

Race without Racism in the Communist Period*

Constantin Bărbulescu

Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeş-Bolyai University

Email: barbulescu@yahoo.fr

Abstract: *Race without Racism in the Communist Period.* The concept of 'race' will continue its destiny in Romanian culture after WWII, even if the communist ideology will be reticent at some moments towards its use. On the one hand in the academia the concept we are talking about is oculted even if it is used without being named. On the other hand it penetrates the constitutional texts. What communist ideology tries to do is to keep and use the national dimension of the interwar concept of race, but at the same time by delimitating it of rasism.

Keywords: racism, 20th century, communist ideology, national identity, physical anthropology

Rezumat: *Rasă fără rasim în perioada comunistă.* Conceptul de „rasă” își va continua destinul în cultura română și după Al Doilea Război Mondial, chiar dacă ideologia comunistă va fi reticentă față de utilizarea lui în anumite momente. Pe de o parte, în mediile academice conceptul despre care vorbim este ocultat, cu toate că este utilizat fără a fi numit. Pe de altă parte însă, el pătrunde în textele constituționale. Ceea ce încearcă ideologia comunistă este să păstreze și să utilizeze dimensiunea națională a conceptului interbelic de rasă, delimitându-se în același timp de rasism.

Cuvinte-cheie: rasism, secolul al XX-lea, ideologie comunistă, identitate națională, antropologie fizică

In the present micro-research I will follow the manner in which Romanian communism will receive two of the major concepts that have shaped the cultural and political of interwar Romania: race and its corollary - racism.

Romanian eugenics dies together with the interwar society, the environment that favored its apparition and development, they die

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together, dissolved in the military, social and political tragedies of the WWII. After the war 'race' will become a compromised concept, just because it stood at the bottom of Nazi ideology. Nevertheless especially because of the almost perfect symbiosis between race, ethnicity and state that we have found in the social-political and scientific thought of the interwar period, it would have been hard to reach a total disappearance of the biological component in the mentioned conceptual triad. Indeed, at a closer look, we notice that race does not reach a taboo term in communism, and from some point its scientific validity is no longer denied.

For example, in 1974, from the great dictionary of Romanian language, elaborated by R.S.R. Academy we find that race means 'each of the great human groups, formed since the oldest times of prehistory and characterized by the form of skull, color of the skin and other exterior features' and that only in an improper manner it would mean 'people, kind, descendant'¹. This is the academic level. If we would lower the level, browsing the most popular dictionary of the communist period – Explicative Dictionary of Romanian Language (DEX) – we find a definition resembling the one offered by the great dictionary of Academia: race gives identity to each of the 'biological groups of populations' characterized by 'the color of hair, of skin and through other exterior features'. Further on it is added a supplementary explanation meant to erase any trace of a possible racist instrumentalization of the term: 'but that not contradicts the biological unity of the entire humanity and it is not a scientific criterion in differentiating it into social groups'². This way we return to the meanings ascribed to the term at the middle of the 19th century! Race is accepted as scientifically classificatory item but is not associated, at least in the quoted definitions, with any form of racism. In communism, race should have been a neutral classificatory term.

Still, the biologization of national identity, so intense during interwar period, finally reached the scientific discourse in the *communist period*, especially in the 1950' and 1960', but even later in the following decade. Everything starts with C. I. Parhon – the last president of the International Federation of Latin Societies of Eugenics – that after 1948, converts to communism and becomes among others, for a long time, the

¹ *Dicționarul limbii române* [Romanian Language Dictionary], tom. XIII, (București:, Ed. Academiei Române, 2010), p. 42.

² *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române* [Explicative Dictionary of Romanian Language], (București: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1975), p. 773.

president of the Great National Assembly³. From this powerful position he will support the career of the one that will contribute the most to the 'rebirth' of anthropology during communism, his son in law, Ștefan Milcu.

Under Milcu's coordination (from 1950 director of the Institute of Anthropology of Romanian R.P.R.) in sixth and seventh decades of the past century *physical anthropology* knows a true progress. Broad researches are launched, numerous publications, where we should mention the monograph of Clopotiva village, whose declared aim is that of continuing the anthropological researches of Fr. I. Rainer from the interwar period. Professor Milcu like his famous forerunners, has started searching for the anthropological profile of the natives and hoped that this type of researches would contribute to 'solving the issue of forming the Romanian people'⁴. Clopotiva was not chosen randomly - it was an isolated community, as also situated in the area of Dacian dwelling! Under these circumstances it is not hard to find out what exactly the researchers were looking for in the villages from Hațeg county: the native anthropological type presupposed to have been very well kept in the isolated mountain areas.

The following monograph brings in front Bătrâna village, from Pădureni area, same as isolated and Dacian!⁵ What is remarkable in the case of these approaches is the continuity with the interwar period, both at the level of methods of research and of the ideology that legitimates them, the national one. There are also discontinuities, likewise remarkable. The term 'race' is banned. It is talked about 'anthropological type', never about race. Physical anthropology during the communist period evolves in a quasi-aseptical ideological environment where only the national ideology is allowed. It is quite bizarre to notice the impressive display of forces of collective researches in these decades, without the obvious scope to justify such a waste of resources. In fact, the scope was well hidden in the core of researches, in continuity with the interwar ones, even though its explicit disclosure was bocked by the ideological line of the Party.

³ Marius Turda, *Eugenism și modernitate. Națiune, rasă și biopolitică în Europa (1870-1950)* [Modernism and Eugenics], (Iași: Polirom, 2014), p. 144.

⁴ Ștefan Milcu, Horia Dumitrescu (ed.), *Cercetări antropologice în Țara Hațegului. Clopotiva. Monografie* [Anthropological Researches in Hațeg County. Clopotiva. Monograph], (București: Editura Academiei R.P.R., 1958), p. 13.

⁵ Ștefan Milcu, Horia Dumitrescu, *Cercetări antropologice în Ținutul Pădurenilor. Satul Bătrâna* [Anthropological researches in Pădureni County. Bătrâna village], (București: Editura Academiei R.P.R., 1961), p. 10.

Even if 'race' became, in principle, a prohibit term in the anthropological discourse, it was not dislocated from the space of public communication. Professor Milcu, for example, was not shy in asserting in 1967 that 'races exists but we do not have enough elements to identify them correctly'⁶.

Moreover, the notion of race enters for the first time in a constitutional text in the communist period. Not even the Constitution during Carol in 1938 uses the respective term. It is true that in the first three constitutional texts previous to communism setting up, even if we do not meet the term 'race', *expresis verbis*, it is present still, in synonym formula, in the paragraphs that aims at preserving the ethnic purity of the state, according to the principle 'one state - one ethnicity - one race'. Thus, Constitution in 1866 stipulated in article 3 that 'Romania's territory can not be colonised with people of foreign origin'. The article will be kept likewise in the Constitution in 1923 and modified in the Constitution in 1938 but briefly, replacing the term 'origin' with 'kind'.

Obviously, in the three communist Constitutions such item does not appear. Nevertheless, the policy of *ethnic homogenization* done through population movements following industrialization and emigration of undesirable minorities (such as jews for example) has done more efficiently the uniformization of the population of the republic⁷. If we go back to the use of the term race in the communist constitutional texts, we see that this is present in all three constitutions and comes out in the context of enumerating the types of discrimination that can affect the rights of a Romanian citizen, obvious with the purpose of forbidding them. Art. 16 in the first communist constitution, in 1948, stipulates that 'all citizens of Romanian Popular Republic, regardless of sex, nationality, class, religion or culture are equal in front of the law', and the next article incriminates any 'advocacy or manifestation of race or nationality hatred'. Articles with simmilar content have the constitutions in 1952 and 1965. Previous constitutions defended the Romanian citizens from different types of discriminations but did not mention the ones with reference to the race. According to Constitution in 1923, Romanians enjoyed the same rights no matter 'the ethnic, language or religious origin', and in 1938 no matter of 'ethnic origin and religious belief'.

⁶ Ștefan Milcu, Constantin Maximilian, *Introducere în antropologie* [Introduction in anthropology], (București: Ed. Științifică, 1967), p. 35.

⁷ Lucian Boia, *Cum s-a românizat România* [How Romania was romanized], (București: Humanitas, 2015), pp. 108-117.

After Nazi experience, all states acknowledged the perils of rasism and the interdiction of rasial discrimination finds a justification through this international ideological evolution. On the other hand, this formulation is taken by the socialist Romania constitutions from the famous soviet Stalin Constitution in 1936. Once entered in the constitutional texts, the term 'race' seems not to be overlooked. The present Constitution of Romania since 1991, uses it in the same manner the communist constitutional texts were using it, in the direction of removing a possible discrimination, homogenizing the national corpus by eliminating the lines of frature whatever they might be. Constitution in 1991 is the most scrupulous regarding the naming and incrimination of the fractures that might fragment the national unity. Art. 4 is conclusive in this matter: 'the state has as fundament the unity of Romanian people. Romania is the common and undivided country of all its citizens regardles of race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion, sex, opinion, political appartenance, wealth or social origin'. Anyway the Romanian constitutional texts after 1948 use the concept of race this way too and implicitly validate its value of truth.

Despite the neutral connotations of the term race and of dismantling the eugenic movement, the ideas of eugenic utopy made room in the society especially at the moment when the communist leaders became aware at the middle of the 1960' of the *demographic decline* of Romania. The measures they envisaged were inspired by the biological ideology of the interwar period. Moreover, one of the distinguished members of the eugenic movement in Cluj, Petru Râmneanțu, who, despite some restrictions would continue his career during communist period will send memorials to authorities that approach the demographic issues of Romania and proposed solutions in the spirit of the interwar coercitive eugenics measures. He had in view baning the abortion and contraceptive methods as also a more active intervention upon population through educational programmes in the direction of 'genetic' awareness⁸. We cannot know in what measure his proposals have influnced the political decisions of those years. Certain is that the solution chosen by communist authorities was the famous decree no. 770 in 1966, that banned abortion. Ironically and cinically at the same time, contraception remained a legal practice that the same authorities will drain of any content by taking out of the market the contraceptive means. Obviously, the aim of communist authorities was a

⁸ Maria Bucur, *Eugenie și modernizare în România interbelică* [Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania], (Iași: Polirom, 2005), pp. 301-303.

populationist and not a 'classic' eugenics, of improving the quality of race. It was not possible the other way since the communist ideology have reversed the hierarchy of the social classes. If interwar eugenists were aiming at strengthening the biological elite of the nation – that they identify with social and cultural elite –, through measures to favor an increased natality of this walks of life, the communist ideologists reversed the terms of the matter: to them, the nation's elite was represented by the masses of workers, 'men of work from towns and villages', creators of the socialist state, just as the Constitution in 1965 defined them. The communist state had them in view when imposed its pronatalist policies, policies that amalgamated negative measures (banning abortion, limiting acces to contraceptive means) and positive (financial support for the families with many children). Above all, the negative measures did not highlight anything else but the change of the relations between citizens and the state, respectively the complete subordination of the individual in favor of the state ideology, specific to totalitarian regimes. It was the dream of the interwar eugenists, that they could not put into practice!

In conclusion, the concept of 'race' will continue its destiny in Romanian culture also after WWII, even if the communist ideology will be reticent at some moments towards its use. On the one hand in the academia the concept we are talking about is oculted even if it is used without being named. On the other hand it penetrates, and this is extremely important, the constitutional texts. What communist ideology tries to do is to keep and use the national dimension of the interwar concept of race, but at the same time by delimitating it of rasism. Communists want in fact an utopy – race without rasism!