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## **FROM “UNDER THE SHADOW OF DEATH”: CHOOSING THE LEFT AS A LIFE OPTION**

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**Abstract:** Drawing on scholarship on transnationalism, this paper resorts to concepts such as “trans-ethnic identity” and “multiple social identities” for making sense of two autobiographical writings authored by scholars who articulated a leftist counter-memory in telling their life stories spanning before, during, and after Romanian socialism. The study compares and contrasts the memoirs of Andrei Roth and Ion Ianoși, arguing that their retrospective writings document the articulation of a different strand of memorialistic literature that challenges the hegemonic anti-communist politics of memory. By never recanting their leftist beliefs, their writings give voice to a Marxian counter-memorialistic account of the past that enriches the post-communist memoryscape shaped by what we suggest calling the carceral paradigm of Romanian communism.

**Keywords:** autobiography, anti-communism, multiple minority status, politics of memory, Romanian communism

### **Politics of Memory in Post-Communist Romania: Between Hegemony and Counter-Memory**

In the aftermath of the Revolution of December 1989, an outburst of memory flooded Romanian public culture. Repressed long after the amnesty of 1964 put an end to the political terror unleashed by the Socialist regime that came to power in the wake of the Second World War, the memory of the Romanian Gulag could finally

articulate itself in the public sphere only after the toppling of the communist system. Consequently, during the long transition to democracy, Romanian collective memory of communism had taken shape primarily from the memorialistic literature written by the former victims of the regime. Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that the memory of Romanian communism had taken traumatic undertones, as the detention memoirs were the effusion of the traumas suffered by the political victims of the former regime within its ghastly network of concentration camps.

Undoubtedly, this purulent outpouring of memory from the still unhealed wounds inflicted by the carceral experience of the Romanian Gulag brought to the fore of public awareness a consubstantial part of the communist experience. But beyond recovering from the grave of public oblivion the carceral experience of Romanian communism, the detention memorialistic literature was also instrumental in imposing the hermeneutic norm of *visceral anti-communism* in interpreting (and invariably condemning) the communist past. Against the background of this stark domination not only of an imperative “ethics of unforgetfulness” (Lovinescu, 2008), but of a *tout court* condemning ethos of communism prescribed by the detention memorialistic literature, dissenting voices sporadically appeared. Going against the tidal wave of the prison memoirs, now and again retrospective writings of people who remembered the lives they lived not in the cages of communist prisons, but in the non-repressive institutions of the Socialist order have been published.

After the appearance of the Ion Ianoși’s book *Internaționala mea. Cronica unei vieți* (My International. The Chronical of a Life) in 2012, the Marxian memorialistic voice, stifled under the collective groaning of pain echoing from the prison memorialistic literature, articulated itself with the publication in Romanian of Andrei Roth’s memoir, *Opțiunile mele* (My Options) in 2014. Written in 2005 and published in Hungarian at Mentor Publishing House a year later, Andrei Roth’s memories of his existential options chronologically precede Ion Ianoși’s biographical chronicle, although the latter had also explained his own life choices back in 1989, which makes him, as himself suggests, a “relapsing memorialist” (Ianoși, 1989; 2012, 3).

This paper draws on concepts developed in transnationalism studies, such as “trans-ethnic identity” (Upegui-Hernández 249) and “multiple social identities”

(Miller *et al* 8), in analyzing the memoirs of two Romanian scholars – Andrei Roth and Ion Ianoși – whose writings have implicitly challenged the cultural hegemony in the Romanian post-communist politics of memory. The paper will proceed by presenting, first, the similarity of the life trajectories of Roth and Ianoși, defined by their shared status of ethnic minorities (Jewish Hungarians) living in the Romanian society. This will allow us to reflect upon the entanglement between macro-structural factors and personal biography. It then follows closely Andrei Roth’s existential choices, among whom his enrolment in the Communist Party in the context of the Second World War turned out to be the most consequential for his life path spanning throughout the Socialist period and beyond. Roth’s reflection on the interwar period, real Socialism, and post-communist times, together with Ianoși’s own accounts of these topics, will occasion us to engage critically with the anti-communist politics of remembering that exert a hegemonic dominion in the current Romanian public culture.

### **The Condition of “Multiple Minority”: Between Trans-ethnicity and Social Liminality**

Presenting the two scholars – Andrei Roth and Ion Ianoși – side by side is far from accidental. Their biographical journeys, social destinies, and intellectual professions of faith are grounded on an entire cluster of structural resemblances and existential choices that set their lives on similar trajectories. The two’s parallel lives, which started from similar starting points, have followed similar life pathways propelled by the same political choices and ideological commitments, and reached to similar professional and intellectual destinations, provide an open invitation to reflect upon *the structural determination of individual biography*. They were born only a year apart – Andrei Roth in 1927, Ion Ianoși in 1928 – in similar urban settings, the multi-ethnic and pluri-confessional thriving towns of the former Austrian Empire, Timișoara and Brașov respectively. Besides time and place, they were both born within families of Magyar Jews (Roth into a petty-bourgeoisie family observing the rules of Neolog Judaism, Ianoși into a family pertaining to what Karl Marx labeled as “haute” bourgeoisie, with freethinking parents who broke with the religious tradition of Judaism). Of lasting importance directly deriving from this social origin was that they were both deeply impressed by the condition of “multiple minority” which will define their social and intellectual identities (Roth, *Optiunile*,

73; Ianoși, *Internaționala*, 6).

Their “trans-ethnicity” implied by the condition of multiple minority came with both blessings and curses. For both of them, the advantage of speaking numerous languages (Hungarian as native, German, Romanian; Roth also spoke French and English, while Ianoși learned Russian) and of belonging simultaneously to multiple cultural spaces was offset by their status of *social liminality*, given by the ambivalence (or perhaps even trivalence) inherent in their belonging to different ethnic groups (van Gennep, 1960 [1909]; Turner, 1969).<sup>1</sup> In Andrei Roth’s case, this condition of liminality gained an even more salient dimension, given his alienation from his parents’ religion (Ianoși grew up, as already mentioned, in a family that already made the step towards secularization. Roth had to go through the extra pains of dislodging himself out of the religious communion of belief of his family).

The two are brought together not only by their common social origin, the condition of multiple minority, and the status of social liminality, but also by the traumatic experiences of their childhood and adolescence. That they were born after the Great War, and not before, has been what one could oxymoronically call a “fatidical chance.” Both have witnessed helplessly, together with their increasingly worried families, to the accelerating fascistization of their country and, along with this, have felt firsthand the consequences of living in a society which was taking ever more decisive steps towards becoming a *persecuting society* (Moore, 1987). During Antonescu’s regime, the persecuting society ended up becoming a full-fledged *genocidal society*, massacring, in its utopian aspiration of national rebirth, its ethnic minorities accused of tainting the purity of Romanianism (Solonari, 2015). Both of them were, as soon as the National Legionary State was proclaimed in 1940, direct victims of anti-Semitic state policies. First to open the way for official state discriminations was the restriction of *numerus clausus*, which limited the number of students admitted to high school and universities to the percentage represented by their ethnic community within the Romanian society (Livezeanu 238).<sup>2</sup> Due to

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of “liminality” was coined by Arnold van Gennep in his 1909 book, *The Rites of Passage*, and was worked out subsequently by Victor W. Turner. It signifies a threshold position in the social structure, “between and betwixt” positions assigned by social order.

<sup>2</sup> According to the 1930 *General Census of the Population of Romania*, in Greater Romania there were 71.89 percent Romanians and only 4.03 percent Jews. However, in the student population, Jews were representing 14.2 percent, hence the source of the Romanians’ claim for *numerus clausus*. What the proponents of the *numerus clausus* policy were not saying was that Romanians themselves were overrepresented in the university student body, as Romanians were accounting for 79.9 percent of the total of 30,228 students, almost 10 percent more than their proportion in the general population.

his good grades, Andrei Roth managed to avoid the effects of the new law, as he was allowed to continue in the public schooling system. But all his luck (or rather, his merits within a society which displayed what could be called as a "discriminatory meritocracy" – another example of a conceptual oxymoron which is fully justified by the nature of the Romanian interwar reality) would eventually turn out to be ill-boding. That he escaped from the proportional purging imposed by the policy of *numerus clausus* turned against him, as he was now being exposed daily to "the offenses, vexations, and maltreating from the part of teachers and students" in a fascistized state (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 76). Neither Ianoși was immune to the persecutions of his Romanian colleagues belonging to the ethnic majority. In his memoir, he was even more explicit in detailing the humiliations he underwent, to the dismay of his wife who pledged him never to remind of those terrifying episodes. Defying her interdiction, Ianoși described in a graphic manner the horrific episode occurred in the classroom, where colleagues restrained him and stained him with snot all across his face. The paradoxical salvation out of such everyday humiliations came several weeks later, with the radicalization of *numerus clausus* into *numerus nullus*, which meant that all Jews were purged from secondary and superior public schooling.

Both of them were expelled from the state high school to which they were enrolled and forced to continue their studies, in a regime of clandestinity, to private unauthorized gymnasia supported financially by the Jewish community. They were both to bore sight to the tragedies fell upon their families, as they bore witness to terrible scenes where their fathers, alongside all the others male Jews of the town, were brought together by soldiers armed with bayonets and then escorted into forced labour camps. The dismissals of Jews from state jobs, as well as the confiscation of properties within the policy of "Romanianizing" the economy, have deepened the drama befell upon the Jewish community. All these biographical resemblances are completed by similarities regarding their *intellectual proclivity*. Beyond the fact that both of them showed an acute interest in books and discovered their intellectual vocation early on, both future scholars have sensed the irresistible attraction of aesthetics and philosophy. Ianoși went on to build his academic career on aesthetics, while Roth, although a sociologist by formation with a philosophical predilection for theorizing, was also a *connoisseur* in the field of aesthetics, as his book in which he offers a sociological reading of Shakespeare fully reveals (Roth,

1988).

### **The Allure of the Left: Stepping in the Minefield of Political Engagement**

This is the dramatic socio-political background against which the protagonists defined themselves as autonomous persons by making their first existential choices. The similarities of their life options, extended to even what appear to be as superficial coincidences, continue to be utterly striking, highlighting not only the existence of a certain life pattern, but also the structural determination of individual biography. After he tried unsuccessfully in the summer of 1944 to make contact with the communist movement outlawed since 1924, Andrei Roth joins the communist youth organization immediately after the coup d'état of August 23. Graduating his short apprenticeship in the educational cell of the youth organization he eventually came to lead, Roth decides to step in definitively "on the minefield of political engagement" (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 102). On March 5, 1945, Andrei Roth enters the Party, joining the branch from Arad (the city of the memorialist's youth) recently established in the communists' effort to re-organize the Party, a process started immediately after the turning of Romanian arms from fighting with Wehrmacht against the Red Army to fighting along Russians against Germany. He was yet to reach 18 years old. The next day – March 6, 1945 – was to be the decisive day in the remaking of Romanian political order, when the first communist government, led by Petru Groza, was invested. This calendrical order would serve him both in terms of personal pride and as evidence against potential accusations of political opportunism, by showing that, adhering to a party that was not yet in power, the reason of his enrolment in the Party was a strictly principial one. Confronted by the spectre of fascism that, as he himself had confessed, attempted ontologically on him and his family's existence, Andrei Roth took the path of radical anti-fascism (what communism presented to be at that time) out of a deep sense of "moral duty" (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 92). More opportunistic was Ion Ianoși. He signed up to the Union of Communist Youth (UTC) on August 30, 1945, a year after the turning of the Romanian arms against Germany. His father, instead, supported the Party as long as it was still functioning in illegality. Card-carrying Party member he became only on December 30, 1945. Just like Roth, he did not yet reach the age of 18. Both of them mention in their memoirs that their acceptance into the Party was non-statutory, since neither of them reached the statutory age of 18 years old (Ianoși,

*Internaționala*, 73; Roth, *Opțiunile*, 115). But who cared, rhetorically ask themselves both Roth and Ianoși, over such bureaucratic scruples during those troublous times?

Neither of them was religious. On the contrary, Andrei Roth embraced atheism – breaking with the religious tradition of his family was even one of his cardinal options – while Ion Ianoși, likewise, did not baptize his daughter, who will choose, after five decades, to be incinerated. The two do not mention each other in their memoirs, but their life paths must have crossed, at least during Ianoși's studies at Cluj (1947-1949), at the Hungarian Bolyai University, during which time Roth was finalizing his studies at the Romanian Victor Babeș University. If their common origins, condition, and left political sympathies did not bring them together, Nicolae (Miklós) Kallós, a good friend of both, could have been the social bridge. Both have pursued, early on, successful university careers, reaching eventually to full professorship (Roth at what had meanwhile become Babeș-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca in 1977 at 50 years of age, Ianoși sooner, at the University of Bucharest, and was elected in 2001 member of honour in the Romanian Academy). There are, to be sure, some differences that, in one way or another, have influenced their life trajectories and professional destinations. The most significant of them, with the most consequential effects, turned out to be Ianoși's willingness to go to study in the U.S.S.R., in contrast to Roth's refusal, although he was nominated to follow the same Eastern university path. In U.S.S.R., Ianoși became licensed in 1954 at Zhdanov State University from Leningrad, and a year later received the "aspirantura" from the same university, later equvalated with the title of "candidate in philosophical sciences" at the University of Bucharest.

This difference – among the few that can be attributed to structurally undetermined (or better said, *underdetermined*) personal choice – seems to be one of the factors responsible for the two's slightly different destinations within the power echelon: Ion Ianoși, "instructor" at the Romanian Communist Party's Central Committee, university professor and, after the regime change, honorary member of the Romanian Academy. Roth, too, got a fulminant career start in which he becomes university preparatory (1948), then teaching assistant (1949), and then, as lecturer (1951) to be named in 1957 the chief of the department of social sciences from Victor Babeș University as well as the chief of the section of philosophy in the Cluj branch of Romanian Academy. Reflecting upon his fast rise through the ranks of academia, Roth is modest enough as to downplay his personal merits while highlighting

structural and contextual powers at play. His account is thoroughly sociological in its explanatory prowess: his rise can be understood in structural terms as benefiting from a systemic window of opportunity. The purgings unleashed on political reasons after the regime change had produced a vacuum in the occupational structure that had to be filled. This situation accelerated the rate of professional upward mobility in comparison to regimes that are stable socio-politically, in which career development follows a slower, more settled, pace. After reaching this professional peak, his career development will slow down and eventually descend, as the initial advantage of his minority origins (his Jewishness) turned into a disadvantage in the context of the increasingly Romanianization of the Party and of the entire state apparatus. Undoubtedly, the university, as an important part of society's superstructure, responsible for the field of cultural production, was also affected by this nationalization process started after the intestine power struggles from within the Party settled in favour

of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who managed to remove the ethnic "minorities" forming the Ana Pauker-Vasile Luca group from party leadership. Against the background of this nationalization of the Party apparatus, another significant difference between the two becomes apparent. Without renegading his Jewishness, Ianoși had nonetheless taken steps towards Romanianizing his identity, first by adopting Romanian as *lingua prima*, and then, more importantly, by changing his name (in 1958, he who was born Ioan-Maximilian Steinberger became Ioan-Maximilian Ianoși, finally changing his family name once again to Jánosi). In contrast, Andrei Roth stood by his name, literally, keeping his name as to indicate bluntly his Jewishness. He reacted negatively to orthographical actions by which some editors attempted to Magyarize his name, writing it with o-acute – Róth.

### **Biographical Pathways: Between Structural Constraints and Agentic Volition**

Superseding these personal idiosyncrasies, structural resemblances (ethnic and socio-cultural origin, the condition of multiple minority, social liminality, intellectual proclivity, political choices, university careers) are indeed overwhelming. Precisely this biographic-existential pattern to which the lives of Andrei Roth and Ion Ianoși subscribe prompts us to once again reflect upon the relationship between structure and agency. Without denying to either one of them



the freedom of their choices that came to define their existence, their biographical parallelism suggests that we are dealing with a “structured volitionism,” i.e., with a spectrum of choices drastically limited by sovereign structural constraints within which free will can act. The formula of “structured volitionism” aims at highlighting that free choice – without being completely illusory – is nevertheless strongly conditioned by the structural possibilities existing at the respective moment. Consequently, the term insists on the idea that the subject’s self determination through free will is actually superdetermined by the objective structures existing in that particular moment in time. As a sociologist formed in the spirit of Marxist analysis – a structuralist analysis par excellence, as revealed abundantly clear in Marx’s assertion that “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their [objective] existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Marx 11-12) – Andrei Roth is careful not to underestimate the importance of objective conditions in structuring peoples’ personal biographies, including his own.

However, his inner ethical thrust along with his subjective will of freedom must have driven him to proclaim the Sartrean principle of human condition, that of the human being as irrevocably *condemned to freedom* (Sartre, 1946; Roth, *Opțiunile*, 59).<sup>3</sup> Immediately after asserting this principle, Andrei Roth hastily proceeds to relativize this grave (and absurd, I would add, and not in the sense of existentialist philosophy, but in a basic sociological one) verdict condemning the human being to freedom, thus amending the absolutist character of Sartre’s pronouncement. After all, without acknowledging human freedom in principle there can be *moral responsibility*, which hinges, invariably, on every individual, including the author of the book. Reaching a conciliatory compromise between Marxian structuralism and Sartrean voluntarism, Andrei Roth concludes that “we are what we were made to become by the bundle of multiple consequences of the pre-existing conditions and of our own choices – for which we are responsible” (Roth, 2014, 59). Seen under the light of this ethics of responsibility, the book of his memories is the outcome of a three-folded struggle: on the one hand, the struggle to unravel and shed light on, as much as possible, with the help of auto-socio-analysis, the particular bundle of structural constraints and personal choices behind his own

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<sup>3</sup> Sartre expressed his existentialist view on freedom as follows: “[M]an is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does.”

case. Secondly, the struggle to give “account,” before the “closing hour,” of the pathway he undertook, on his spiritual formation, as well as for his “searches and wanderings.”

Worthy of mentioning is that the author disavows the idea of post-factum justification. For this very reason, the book of his autobiographical memories is neither the book of regrets nor the book of rationalizations and repent (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 55-56). Consequently, the memorialist’s reflections on his biographical becoming cannot be included in the confessional genre of contrition and repentance for his political options (namely, for his Marxist conception of life, world, and the sense of social existence, in a word, for his Marxist worldview) that he embraced in his youth and held throughout his entire life. Finally, the cathartic finality pursued by the author in writing his memoir cannot be left unmentioned. In narrating his life and choices, Roth engaged in what could be called, paraphrasing a psychoanalytical concept, as *socio-biographical working-through*, whose aim is therapeutic healing achieved as an outcome of the critical examination of personal past. But the deepest reason for his effort, as the memorialist himself had confessed, was “the hope that the rigors imposed by the exercise of writing will help me analyze and understand the determining choices of [my] life” (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 56). Underpinning the entire endeavour there lies a fundamental struggle towards self-understanding, a basic striving towards making sense of himself. Subjecting himself to an act of critical self-analysis, Andrei Roth’s autobiographical book could be taken as a historical sociology of his self.

Prefigured already in the previous lines, three were Andrei Roth’s “cardinal choices.” All of them turned out to be biographical turning points, taken in troubled times during the tragic years of the Second World War. The first of them, of which he will never recant, was the choice in the realm of the spiritual – namely, to break free from the cognitive captivity of the ancestral religion. The second, that he will also never regret, was the choice of profession. With a pharmacist father, there was the expectation in the family that the son will continue upwards the parental profession. The young Endre was to pursue a career in medicine. Going along his father’s wishes, he was admitted to the Faculty of Medicine from Târgu Mureș, but, double-crossing his parents, Andrei also secretly enrolled to the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy from Cluj, where he will pursue his studies. Despite deceiving his trust, his father respected his choice, supporting Andrei’s professionalization in the

field of philosophy to which his son devoted himself. That the professional choice was a right one would later be vindicated by his achievements in sociology, a domain in which Andrei Roth was to become an accomplished scholar. Regarding his third choice, the political one, things are more complicated. Alongside Terike, Andrei Roth declares that "we have chosen each other and we have chosen together the path of social action. The choice of the partner was good, but the chosen path turned out to be bad. Was it a bad choice? In any case, it brought us into a cul-de-sac. It is debatable though if in those particular conditions we could have chosen for something else" (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 22).

The bad pathway was, of course, the path of the Party, the road of political engagement that, retrospectively, the memorialist came to regret. Propelled by the terror of fascism on the one side and the social ideals promoted by communism on the other one, Andrei Roth expressed his youthful revolt by venturing in the midst of political battle. Without readings from Marx or even Marxist readings, the young Roth (he was not yet eighteen years of age) was especially attracted by three aspects of Marxist ideology. Firstly, he admired the promise of *Socialist democratism* that he considered more appealing than the bourgeois type of democracy since it proclaimed the values of social dignity and political equality for the majority, not only for the affluent and the privileged. Secondly, he was impressed by the *Socialist internationalism* with its stress on human solidarity extended beyond ethnic belongings, as a counter-ideology to the doctrine of increasingly racializing ethnic nationalism that took shape during the interwar period with catastrophic consequences for humankind. Lastly, the third element he resonated with from the Marxist ideology was the *non-pecuniarism* of the communist doctrine, in which the value of a human being was given not by his or her financial situation, but by his or her capacity for spiritual creation and moral probity (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 94). He will continue to cherish these values, even after he came to regret his Party engagement, in whose name he made actions he himself had qualified, retrospectively, as reprehensible.

Such as, for instance, his involvement in the Parliamentary elections organized in November 1946. Already a Party member, Andrei Roth confesses he was aware of the Party's endeavors to defraud the results. This knowledge did not, however, stop him from participating in the electoral fraud: "following the indications, I voted multiple times" (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 145). Ianoși, relating the same

episode of the truncated elections, remembers that since he was not yet 18, he had no involvement in the success of the Party. He also knew of the rigging through the method of multiple voting. There were rumors that the motorcyclists who were transporting the ballot boxes had the task from the Party (in power from March 6, 1945) to change the real votes with false ones. The Bloc of Democratic Parties (B.P.D.) led by the Romanian Communist Party (P.C.R.) hailed a major electoral victory, claiming 69.8 percent of the votes. Neither did Ianoși seem to have been troubled by too many ethical scruples. How is it that individuals who entered the tumult of party politics driven by the longing for justice and moral imperatives have accepted with such nonchalance the electoral rigging? Both memorialists – and this is another resemblance that cannot be taken easily as just another accidental coincidence – invoke Machiavellian morality.

My answer to the question “How could my action be consistent with my moral consciousness?” is “According to the principle the end justifies the means.” I was convinced of the rightfulness and moral value of the end and I wanted to favor the creation of more democratic social relationships and of a more just society than the previous one. I believed and I wished that this could be made real. I was not doubting the nobility of this end and I have accepted that circumstantial necessities allow for using some filthy means to make it true (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 145).

I was suspecting the results of the elections to be falsified. I knew that some older “comrades” received several bulletins in order for them to vote in different sections. [...] Nevertheless, I have accepted the counterfeit figures published some days later. [...] And on top of the fact that I have accepted the rigging, I also felt satisfied, attributing it to Machiavelli. I have thus justified the principlessness principle “the end justifies the means” (Ianoși, *Internaționala*, 94).

### **Growing Out of Illusion: Between Political Displacement and Axiological Steadiness**

“I was profoundly wrong,” Roth was about to repent, after breaking free from the toils of illusion. “Precisely the oppressive and tyrannical nature of the new regime will oblige, based on this original sin, to the using of ever new instruments increasingly dirtier” (Roth, 2014, 145-146). Both memorialists will acknowledge themselves as prisoners of a chimera and start the painful process of breaking the spell they have fell under. Neither of them became seduced by temptations of

nationalism – which they both rejected categorically –, not even under its Zionist guise, to which they could have been more empathic. “Instead, I could be confiscated (and manipulated, I would add retrospectively) by the left radicalism – and it didn’t matter, for now, how authentic and how counterfeit was this ‘left’,” confesses Ianoși (*Internaționala* 93). Roth, as well, will admit that in his youth “I have become the victim of an illusion. I have engaged myself for an ideal which turned out to be a trap, as reality, instead of closing down the distance, was getting farther and farther from what I was wishing to happen” (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 402). Political apostasy? Not at all! Rather, it is a categorical *refusal of apostasy*. Repudiated is only the Party enrolment, as the memorialists are reproaching to themselves especially the non-dissident persistence within the Party, even long after they have awakened from the idealist naïveté. Why haven’t they struggled against the regime of whose historical inopportunities were now fully convinced, during the 70s and 80s? In a remarkable thrust of sincerity, Andrei Roth confesses that “I lacked the courage” (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 284). Neither did he have the courage, as he himself had acknowledged, to engage in acts of written dissidence (except for some subtleties and wordplays inserted within the published texts – “lizards,” as they were called in editorial jargon), postponing indefinitely, until he completely abandoned it, the project of writing a “*arcana sociologica*” – i.e., a secret sociology of real socialism (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 300). He nonetheless found the inner courage to engage in an examination of consciousness at the time of taking stock, and to subject his biography (values and beliefs, deeds and undeeds) to critical reflection. What is remarkable, in the case of both scholars, is this outright refusal of political apostasy (which should not be mistaken with Party apostasy). Freed from illusions, both memorialists have remained faithful to the values of the political left, the same ideals that motivated them in the first place to take the step towards enrolling in the Party. The path of the Party turned out to be the wrong one, but not the original values perverted by the Party.

Not even after he was forced by the changes occurred in 1989 to engage in a radical revision of his worldview founded upon Marxist social theory, Andrei Roth did not recant his left ideological commitments. Providing an uncommon example of political and axiological stubbornness, especially during post-communist transitional times, Roth asserted that “not even then [after he had revised his Marxist worldview], I did not switch from left to right. I still feel a great connection

to the democratic spirituality of the left, to which I still subscribe” (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 283). In post-communist times, remaining faithful to the ideological left by espousing Socialist values (social justice and equality, human solidarity, internationalism) turned out to be a minority reaction to the regime change. Paradigmatic is the case of Vladimir Tismăneanu, converted from the fanatical young Leninist of the 70s into the just as fanatical commissar of Romanian anti-communism. Worthy of mentioning is that the young Volodea, as Vladimir was nicknamed in the upper circles of communist nomenclatura, was prepared for the admission exam to the Faculty of Philosophy by Janina Ianoși. In his memoirs, Ion Ianoși recounts that he and his wife tried hard to temper Volodea’s “juvenile ultra-leftisms” and to open up for the young intellectual a wider theoretical horizons towards a Marxism with more critical inflections, but with no success (Ianoși, *Internaționala*, 514, 741). Consequent in his value options, Ion Ianoși continues to assert his leftist belief system, even after he was the subject of a series of cruel attacks in Romanian press coming from rightist intellectuals who after 1989 erected themselves as champions of visceral anti-communism. Vladimir Tismăneanu, to be sure, could not have *not* been among them. “Why am I still on the left? Answer: because of the injustices and of the victims of injustices. Since before being ideological [Party-politics, I would have said instead], the left is (or has to be) social” (Ianoși, *Internaționala*, 848).

### **A Socio-biographical Account: Between Self and Sociology**

I will not stop over reconstructing the biographical details of Andrei Roth’s life. Some bits and glimpses of his life have been touched upon, even though in an unsystematic fashion, already. The interested reader can delve into the book and accompany the author through the journey of his life, which will inevitably mean a political history of the twentieth century. Born during the monarchic democracy of the interbellum, he grew up during the turbulent years of the 30s and 40s, when Carol II established his short-lived royal dictatorship, soon replaced by the fascist National Legionary State, which rapidly dismantled to give way to the military dictatorship of Ion Antonescu. He came of age during the Second World War and then lived his adulthood during the long, seemingly forever lasting, communist regime. But he outlived the regime in which he put his faith during his youth and which in the meantime had become a societal nightmare, to witness the painful birth

of the post-communist democracy. The overwhelming part of his existence was lived during the "age of extremes," as aptly described Eric J. Hobsbawm the "short century" beginning in blood and ending in hope, and punctuated by ghastly catastrophes in-between (Hobsbawm, 1995). Defying the chronological conventions, the short twentieth century started with the Great War in 1914, followed soon by the Bolshevik Revolution, only to continue with the disastrous fascist experiments culminating in the Holocaust. It went on with the Second World War prolonged in the Cold War, and finally came to an end with the cascading collapses of the Socialist camp (U.S.S.R. dismantled in 1991, which Hobsbawm takes as the temporal milestone bringing the short twentieth century to a close). With the majority of his life spent before the turn of the millennium, it is easy to understand why Andrei Roth saw himself as a "man of the twentieth century," considering the years he lived in the third millennium as an existential "bonus" (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 60). True enough, both his existential and his intellectual biography unfolds almost entirely between the watersheds of the "conventional," as opposed to the "short," twentieth century.

His love story, existential choices, professional career, beloved family – in a word, his *life*, in all of its constitutive dimensions – takes shape from "under the shadow of death" projected by the specter of fascism (Romanian and Hungarian alike) and war. His life assumes a more stable form during communism, while the communist experience will lead him during post-communism towards revising the political commitments he embraced in his youth. His sociological *oeuvre* is scattered across the four decades of intellectual maturity, from the 60s until the end of the century. Only his book on modernity and social modernization crosses the symbolic threshold of the twentieth century, as it was published in 2002 (Roth, 2002). The "bonus" years he was granted to live in the twenty-first century, of which Andrei Roth had the existential feeling of being a temporal foreigner, was nonetheless *the time of autobiographical reflections*. To this sense of estrangement, a decisive contributor was the loneliness he experienced after his wife passed away in 1999. Andrei Roth describes this loss as a "half-death" of his own, as an existential halving. Emotionally disturbing is the first section of the book (written, as opposed to the rest of the volume, in 2000), in which the memorialist, ravaged by the pain of losing Her, remembers their love and the happy life together with Terike (to whom Andrei Roth always refers to as She or Her, with capital letter).

### **Beyond the Self: The Interwar Myth, Communism, and the Phantasma of Nationalism**

I will insist, instead, on the three pivotal themes emerging from the reading of Andrei Roth's book. The first is the myth of Romanian interbellum as a period of collective wellbeing and societal model for post-communist Romania. The second theme is linked to what can be called *the carceral paradigm of Romanian communism*. Lastly, the third topos addresses the (still) thorny question of Romanian nationalism. Defying the chronological order for the sake of thematic logic, I will approach them starting with the memory of Romanian communism, continuing with the nostalgia towards the interwar period, and ending with the nationalist phantasma.

Leftist memorialistic literature, written by people like Andrei Roth and Ion Ianoși who remained faithful to the political values of Socialism (such as social equality and human solidarity), calls into question the *carceral paradigm* of Romanian communism. This currently canonical way of remembering Romanian communism as a societal prison was first articulated by the detention memoirs written by the political prisoners of the former regime (Petrescu and Petrescu, 2014). The understanding of the communist experience through the carceral metaphor was then generalized by the right-wing anti-communist intellectuals from a painful experience of the interwar elite victimized by the Socialist regime to the level of the entire social body (Rusu, 2015). This key of interpreting the communist past in the contemporary memory has been officialized through the *Final Report* drawn by the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania coordinated by Vladimir Tismăneanu in 2006. The Report, commissioned by the President as a ground for his official condemnation of communism, endorsed the conclusion that "Communist Romania has been from the first day to the very last a prison for the overwhelming majority of the population" (Tismăneanu 16-17). The life stories of intellectuals such as Andrei Roth or Ion Ianoși, as well as those of millions of other Romanians who lived their lives in real socialism, challenge the opportunity of this carceral metaphor when, generalized at the level of the entire population, claims literal validity. The quest to impose the carceral paradigm of communism in the memory of the recent past is ideologically propelled by a *retributive, unidimensional*, and thus *cataractic anti-communism* –



officialized in the *Final Report* as the state policy of national memory.<sup>4</sup> Retributive, since it is animated by the revanchist desire to punish and condemn, without any right of appeal, the communist past as "criminal and illegitimate," from the supreme political court of the present. Unidimensional, since, instead of treating communism as total (and totalitarian) phenomenon, the carceral paradigm reduces the entire phenomenon to its criminal dimension. Even if this was undoubtedly a constitutive dimension of Romanian communism, the Socialist societal project is not reducible to this single aspect. This is the reason why the carceral paradigm of Romanian communism can be found guilty of professing the hermeneutical fallacy of criminal reductionism. Cataractic, since even if it strives towards a *cathartic* finality, by reducing the communist historic experience to its criminal dimension, the process of coming to terms with the past will end up obscuring the other non-criminal (some of them even positive) aspects of Romanian communism. The conceptual wordplay between "cataractic" and "cathartic" deserves proper semantical clarification. Cathartic memory refers to an interpretation of the past aiming at healing the present from the traumatic memory still haunting it. In the case of the memory of Romanian communism, catharsis is aimed at by facing-off the communist past, exorcizing the demons of the past, hoping that breaking with it in such fashion will inaugurate a founding moment for a clean start. It is employed as a symbolic therapeutics targeting the memory of the past designed to redeem the present. Cataractic memory, instead, is a metaphoric notion drawing on ophthalmological imaginary. Just as the cataract is shrouding the eye preventing it of seeing the entire spectrum of vision, cataractic memory is remembering selectively only some partial aspects of the past.

In close ideological intimacy with the *visceral anti-communist* preached by the post-communist right is the *nostalgia for Romanian interbellum*. The new beginning towards which those aspiring to break with the communist past by its moral and historical condemnation is paradoxically but often enough found in the period between the two world wars, a time retrospectively idealized as the golden

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<sup>4</sup> A recent critique of the anti-communist establishment in the Romanian culture was mounted by Doru Pop (2015), who argues that in rendering Marxism as "an idea that twists our minds," the "PLP triplet" (Pleșu-Liiceanu-Patapievici) have themselves twisted the idea of Marxism so as to fit their visceral anti-communist political bias. For a position that breaks free of the anti-communist consensus that advances a "normalizing paradigm" based on a politics of understanding, as opposed to a "mastering paradigm" founded on a revengeful politics of criminalizing the past, see Rusu (2017, forthcoming).

epoch of national history. Only that the life stories of those who actually lived during the interwar period, all the more so of those who were wearing the burden of “multiple minority,” unveil the tenebrous nooks of the period so brightly shining in the Romanian national memory. The provisions referring to the rights of minorities from the Declaration of Unification issued at Alba Iulia in 1918 were eluded, as neither of the two historic parties – National Liberal Party and National Peasants’ Party –, even less so the myriad of parties identifying themselves to the increasingly extreme nationalist right, were interested in respecting the formal engagements taken towards minorities. The politics of Romanianizing national minorities (especially in Transylvania and Banat that, after their incorporation into the Old Kingdom, brought with them large ethnic minorities) were the vindictive answer to the politics of Magyarizing Romanians by the Hungarian government. The cultural effervescence of interwar Romanian intelligentsia was intrinsically pervaded to the nationalistic fanaticism imbued with anti-Semitic feelings, as another Romanian Jewish scholar, Zigu Ornea (1995), documented in his fundamental work *Anii treizeci: extrema dreaptă românească*. Undermining even more the myth of Romanian interbellum, Andrei Roth has shown the basic lack of any substance of the forms of the Romanian interwar democracy. The ubiquity of corruption, the culture of baksheesh, together with the politicianism and the venality of the ruling class have facilitated the emergence of radical anti-democratic movements such as the Legion of the Archangel Michael, with tragic consequences for Romanian society (Heinen, 1999; Clark, 2015; Rusu, 2016).

Finally, Andrei Roth has remained consistent in repudiating ethnic nationalism first hyperbolized during the interwar period<sup>5</sup> and then, after a half a century of dormancy, re-burst with a revenge after 1989. Even before the toppling of the regime, nationalism has already made its comeback in the grotesque guise of “national-communism,” as the regime was resorting to a “therapy through myth” in order to cope with the failing command economy (Tomiță 12). But ethnic tensions would explode only after the collapse of the communist system, such as was the case in the “Black March” of 1990 in the multi-ethnic Transylvanian town of Târgu Mureș. Polyglot, a spiritual citizen of multiple cultural republics, Andrei Roth could

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<sup>5</sup> Octavian Goga (1927), the prime minister during whose tenure state anti-Semitism took violent proportions, spoke of the necessity of the fanatical belief in the supreme dogma represented by the national idea (p. 12).

not be but an apologist of multi- and inter-culturalism. Instead of ethnic nationalism, with its destructive martial propensities, its strive towards cultural homogenization, and drive to persecute its minorities, Andrei Roth embraced, following intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas and Jan-Werner Müller, the principles of *constitutional patriotism* (Roth, 1999, 2000; Habermas, 2001; Müller, 2007). This differs radically from the patriotism espoused by ethnic nationalism in that the principle of belonging to the political community is not given by ancestry or ethnicity, but by citizenship. Consequently, the supreme value cultivated within the framework of constitutional patriotism is not the feverish worship of the ethnic nation and its glorious military past, but the civic respect of the democratic principles and of the normative grammar on the basis of which democracy works.

Undoubtedly, all of these untimely topics pose inconvenient challenges to the current cultural consensus, enshrined by the political values of the (center-) right. That this is the case one can only take the reactions aroused by the publication of Ion Ianoși's memoirs in 2012, in which the author dared to confess his leftist adherence in the very title of the book, which reads as *My International*. What disturbed the anti-communist cultural consensus was precisely the refusal of apostasy towards the leftist political values, the rejection of "de-commitment" from the Socialist axiology of social justice to which he remained faithful. In similar fashion, Andrei Roth, although he disengaged himself from Party-politics by assuming the Mannheimian position of the "free-floating intellectual," has nevertheless remained firmly grounded in the values of the political left (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 41; see also Mannheim, 1992 [1956], who developed the notion).

### **Conclusions: Autobiography between Sociological Introspection and Ego-history**

The book of memories, choices, and life of Andrei Roth resists to being easily included in the conventional genre of memorialistic literature. It is rather an existential and intellectual *socio-biography*, in which the author, a sociologist by formation, takes his own self and his own historical becoming as subject matter. The volume is the result of a double endeavor performed by the author. It is, first and foremost, the outcome of an effort of *sociological introspection*. Throughout the book, the author is at pains to perform an analysis of his own self, its historical configuration and reconfigurations as entangled in the network of structural

constraints and opportunities. Secondly, it is the result of an *ego-history*, by which the author reconstructs, following his own biographical thread and self-formation, the historical contexts in which he lived his life. Precisely this embedding of his own self and personal biography into the socio-historical and cultural context contributes decisively to mitigating, until the very brink of dissolution, the narcissistic bias that invariably pervades autobiographic writings. In contrast to Ion Ianoși's vast work, in the case of Andrei Roth's book reigning supreme is not the chronological accuracy and factual scrupulosity, but a socio-analytical spirit at work. This analytical propensity is also the source from which all the excursions and digressions spring out, in which the author diverts from his own self (the main subject matter of the book) to engage in sociological analysis of the historic phenomena which swept his existence. Unusual and surprising – but only when assessed against the custom established within Romanian memorialistic literature – is the delicacy with which the author handles his contemporaries. Andrei Roth has kept his word expressed at the beginning of the book, where he specified that he intends “neither to perfume some people with incense” nor “to revenge on the others” (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 57). Indeed, he did not pass judgments upon people of whom he talked, remaining faithful throughout the entire book to the principle “*nomina sunt odiosa*” (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 395). What a contrast to Adrian Marino's memoir – *Viața unui om singur* (The Life of a Lonely Man) – which practices the principle of nominal spelling out, that of *naming names!* (Marino, 229). This principle of naming names used as a mechanism of calling out loud those with whom the literary critic grappled with and settled the record straight was the reason why Marino forbade the publishing of the manuscript for five years after his death. This was also the reason why the book was a bestseller when it was finally published in print, after the five-year embargo from the time of his death expired in 2012, creating a stir in academic circles and beyond. Nothing sensationalist of this type can be found in Roth's book, who treated his fellows, including his fierce rivals, with utmost civility.

A quote from the same Marino can serve as an epilogue for this essay. Anguished by the consciousness of his own concessions, the literary critic asks himself “Who can be a ‘hero’ day after day, year after year and even decades, especially under a dictatorial, repressive, terroristic regime?” Marino finds solace in the answer that “in the realm of culture, the ‘oeuvre’ redeems, ultimately, all the

weaknesses of the 'creator'" (Marino 229). Roth, the sociologist, haunted by the same problem of heroism during hostile times, noted down that in limit situations, "The heroic option is dangerous and excruciating. The ordinary human being does not aspire to become a hero" (Roth, *Opțiunile*, 60). Andrei Roth was not a hero. Politically, he reproaches himself for the path of the Party he undertook, driven as he was by social ideals he espoused until the last breath and in whose name he refused every act of political and axiological apostasy. Morally, he blames himself for the Machiavellian ethics he practiced during his communist youth (to which he resorted, for instance, to justify the multiple voting at the elections from November 19, 1946, by which he partook to the defrauding of the electoral process). Civically, he reprimands himself for lacking the courage to take dissident action against the regime that betrayed his youth expectations. Intellectually, however, save the small concessions he made at editorial pressure materialized in quotations from Nicolae Ceaușescu's addresses, Andrei Roth has little to reproach to himself or to others. The *oeuvre* redeems the weaknesses of its creator. Without being a hero, lacking the courage of dissidence, Andrei Roth found the courage and moral serenity to subject his youthful choices that marked his existence along with his mature life to a scrupulous examination of consciousness.<sup>6</sup> He regretted specific actions, worthily acknowledging his errors, but he never recanted any of the *principles* for which he committed himself and in which he abode until his death. After the tumultuous years of the youth, the time of maturity brought him the *lucidity of disillusion*, while the time of senescence, as the memorialist himself confesses, enriched him with the gift of wisdom. Senescence had also brought him the wisdom to critically assume his own past. If Plato's Socrates is right when asserting that "the unexamined life is not for man worth living," through the *oeuvre* surviving him – which now includes the ego-socio-analysis from *Opțiunile mele* – Andrei Roth has had a life which certainly was worth living (Plato, 38a, 100).

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<sup>6</sup> For a plea for the development of a "sociology of serenity," see the volume coordinated by one of Andrei Roth's younger colleagues – Petru Iluț, *Dragoste, familie și fericire. Spre o sociologie a seninătății* (Love, Family, and Happiness. Towards a Sociology of Serenity).

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