

SHAPING POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA'S INTELLIGENCE CULTURE: THE DE-COMMUNIZATION OF PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract: *The paper explores the impact of the Securitate archives' declassification upon the intelligence culture in post-communist Romania. It starts from the premise that the declassification of the Securitate archives, seen as a social topic, has had a significant influence on perceptions of national security and on the public profile of the institutions with responsibilities in national security. Starting from this preliminary observation, our aim is to explore the cultural artefacts inspired by the Securitate theme, in other words the alternative cultural forms of expression which along with classic informative processes have the potential to function as a barometer of intelligence culture while also being a factor in influencing and shaping the culture of intelligence. Further on, the paper will analyze the mechanisms emplaced in appropriating and renegotiating the topics of Securitate, archives, lustration and de-communization within the cultural space in Romania. Last but not least and perhaps risking to attach an emotional tone, the paper is aimed to contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of a key historical period that few states share but that keeps imprinting not only national collective imaginary but the overall structure of the debate about freedom, justice and democracy at a global scale.*

Keywords: *intelligence culture; perception; de-communisation; cultural memory; mythology*

1. INTRODUCTION

Intelligence culture in the states that share a democratic present and a communist past, is easily understandable and needs no further justification. In these countries, intelligence culture has developed as a committed approach in the attempt of appropriately positioning institutions of security in the collective imaginary. More directly, in Central and Eastern Europe, developing an intelligence culture is an endeavor which we can date back to early post-communist regimes of the late 80s and early 90s. These initiatives played a central role in the construction of the newly independent states, which began the long and difficult journey towards creating strong, democratic systems. However, although all these states started their democratic journey in a fairly similar moment, the cultural, geographical, historical and socio-psychological variables have taken them along distinct paths in which the transition was differently felt, constructed and imprinted in the collective mentality.

One of the ways in which we can foster a better understanding of the intelligence culture is by investigating perceptions on national security institutions, as well as related topics. Relevant

aspects of this investigation can be found in the analyses performed on public perceptions of security risks and civil rights (i.e. surveys published by Institutul Român pentru Evaluare și Strategie - in cooperation with Asociația Română pentru Evaluare și Strategie, available at www.ires.com.ro). These results illustrate the latent character of mentioned representations and their powerful impact in terms of perception. It must be emphasized that these representations are generated by a particular context that has systematically fed the social representation of the intelligence services as omniscient and omnipresent forces. It is easy then to understand why any attempt to develop an intelligence culture in Romania was conducted on an extremely fragile foundation, representations of intelligence being associated with the repressive apparatus of the communist state. Paradoxically, it is this very fragility that has become a strong argument in favour of a whole range of initiatives to strengthen security and intelligence culture. We can therefore argue that historical realities made Romania a good case study for those interested in investigating intelligence culture.

Today this process of reflection is even more necessary because its implications have a strong

impact on the mind frame of both "ordinary citizens", and policymakers. For the latter especially, the past can generate two types of perceptions: people either believe intelligence services own absolute and all-pervasive power or they distrust intelligence, perceive it negatively and reject any initiative coming from the services (including the intelligence products).

2. THE SYMBOLIC POWER OF LUSTRATION: POST-COMMUNIST (RE)INTERPRETATIONS

One of the questions intelligence culture as a field of study needs to address in the new democracies is how to deal with the trauma of the communist past? The difficulty of advancing an answer comes from the fact that the post communist elites of society were more than involved in collaboration with the former regime. Similarly to other states of Central and Eastern Europe, Romania was being faced at the time with the demand to do justice and reform the political and social structures of society. From this point of view, evaluating the relation between past experience and the process of democratic consolidation is difficult as, in Romania, talking about the Communist past is not only a problem of historiography, but rather a challenge with ethical and political reverberations and stakes.

Furthermore, the debate about the limits of the lustration process and the delays of de-communization have systematically and continuously marked the 26 years of democracy. The long duration and the aggressive content of the debates, the angles taken by stakeholders often overshadowed the academic approach. We can then argue that this particular theme is in fact the core theme that shaped the collective mindset and implicitly the core of any debate about the national intelligence culture. In addition it reflects one of the most delicate experiences of the modern world.

Lustration (from Latin *lustratio* - "purification by sacrifice") has a long history. *Lustratio* was used in medieval times to refer to a sacrifice or a ceremony aimed at purifying cities, fields or populations contaminated of crime, sickness or other trouble. It re-entered the political vocabulary in 1989, after the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe when it got a wider circulation in the context of the conflicts between former communists and adherents of democratic liberalism.

The idea of cleansing was overemphasized during past and present debates within the post-communist society of the Central and Eastern Europe, and it attracted the sense of "purification": the purification of state organizations from their "sins" under the communist regime. More broadly, it is related to the process of "vetting", understood as an evaluation and examination process in order to eliminate abusive and corruptive officials through due procedure. Lustration also involves the opening of the archives belonging to the former political police, an act which is perhaps the most important sign of "Communism abolishment". In fact, various states adopted laws regarding the lustration, some of which were significantly stricter than others, entitling the access to one's own Securitate file. In Romania, the term "lustration" was introduced after the 1989 revolution and has been used since for designating the process of removing former communist dignitaries and former officers of the political police as part of the post-communist political process.

However though, beyond assuming a new legislation (Law no. 187 from December 1999, regarding people's access to their personal files and the disclosure of the Securitate as the political police), and setting up special structures to facilitate the research of the archives belonging to the former Securitate, an example being the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS), the relatively tortuous evolution of Romania towards reconciliation with the communist Past has proved once again that the application of lustration is "a highly sensitive issue", which has "questionable results" (Michnik, 1998). Therefore, a number of scientific contributions, like those of Paul Dragoș Petrescu (2007) or Paul Madrell (2018) shed light on the process, which, beyond their sometimes critical appreciations, give us the chance to understand the transition process in a structured and constructive manner. But if the opening of the archives and the process of assuming this at both legislative and executive levels can be relatively easy to reconstruct by using historical data, other questions, that we consider necessary to be addressed, are more problematic: what is the content of the archives and to what extent (only) its investigation can provide clear answers and restore in a fair and objective way a past that most of us don't want to address anymore and prefer to forget?

3. THE DECLASSIFICATION OF THE SECURITATE'S ARCHIVES: FACTS AND LIMITS

Facts about the current status of lustration in Romania show that on December 27, 2006, the Romanian Intelligence Service delivered the documents kept in the Securitate Archives to the National Council for the Study of the Securitate. Within this process, 1,587,831 dossiers were submitted, containing 1,930,062 volumes, and representing over 18,000 linear meters of archives. Also, the Romanian Intelligence Service sent the CNSAS management about 1,400,000 record files from the cabinets of the Securitate and over 700,000 records from the database of the former Information and Documentation Centre. To enable the consultation and expeditious retrieval of files and records towards the Council, the SRI also provided this institution with the digital records of these files. Documents that were transmitted came from the Central Archive of the Romanian Intelligence Service and the 40 county archives of the institution (official data according to www.sri.ro).

Also, according to the assessments of the Romanian Intelligence Service, about 75,000 cases, mainly on issues of counter-terrorism and counterintelligence, have remained in the Archive of the Romanian Intelligence Service. According to the law, the CNSAS has access to the files through the Joint Committee. Furthermore, within the Joint Committee and in the context of periodic reevaluation of the content of the archives, the specialists working at the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives and the Romanian Intelligence Service established that some files created by the former organs of the Securitate that deal with national security, are to be declassified. As a result, those folders were handed over to the management of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, having been transferred on March 21, 2016, to the CNSAS warehouse in Popesti-Leordeni (www.sri.ro).

Thus, thanks to Law no. 187/1999, a good part of the archives of the former Securitate, namely those that don't contain information affecting national security, have become accessible to a wide category of people interested in the history of the second half of the 20th century, such as the people who were pursued by the Securitate. But on this occasion, many argue that a "Pandora's box" has been opened; there have been numerous questions related to the information recorded in the Securitate files and thus the extent to which the

declassification of these archives can truly lead to the desired effect of "social and political cleansing". Not only that such information was decontextualized, but even where, at least apparently, the file remained intact, the data proved to be, quite frequently, fabricated truths. The first signs in this regard came from the victims, who read about their "official" life. This observation on the limits of reconstructing the communist past based on the archives of the former Securitate was also confirmed by experienced historians and researchers involved in this complex process.

It should be emphasized that the Securitate documents are largely the result of a process of information gathering through informative networks. The information had been provided by the tens and hundreds of thousands of informants (over the four decades of existence), whether they were skilled or unskilled, permanent or occasional, represented the raw data used in elaborating reports, analytical notes and summaries. Obviously, they had to be corroborated with information obtained through operative techniques, like the interception of letters or surveillance. But this was not a given, professionalism being many times an aspiration. So the first level of distortion is found in the way the notes were written. Some informants supplied numerous notes based on their imagination, motivated by financial benefits or the desire to take revenge. Statements obtained during the investigations and then inserted in the Securitate files could not be used in historical research in the first stage, and only after a serious critical analysis they were likely to be a source for the historians. Very often, after being the subject of great torture used by the investigators, prisoners often preferred to sign fabricated testimonials.

Also, it is important to note that in no other country in Central and Eastern Europe the totalitarian and dictatorship system had such longevity and intensity as in Romania. Considering the lack of de-Stalinization and of real reforms in Romania, as well as the personality cult, a topsyturvy Romanian exceptionalism can be assumed. Despite the fact that a mini-liberalization took place in the 60s (1963-1964, 1965-1971), the regime had maintained however an unwavering absolute domination on society, economy and culture throughout the entire communist period (1948-1989).

Obviously, studying the communist regime in Romania is not possible without detailed analysis of the role played by the Securitate therein. By creating such a huge volume of documents, the

Securitate system has shaped the reality of the Romanian society “in its own image”. But despite the existing reflexes of a so-called “File syndrome” still present in the Romanian society, historical research must delineate from stereotypical approach of the past. Critical analysis of the historical sources is badly needed for the last 50 years not to remain a simple “reflection of the Securitate reports”.

4. THE POST-COMMUNIST PUBLIC CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE. THE ROLE OF FILM IN DEFINING IMAGES OF THE SECURITATE

The recovery of a traumatic past and the reconciliation with the past is a complex process, involving various factors of which only a few are manifested. From this point of view and in the spirit of intelligence culture, we must operate with the distinction between history and memory. If we define intelligence culture as a complex aggregation of ideas, responses and behaviors in relation with intelligence, then the focus must be less on the reconstruction of the process but rather on the manner past events have shaped the collective memory.

Starting from the impact of the violent exit from communism has had on the Romanian democracy, we consider that one of the dimensions that needs to be investigated is the way in which the actions of the Securitate found a place in the public sphere, especially through cultural productions. Such narratives come as complementary alternatives to the academic narratives of historians (as archive research or memories).

From the perspective of the intelligence culture, the investigation of popular culture’s productions, representations, artifacts and trends has the potential to reveal and explain the deviated perceptions which many times mark our understanding of intelligence and intelligence services. It is otherwise an idea fully assumed by academic literature that knowledge and people’s conceptualizations (and beliefs) are enhanced by the propensity of newspaper articles, cinema productions and literature at the expense of academic sources of information.

The need to analyse cultural productions in relation with intelligence culture is based on an understanding of the fact that every society has its own mythology, its own set of persistent narratives, tropes, and beliefs that “spell out that society’s origins, evolution, values and character”

and also “its image of the community of which that society is said to consist” (O’Meara *et al.*, 2016: 27).

Myth is a “discourse opposed both to truth (myth is fiction) and to the rational (myth is absurd)” (Overing *apud* Tănăsioiu, 2005: 114). Simply put, myths are commonly repeated stories about past which are the central mechanism of what can be defined as “cultural memory”. In other words, every society advances and embraces a shared view of the past which has the potential of defining identity, values and the boundaries of that imagined community also tracing the frontier between the “included” and the “excluded” ones.

Post-communism is a particular case study. It is bound to be a highly “mythologised” era derived from its own nature: up until not very far ago, “post-communism was a myth in itself, as life after communism was unthinkable” (Tănăsioiu, 2005: 115). Secondly, the fall of communism led to “a discursive vacuum” which needed to be filled up with a language able to replace a defunct vocabulary. In this context, the old myths have been strengthened (as the myth of the Western savior) and new ones were created. The latter, true urban legend, issued from the context itself, such as “Arab terrorists” (given the good relationships Ceausescu had with Arab countries), “Bucharest underground” (as withdrawal tunnels for Ceausescu and his family) or “water poisoning in Bucharest”. Moreover, the violent historical circumstances, coupled with above mentioned stories, generated immediate effects that made Romania a special case: sending all former officers of the Securitate to prison, closing down its intelligence services etc. – which made Romania the only country to begin its democratic destiny, in a very complicated period, without intelligence.

Cultural memory as preserved in media productions such films serve as mnemonic triggers to initiate meanings associated to past events. The impact of cultural memory as seen by A. Assman (2011) comes from its mere characteristics: it is “freely built according to the demands of the respective present” and it serves as a compelling idea for the future. Although these stories reflect with a greater or lesser degree of accuracy past events, if persistently repeated and invoked, they acquire the force of truth. Therefore, while myths are “crucial to the world view and self-image of the people” (Bruce, 1993 *apud* O’Meara *et al.*, 2016: 28), they are also partial, incomplete and privileging only one of the competitive narratives of an impossible to be comprised past.

As a special type of cultural production, the film represents a material useful in exploring the ways in which post-communist ideas propagate, reproduce, contest and reflect the issue of security and its related topics. Compared to other forms of artistic expression, films are one of the most influential communication channels, having the potential of making the significant difference between those interests, values and social norms which are legitimate and which are not. Films play a vital role in imagining the universe and in shaping the vocabulary, in establishing the mental maps, mindsets, and emotional framework through which we think about ourselves, and our country and the national security. And they can also be considered forms for expressing every society's own social organization of forgetting the past. Because whatever the filmmakers' intentions, no film can escape the cultural, social and political context in which it is made. In this sense, "films are veritable time capsules" (Dan O'Meara *et al*, 2016: 225) deeply embedded with the prevalent values, ideas and social relations of their times.

Among the responses identified by mass communication theorists on the causes of power and force influencing cinematographic communication are: (1) images promoted by film convert easily into mental images; (2) multiplicity and versatility of included codes undertake a large area of cognitive and affective reception; (3) film is a means of evasion, which allows triggering the mechanistic identification (living by proxy); (4) by joining stimuli, experience is characterized by intensity; (5) the feeling of ubiquity and intimacy enhances the impact. Having in mind the need to objectively investigate intelligence culture, it is less relevant if the myths, as they are taken up and promoted by cultural production are true or false:

It is not its truthfulness that is relevant, but its very existence, its content and the fact that there is a community that believes in it (Hosking & Schopflin, 1997:19).

Therefore, in establishing the link between post-communist myths of intelligence and cultural productions, the analysis of myths should prevail, as well as the ways they can be used as a tool for understanding the community or the nation.

In addition, starting from the premise that films function as barometers reflecting this complex social, political and cultural aggregation while also shaping and legitimizing it and in line with our interest and research, we opted for the analysis of post-communist film about Securitate.

5. *QUOD ERAM DEMONSTRANDUM*: PRINCIPAL TENETS OF A POST-COMMUNIST MYTHOLOGY

The film "Quod Eram Demonstrandum" is built around the attempts of a brilliant Romanian mathematician, Sorin, to publish his work in Western journals in 1984. Sorin refuses to comply with "the rules of that time", refuses to become a member of the Communist Party and his academic career suffers the consequences. His profile, basically unproblematic for the communist regime (he is not engaged in politics and his main research concerns mathematics), changes from the moment he tries to submit an article to an academic publication and comes to the attention of the Securitate. His friend and colleague at the university, Elena, who is asked to be the messenger for his paper, wishes to join her husband, an academic who left Romania and had never returned. She also becomes persecuted by the regime. Alecu, the representative character for the Securitate body who interacts with Sorin and Elena, has an ambivalent status. He is a divorcee, a status that was profoundly criticized in the communist era, he cannot be promoted and therefore, to be recognized his merits, he makes sustained efforts by documenting the case of Sorin, referred as "Hoinaru" (equivalent in English for "The Wanderer").

By playing back stories of life on both fronts (ordinary people - subjects of the Securitate's actions, and those officers who investigate the cases), in a context of political, social and cultural coercion and limitation of all action, the movie captures at small-scale the Romania of the 1980s and the image of the Securitate, an institution with great potential to shape human destiny and pervert characters.

The film breaths and plays fairly, tragically, having both a subtle and an ironic atmosphere of a traumatic period in the history of Romania. A history that perverted characters, a time that promoted fake human values, a daily life kept prisoner between physical, professional and moral borders, carefully established in advance. Needless to say their consequences are not fully eradicated today.

Table1. *Quod Eram Demonstrandum*: Principal tenets of the post-communist consensus

The image of the Securitate	power instrument that enforces and exercises pressure on society members
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	omniscient all-powerful	
The grammar of power	consensual relation between the actions, objectives, and the ideology a discourse gap between propaganda and every day reality (regarding living standards)	
	society cleavage: 'them' versus 'us'	
The myth of salvation	the West as the place of all options/prosperity catalyzes despair and provides fast and unequivocal explanations	
The past- present nexus	symbolic framework of de-communication and lustration the fate of values, memory, and ideas in communist and post- communist societ	

deeply illustrative era for the communist period. Its core elements were at the time intensely promoted by radio and television. Their main propaganda role was to 'testify' to how well people lived in Romania, in the best society ever, a golden age, under the greatest leader. In reality, everything was gray, and this "gray colour" has a symbolic dimension (in the sense of colourless). It is emphasized by the fact that the film is in black and white. Not accidentally, the period the film depicts are the 80s, when, for financial reasons, Romania had broken almost all contact with the outside world. This decision generated harmful effects on the academics who were not allowed to foster cultural and scientific contacts, buy specialized magazines or books, or attend conferences abroad (these were accessible only to party members who were also collaborators of the Securitate).

The social system is based on duplicity, treason, schizophrenic relationships, dictatorship over human needs, memories, and hopes, and the almost complete control of the communist party/ of the Securitate over human activities. The film thus depicts a deeply divided society, between those who were part of the Securitate (having a special status and being allowed access to a range of resources) and the "rest", whose lives were marked by the "non-collaboration" with the Securitate.

The narrative is also marked by a red thread, envisioned as the "space of all possibilities", and the idea that only foreign countries/ the West can offer the chance of a personal and professional achievement. Moreover, the projection of a better destiny which can be fulfilled only in the West is constantly reiterated throughout the entire film. The idea is systematically voiced by the characters and depicted in their life experiences. Thus, the film anchors its main elements within a mythology embracing the myth of salvation as the ideological surrogate. This myth functioned throughout Romania as an ideological surrogate whose main function was to unify the public discourse and to provide the citizens with an easily recognizable source of identity. This myth has also favored the politics of anger and resentment in the majority of communist countries, concentrating the feeling of despair, while providing fast, clear-cut explanations for the causes of the ongoing troubles. In the aftermath of the 1989 revolution, the myth of salvation took shape in a European Union and a North-Atlantic Alliance that will save us. The discourse around the idea of a savior, provider of all goods, as "Europe" and "NATO", builds on the promise of a better future and the arrival of a Golden Era.

In this film, "the image of the Securitate" is introduced through people's perceptions of the role it had within society and the reflection of an omnipotent institution. Its role is to put pressure on ordinary people. As one character says, its role is "to give us a hard time." This role is not a stake in itself or a strategic goal. It is rather the image of hopelessness and lack of concerted action at national level. The omniscient and omnipotent character of the Securitate is depicted by the Securitate officer who proves to be able to change roles, being present in different courts and in different situations of controlling destinies (he is an officer but also the clerk from the Passports Office contacting Elena to force her to betray her colleague). The Securitate has the potential to influence the destinies and to exercise control of the destinies of the characters. Like an institutional master puppeteer.

In terms of how "the grammar of power" is rendered, it must be said that the film contains a consensual relationship between the actions, objectives, the ideology of that time, all illustrated by the characters' life stories. The film depicts a

Interestingly, the entire process of making the movie also testifies to the relationship between the communist past – and the democratic present. 26 years after the breaking of communism, trying to find original pieces (Coral computers manufactured in the 80s in Romania, Dacia cars, Ceaușescu paintings, and handmade paper shredders) proved an impossible mission. Once again, one can see how brutal the break with the past occurred in Romania providing additional arguments to understand the symbolic register of de-communization and lustration.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The post-communist history proves that lustration is a highly sensitive issue, and Romania was certainly not an exception in this regard. Debate over the success or failure of the process of lustration in Romania should be understood in the broader political context of regional relations in the early 1990s, which had its fertile soil for “collective passions, fears, illusions, and disappointments” (Tismăneanu, 1998:6).

Romania's case on the other hand illustrates the transition from a violent exit from communism to democracy and the impact of historically imprinted latent perceptions on this complex and difficult process. Therefore we would argue further research is needed on less investigated aspects of intelligence culture: the type and degree of citizens' involvement in shaping the post-communist debate on security, the extent to which we can talk about the “de-communisation of institutions” or/ and the “de-communisation of people and of their perceptions”, the extent to which the process of lustration was accompanied in Romania by a polarization of society: us versus them or continuity in constructing the figures of the “Other” as a demonic figure to meet practical political aims.

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