

BOOK REVIEW**REFLECTING ON TWISTED THINKING.
NEW INSIGHTS INTO THE IDEOLOGY
OF RIGHT-WING TOTALITARISM¹**

Abstract: Generally, totalitarianism is presented as the opposite of democracy, although the two systems proclaim the same goal: „the good of the people/demos”. By this viewpoint, totalitarianism (left wing and right wing) derives from democracy as nothing more than a mutation. Concerning the nature of fascism, it is based on the exploitation of history, traditions, customs, but not in the interests of the demos, but of the new totalitarian elite. Thus, following the logical-explanatory line of viral metamorphism, it can be observed that the fundamental role in the ideological development of the extreme right played the „infection” of pluralistic political thinking with an irrational mentality, consisting of existentialism, intuitionism, vitalism, nihilism, symbolism, restoration of thought magical, archetypal, mystic, mystical, taboo-based.

Keywords: Thinking, Ideology, Right-Wing, Totalitarianism, Authoritarianism, Viral-Metamorphic Theory

Rezumat: Reflectând asupra gândirii distorsionate. Noi informații despre ideologia totalitarismului de dreapta. De cele mai multe ori, totalitarismul este prezentat drept „opusul democrației”, cu toate că cele două sisteme proclamă același țel: binele poporului/ demosului. În această cheie, totalitarismul (de stânga și de dreapta) derivă din democrație, nefiind altceva decât o mutație a acesteia. În ceea ce privește natura fascismului, el se fundamentează pe exploatarea istoriei, tradițiilor, cutumelor, obiceiurilor, dar nu în interesul demosului, ci a noii elite totalitare. Așadar, urmând linia logico-explicativă a metamorfismului viral, se poate observa că rolul fundamental în nașterea și dezvoltarea ideologică a extremei drepte l-a jucat infectarea gândirii politice pluraliste cu o mentalitate iraționalistă, alcătuită din existențialism, intuiționism, vitalism, nihilism, simbolism, restaurarea gândirii magice, arhetipale, mitice, mistice, bazate pe tabuuri.

Résumé : Réfléchissant sur la pensée déformée. De nouvelles informations sur l'idéologie totalitaire de droite. Maintes fois, on présente le totalitarisme comme “l'opposé de la démocratie”, quoique les deux systèmes proclament le même but : le bien-être du peuples/

¹ Vlad Gafița, *Originile ideatice ale totalitarismului de dreapta. Repere ale teoriei viral-metamorfice* [Ideational origins of right-wing totalitarianism. Landmarks of viral-metamorphic theory], Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun, 2018, 486 p.

demos. Dans la même clef, le totalitarisme (de gauche et de droite) dérive de la démocratie, n'étant point autre chose qu'une mutation de celle-ci. En ce qui concerne la nature du fascisme, il se fonde sur l'exploration de l'histoire, des traditions, des coutumes, des mœurs, mais pas à l'intérêt du demos, mais de la nouvelle élite totalitaire. De cette manière, tout en suivant la ligne logique explicite du métamorphisme viral, on peut apercevoir que le rôle fondamental dans la naissance et le développement idéologique de l'extrême droite joua l'infection de la pensée politique pluraliste avec une mentalité irrationaliste, existentielle, mais aussi avec intuitionnisme, vitalisme, nihilisme, symbolisme et la restauration de la pensée magique, archétypale, mythique, mystique, basée sur des tabous.

Usually, the notion of totalitarianism, both in common sense and public discourse refers to the historical appearance of the political evil manifested throughout the 20th century. The need for investigative and academic debate is very eloquently illustrated by this issue. The nowadays consistent argumentative arsenal that identifies the difference between the totalitarian phenomenon and the other maladies of politics is due, to some extent, to the results of phenomenological archaeology undertaken by Hannah Arendt on totalitarianism since the 1950s. The six decades since then have not diminished the vigour of intellectual challenge proposed by her classical works of political science. In Romania, for example, there have been many books on the analysis of totalitarian phenomena, translations or original endeavours. They belong to historians, philosophers, political scientists or sociologists who were often tempted by the multidisciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach.

The book on which we insist on the following – *Ideational origins of right-wing totalitarianism. Landmarks of viral-metamorphic theory* – proposes an original interpretation of right-wing totalitarianism through a new theory called “viral-metamorphic”. Taking and adapting concepts from geology (“metamorphism”), biology, and computer science (“virus / viral”), as well as the broad synonymy of these terms, the author attempts to demonstrate that right-wing extremism was born through the changes in anti-modern and anti-democratic political ideologies. In other words, the extreme right is an ideology in itself, but a more special one, distinct by its “viral-metamorphic character”: it is inserted or overlaps the older ideologies affecting them like a virus that penetrates the DNA of a healthy organism, killing or causing reversible/irreversible mutations.

In his work (structured in four consistent chapters: I. *The anti-modern and anti-Enlightenment origins of the extreme right*; II. *Ideology – from pluralism to*

totalitarianism; III. *Irrationalism*; IV. *Elitism, social Darwinism and racism*, Vlad Gafița does not aim at a comparison of totalitarianism. The title itself announces the option for the far right, although there is a left-right balance to highlight some certain particularities. It is rather an ample genealogy of theoretical ideas, an interpretative grid with rigorous argumentation and erudition. It is also an analytical exercise loaded by the author with impetuosity and innovation. For instance, he sees modernity as, in general, synonymous with the Enlightenment, whose consequence in the plan of political ideas is liberalism. In fact, the same liberalism becomes the only ideology that leads to individualism and thus to democracy. In the same metric, totalitarianism is the result of democracy's crisis, using its imperfections to create mutant forms. Based on ideological negationist approach, it destroys the previous (Liberal, Socialist) patterns of thought, or transforms them by integrating revolutionary or reactionary attitudes (conservatism). Sometimes it uses techniques specific to liberal democracy (elections, referendums), but only temporarily, until achieving full power and destroying the system from within.

In the author's opinion, totalitarianism develops a pronounced, polymorphic or, more precisely, dimorphic character. At a political level, it is able to take various appearances (hypostasis): from a relatively moderate secular authoritarianism (Salazar's New State) or an autocratic militarist-conservative system (Francoist Spain) to the totalitarian uncompleted form (Mussolini's Italy) or radical, almost completed totalitarian regime (Nazi Germany). It is also antidemocratic through its collectivist or anti-individualist character. The Reaction to the philosophy of Enlightenment and to the liberal governance model induces the "premature birth" of a dimorphic organism that has the capacity to take two forms. As the "one-dimensional theory" of political parties claims, Communism is placed in the far left of the spectrum, while Fascism / Nazism and the other fascist movements belong to the far right. However, the author defines Fascism and Nazism as "trans-mutations" of Socialism, shaped after the WWI along with redefinition of the Italian and German nationalism. In fact, the two movements have labelled themselves as "the third way", avoiding association with the left or right political and ideological structures. They have likewise been characterized by an intense polymorphism.

However, due to the absence of universalism and unlike Communism, the right-wing totalitarianism can manifest in more varied and paradoxical aspects. It adopts a number of elements specific to the modern world (technology, mass media or means of propaganda), but it is self-defined as the "the way between liberalism and socialism", which dominates the "postmodern era". Revolting against the old

world's seemingly immutable models (religious, moral, aesthetic), the generic Fascism becomes a result of modernity, while its ideological sphere embracing both reactionary and revolutionary aspects. Hence the author's conclusion: "Fascism has often been called a conservative revolution, a reaction's revolution, or a radical form of the revolutionary Conservatism".

Paraphrasing Arendt who defined the non-pluralist totalitarian systems as "pathology of modernity", the author believes that totalitarianism is not the opposite of democracy, but a mutant entity that derived from democracy. It occurs when changes are made to fundamental features of democratic thinking and actions: freedom, equality, individualism, social-contractualism, rationalism, social justice, rule of law, etc. In terms of right-wing totalitarianism, it combines several trans-ideologies to subsequently transform itself into a distinct ideology. This is "coagulated" through a unique and utopian vision of the world built on myths, archetypes, symbols, magic thinking, and taboos. The same right-wing totalitarianism synthesizes, paradoxically, revolution and counter-revolution, reaction and "new order", Socialism and Nationalism.

Moreover, the right-wing totalitarianism has an anti-humanistic character by promoting social Darwinism, lack of empathy and by replacing Christian morality with a pseudo or anti-moral. Simultaneously, it is trans-humanist, trying to "overcome" or "ameliorate" humankind through another genesis that generates the New Human / Superhuman. This entity had to replace God who either "died" (F. Nietzsche) symbolically killed by modern secularism, or no longer had any purpose in the immanent new political religion (H. Arendt). Obviously, both variants of totalitarianism aim to deify the human being, initiating a process of viral-metamorphic nature, in which the man loses its defining features, becoming disentangled, depersonalized, irrational, massed.

As with other ideological structures, the extreme right has a pronounced, reactive character, being a response to the liberalism's crisis and to the rapid advance of Socialism and Communism. Unlike the classical doctrines, Fascism possesses a viral metamorphism, attacking, infecting, and transforming them into mutant political-ideological entities.

According to Gafița, the ideology of the extreme right is also characterized by a holographic-mimetism. In other words, the movements, parties, and paramilitary formations attached to it, copy or reproduce earlier models without having a real consistency. When the charismatic leader decides their futility or dictatorial regimes decay, they disappear like a hologram. Thus, these entities become simple projections of the totalitarian utopia. While the single party is a hologram of the nation-state, the political police appear as a mimetic projection

of the state police. The principle could also apply to the political religion of ideology. It is only a hologram of religion, a pseudo-religion related to the immanent entities: the true God is replaced either by the single party (in communism) or by the Leader (in Fascism / Nazism); the Doctrine (Dogma) is simply a lie, which repeated indefinitely offers the illusion of absolute truth. In addition, the transcendence of totalitarian ideology is apparent and emptied of Sacred. For example, in Nazi Germany, the "Führerprinzip" appears as a mimetic and hideous hypostasis of the Christian or Apostles' Creed. The totalitarian messianism is not a genuine one, but a viral-metamorphic form of Judeo-Christian belief. "Saviours" like Mussolini or Hitler did not bring the salvation, but rather the physical and moral destruction of their peoples and countries.

The author reminds his readers that the irrational logic has to be considered, since irrationalism is one of the main "pathogens" of "viral-metamorphic infection" for rationalist, enlightenment political thinking. It manifests itself in a multitude of domains, having ideologically, ontologically, epistemologically, ethically, anthropologically, culturally, and spiritually implications. Concerning the irrational thinking in interwar Romania, he underlines the harmoniously and synergistically integration into the European current, both in terms of the general, ideological framework and the attachment of its representatives to the totalitarian right-wing political model.

In order to understand the complicated relations between society, democracy, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism, but especially to reveal the nuances of the viral-metamorphic transition from the open (pluralistic) societal type to the totalitarian (non-pluralistic) model, the author's ideas are linked to those of great thinkers such as Henri Bergson, Eric Voegelin or Karl Raimund Popper. The comparative analysis of their theories on the dichotomy open - closed society, as well as their ideological interferences, can decrypt the viral metamorphism of the interwar extreme right-wing. Transition from liberal democracy to conservative autocratic regimes and further to totalitarianism (Fascism, Nazism) or fascistoid systems (Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, the National Legionary State of Romania, etc.) is related - in the opinion of Vlad Gafița - to "the ideological infection of the open democratic society, resulting in variations of the closed society (semi-open, partially closed, or total closed society)".

The author states that the transformation / destruction of politics (in a pluralistic sense) have occurred through the metamorphic-viral pervert of law, public sphere (civil society), autonomous man on a rational plane, Christianity, modernity, morality. This phenomenon was also facilitated by the defects, weaknesses or internal systemic errors of democracy. These include its

conceptual and semantic complexity and ambiguity, relativism and ideological permeability of pluralist regimes, confusion between majority and consensus, egalitarian and libertarian character, superficiality of demos-revolution relations, the fact that democratic principles seem to be counter-nature, lack of aesthetics and hierarchy in the pluralistic systems' organization and structuring, the apparent overlap between democracy and populism, etc.

Appreciating the author's effort to theorize the mutations and action's pattern of the extreme right ideology, it would have been interesting to discover (except the negative effects of conservative-collectivist romanticism) the consequences of Enlightenment individualism. It can reveal specific anti-modern and anti-democratic patterns that influenced the philosophical sources of right-wing extremism. For instance, the Nietzschean theory of will to power represents a critique of collectivism. In addition, it would be appropriate to augment the genealogy of theoretical ideas proposed by the author with a genealogy / phenomenological archaeology, as long as the origins are sought not only in theories, but also in practices or public discourses. The political context proved that the totalitarian idea is older than democratic idea. Besides, the democracy appears in different ways from one state to another, although it starts from general antidemocratic realities.

Concluding, *Ideational origins of right-wing totalitarianism. Landmarks of viral-metamorphic theory* deserves to be read. It is not an easy book (due to the sophisticated, theoretical blend of understanding in the "viral-metamorphic perspective" of the right-wing totalitarianism's ideological peculiarities), but a complex one. It urges reflection on political transitions in general, warning about the temptations of radicalisms, increasingly present in the contemporary ideological approaches.

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