mass party* led by one man, hierarchically, oligarchically organized, completely intertwined with the bureaucratic government organization: *a system of terroristic police* directed not only against demonstrable enemies of the regime but against arbitrarily selected classes of the population: a technologically conditioned near complete *monopoly of control of all means of mass media* (press, radio, television): a similar near complete monopoly of control of all means of *effective armed control*: a central control and *direction of entire economy* < a characteristic absence of responsibility, a distortion of the notion of law.

In terms of historical perspective, the fascism and the communism are not wholly alike. Within this broad pattern of similarities, there are many significant variations. One of them is the problem of resistance seen on the perspective of the general consensus of the population. The memory of the resistance might be a significant revelator of the so called “islands of separateness” (family, church, university. From isolated acts of protest toward mass protest, in exploring the human motivations which lead to resistance, one find that they are as varied as human personalities. Moral indignation, thwarted ambition, religious scruples, patriotic fervor and class antagonism have entered into the complex skein of resistance movements and acts. Memory of such movements and persons is critically to understand the difference between the two totalitarianism.

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Ion Constantin

Parallel destinies: Romania and Poland facing the totalitarian systems of the 20th century

For Romania, as well as for Poland, the 20th century or ‘the short century’, as it has been named by historians, starts in 1918, once the World War I comes to an end. Then, Romania and Poland stepped into a new era that has as goal the accomplishment of the national ideal: the Polish state – after the three desintegration in the 18th century and a persistent diplomatic and military battle – regained its unitary and independent form (11th of November, 1918). The Romanian state accomplished its national unity (1st of December, 1918), as a consequence of the liberation and reunification of the historical provinces found under the occupation of the neighbouring empires. Thus, Poland and Romania become neighbours. Common destinies placed those two countries, as a barrier against the Soviet world, of the Bolshevik Communism, and the European world, the world of the most advanced civilization.

From its very re-birth, the Polish state faced difficult problems, having territorial disputes with all neighbours, excluding Romania. After a heroic battle fought against the Bolshevik forces, the Polish obtained one of the most brilliant victories in the history (‘the miracle on the Vistula River’), thus playing a decisive role in blocking the road of Communism in Europe and, practically saving, the European countries from ‘the red danger’.

The main danger that Romania and Poland were facing was the Soviet state, which, constantly, claimed territories as Basarabia and the Eastern Galice. That explains the good Romanian – Polish relations from that period, illustrated by the Defensive Alliance from 3rd of March, 1921, renewed

every 5 years, new features added, (1926, 1931 and 1936), then transformed in a warranty treaty in 1926 and preceded by the Military Conventions, valid until the tragic events of the 1939 autumn.

On the World War II eve, Romania and Poland lived dramatic moments, being threatened by the big totalitarian powers from the Eastern and Western Europe: USSR and Germany. The Molotov – Ribbentrop treaty – ”the most sinister diplomatic alliance of the 20th century“, on 23rd of August, 1939, created an extremely difficult situation for the two countries. By signing the non-aggression pact, accompanied by the unfortunate secret protocol, Molotov and Ribbentrop were in fact signing the division of the Eastern – Central Europe under German and Soviet influence spheres.

The Romanian and Polish destinies under the Communist regimes had lots of common points. In a strange game of history, Romania as well as Poland were invaded at the beginning of the war – in September 1939 and June 1940 – by the Soviets. In both cases the Red Army occupied the two countries, partially and then completely. Romania and Poland will be ‘liberated’ in 1944, by the same Red Army, and the two nations will be obliged to praise the ‘liberating Soviet people’.

During the process of the Soviet invasion and dominance that affected Eastern and Central Europe, Poland undergone a worse treatment, due to its geographical position, but also because of its size it was one of the main factors that ensured Moscow total dominance, strategic and political, of that zone. After 1948, terror intensified, in Romania and also in Poland. The elite was suffered physical extermination or were totally isolated from social life. All ex-political leaders who did not manage to go in exile were arrested and imprisoned, many of them lost their lives in prisons. The same thing happened to the churches, many priests being imprisoned.

Starting with 1954, Polish people started to show their reluctance towards the Stalinist methods. The gradual unveiling of the aftermath of the ‘personality cult’ created the favourable basis for the developing of the reformist currents in Poland. In 1956 Władysław Gomułka rejoins the political scene. The more freedom that Poland got after 1956 created the opportunity of an authentic process of reconstruction of the Polish civil society.

In Romania, unlike Poland, the unfreezing process generated by Nikita Hroustchev was much slower, the leader of the Romanian Working Party, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, understating that that change had already took place. Removing the Stalinist influence meant, in fact the elimination of the tough factions or of some rival personalities from inside the party. Very significant is the fact that, when Gomulka was freed and acquitted from all charges (1954), in Bucharest, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu was murdered, being one of Gheorghiu Dej rivals for the party leadership. The false removal of Stalinist methods and the more emphasized nationalism that characterized Dej eliminated once more the chance of the affirmation of civil society. In these conditions, no theoretical political project could be designed even in subsidiary.

In March, 1965, the Stalinist heritage that belonged to Dej was totally assumed by Nicolae Ceaușescu. For a short period (1965-1971), he will mime the somewhat independence towards Moscow and a liberalization of the political, social and cultural climate. However, gradually, a new dictatorship regime will be installed that will promote, very close to paroxysm, the cult of the personality of the leader.

The appearance of the ‘Solidarity’ syndicate in Poland, in 1980, managed to arise vivid emotions in the entire world, Romania included. Here, large categories of the population were following the Polish events using foreign media, even if the Communist regime exerted a total control over the Romanian media channels. From the very start of the ‘Solidarity’, a Romanian, Iulius Filip, military specialist from Cluj-Napoca, found the courage to send a letter of solidarity to the Polish Free Syndicate. This was quoted at the first Congress of ‘Solidarity’, from Gdansk, from 27th September, 1981. The Polish evolutions were also carefully followed and interpreted in the publications of the Romanian exile.

The human rights from Romania are in a more obvious contrast to the evolutions from Poland, becoming subject for international protests, fact that shed a negative light over the regime from Bucharest. Extreme enemy of the revision of the existing structures, Nicolae Ceaușescu was more

and more preoccupied with the situation from Poland, felt as a potential danger from the 'values of Socialism'. In the evening of 19th -20th of August, 1989, after the victory in Poland of the opposition and the nomination as Prime Minister of Tadeusz Mazowiecki – the first non-Communist PM in a country which is member of the Warsaw Treaty – , Nicolae Ceaușescu was addressing a letter to all leaders of the Socialist countries , where he expressed his concern for the fate of Socialism in Poland, for this country's obligations as an ally and the possible implications of the events in Poland for the common interests of the Socialist states.

In December 1989, the wave that was throwing overboard the totalitarian regimes had arrived at Romania's borders and just a spark was needed for the population discontent burst out. This spark lit up in Timișoara, on the 16th of December and extended throughout the country. Unlike Poland, the system transition from Romania was not peaceful and did not cross the negotiation with the former power structures. 'For the first time in history a Communist regime was changed in a violent way'.

As a sign of solidarity with the revolutionary events from Romania, in the afternoon of 20th of December, 1989, in front of the Romanian embassy from Warsaw a manifestation took place, where 300 persons took part, representing parties and political organizations (The Confederation of the Independent Poland – KPN, The Independent Party of the Greens, The Independent Association of the Students – NZS), as well as representatives of the 'Solidarity'

The triumph of the social civil society inaugurated a final phase of the collapse of totalitarian regime of Soviet type. Even if in time the rhythm of erosion has proved to be different depending on the various internal and international evolutions that characterize each country, from that moment on we might say that the direction of the process has become clear and irreversible.

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Mioara Anton

Two Experiences, Two Final Reports

The experiences that Romania went through in the last century – the Second World War and Communism – as part of processes which profoundly marked European history, have, since the fall of the Communist regime, been approached and interpreted in different ways. The need to know the recent past has led to the appearance of an impressive number of works, which contain a diverse range of opinions. The attempt to assume and know this past took concrete form in two final reports, made by two special commissions created under the auspices of the Romanian presidency. In the first case, the International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, set up on 22 October 2003, sought to research and establish the truth concerning the tragedy of the Holocaust in Romania during the Second World War. In the second case, at the personal initiative of President Traian Băsescu, was founded in April 2006, a commission headed by the American political scientist of Romanian origin Vladimir Tismăneanu. In the case of the 'Tismaneanu commission',

there was an extra motive. Romanian entry into the European Union, on 1 January 2007, was conditional upon an official, but scientifically-based, condemnation of the crimes of the Communist regime.

Thus, both commissions appeal to basic ethical principles and try to respond, in the name of the truth, to a series of sensitive issues about the recent past of Romania. The aim of such approaches has, at the same time, been to promote knowledge of the dimensions of the Holocaust and the Gulag with all the social, political and psychological consequences which left their mark on Romanian society. Both reports proposed an official sanctioning of the events which took place in both periods (1940–1944 and 1945–1989), but also made available to all categories of citizens information inaccessible before 1989. The conflictual reception of both reports shows Romanian society's increased and very explicable interest in the Communist period, but also an ignorance of the events during the Second World War. In the collective memory of the majority there is no place for the drama of minorities, but only their own experience.

ABSTRACTS POLISH SPEAKERS

Konstanty Gebert

There are obvious analogies between the experience of victims of the Shoah and of the Gulag: the concentration camps, the genocidal intent, and the destruction of entire communities. But while these analogies should be explored and discussed, this should not lead to a blurring of the substantial differences. Gulag victims had the possibility of alleviating their suffering through affiliating with their oppressors, something not possible for victims of the Shoah. Mass murder was a fully acceptable by-product of the Gulag, but it was not its intended goal, at least not in respect to entire ethnic groups. Though the situation of social groups (e.g. the „kulaks”) was different here, under international law this does not warrant an accusation of genocide against the Soviet regime. These differences are important, and need to be clearly stated. But again, the differences should not lead to minimalizing the stated similarities. Extermination of social groups does not constitute genocide under the Convention only because the USSR had vetoed the relevant wording. The experience of concentration camp (as opposed to death camp) was indeed the same. Finally, it is not acceptable to use these differences to somehow reduce the condemnation of the Soviet regime

Marta Pietrzykowska

“A moral dilemma is at your door” is the metaphor employed by Szymon Datner to describe the moment when a fugitive from the ghetto would ask an acquaintance or a stranger Pole for shelter. The one asked for help faced the choice of one of three possible courses of action: denouncing the Jew (aversion); not denouncing, but nonetheless refusing to give any help (indifference); giving help or shelter (aid).

The aid could be temporary - feeding, sharing clothes, arranging false documents, helping in finding a job, renting an apartment, letting the fugitive stay a couple of hours or through the night. But the help could just as well be long-term (several weeks to several years) and consist in hiding the fugitive or fugitives in the house, the household, or in the area; providing them with food, attending to their basic needs.

Almost 18 years after the end of the war Israel's Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, Yad Vashem, initiated its grand effort of commemorating those who saved Jews during the Second World War at a risk to their own lives. Currently the list of Polish Righteous features over 6200 names.

Who are those people? What were their motives for the help they have given? What did their relations with the hidden look like? This paper is an attempt to present several from among the Polish Righteous. Each tale is illustrated by a current photograph of the Righteous, their story of the people they rescued and a sketch of the hideout.

Piotr Setkiewicz

In its official propaganda communist authorities in Poland underlined actions by soldiers of leftist military underground, suffering and martyrdom of Poles, their resistance against the occupants and “liberating mission” of the Red Army. In this falsified and ideologically-branded picture of history it lacked space for other citizens of the Polish Republic: Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Germans and Jews. Apart from official ceremonies of anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising their tragedy has been forgotten for many years. Therefore, since young Poles, who were born after the end of WW II had not their own personal experience and knowledge about the Holocaust, it was not surprising that they were unable to understand dramatic choices done by people who risked their lives for rescuing Jews.

Certainly many things has changed after 1989 in this regard: the fact that Jews constitute a large party of victims in concentration and death camps was generally accepted in Poland, that they were persecuted by the reason of their origin and that the attitude of at least some Poles facing the tragedy of Polish Jews was ethically dubious. This declaration however become a subject of many polemics and disputes in view of difficulties in determining the scale of the phenomenon. Recognizing that a concept of „traditional polish anti-semitism” and “polish concentration camps” leads to marginalization the history of Polish martyrdom some authors began to use the story of the Righteous to counter it. As it was stressed the number of those who offered aid for Jews was in Poland significantly higher comparing to other European countries and this should be considered a decisive proof of “high moral standards”, almost “filo-semitism”, which allegedly prevailed among Polish society during the war. Although a definite answer for those questions will probably never been given, a selection of representative examples and stories presented in this paper constitute a base material for better understanding of complex Polish – Jewish relations under German occupation of Poland.

Piotr Trojański

Today young people during history lessons, while discussing such issues as the WWII, occupation, totalitarianism and the Holocaust, more and more frequently raise moral and ethical questions. For instance they wonder: Why certain people sacrifice their lives for saving others? Perhaps some of us are being born as heroes? So, what are inner factors and outer mechanisms determining our behavior?

In seeking for the answers to those questions making only historical analyses seems to be insufficient. So, we should appeal to other disciplines too. Social psychologists claim that everyone posses elements of good and evil that can manifest in a different ways depending on the situation we are actually living. Hence we can expect that the situation and political system can create both heroes and criminals.

So, what - in this particular context - should be the task of education, teacher and school? Certainly, we should show to the young people standard of behavior and role models as well as to give some instructions, how they can oppose to unwanted social influences, how to defend themselves from propaganda experts’ spell, how to combat the tactics of controlling minds that are used in order to get control on our freedom of choices and thoughts.

Thus, teachers should show to young people an ability of opposing to evil, examples of reflective thinking and courage. It seems that the best way for achieving this goal is using in historical education personal stories and testimonies of Righteous among the Nations. These people can serve for students as exemplary behaviors showing them how effectively they can oppose to the totalitarian systems and criminal political powers.