

THE FILES OF THE ROMANIAN COMMUNIST SECRET SERVICE. A CASE OF PSEUDO-AMNESIA

Andi Mihalache

I would like to say a few words about the files of the communist Romanian Secret Service and about the implications of the recent creating of the *National Council for Studying the Secret Service Archives*. Its mission, similar to the Gauch organization, is to establish which are the present public persons who collaborated with secret police during the communist regime and delivered compromising information about other people. But the very idea of this institution determined a general skepticism because the legal foundation for its activity was obviously fragile. The most important *deficiency* was the absence of any civic restrictions for the persons proved to be “collaborationist” of the secret police. The law recommends just a moral and formal blame. The public hostility against the secret files research can be analyzed from three points of view. The first one is the bureaucratic reticence of the present day Romanian Informations Service, the actual owner of the files. The second is the political skepticism of our government, dominated by members of the former Romanian Communist Party. The third one is the social passivity caused by the every day surviving problems.

Having the capacity to say something else and more than the hidden fact, the secret has been since ever the object of a permanent fascination. Usually, the secret is described by three elements: the information, the dissimulation of this information and the relation with the other person, based on this dissimulation. The encounter of the Romanian Communist Party ideology with the *secret* idea took place in 1924, when this organization became illegal. The communists come back to a normal activity in August 1944, at the same time with the soviet military occupation. In a proclaimed “democratic” context (1945-1947), the Romanian Communist Party preserved the old but efficient practice of *conspiracy*. Moreover, after 1948 when the Communists had conquered the whole power in Romania, the secret was integrated in the totalitarian ideology and participated to the effort to control all the public and private activities. In Romania we can identify a systemical tendency to impose the *state secret* as a typical form of the *secret*. The Secret Service controlled tightly its informers by letting them know

that their biographies were very well studied. A person like this is easily to persuade to give information about the others. By this way, the informer participate to the secrets in order to participate to the power. Thus, keeping secrets was a form of sociability and a sort of “stability pact”. The anonymous denunciation was often a matter of personal revenge mediated by the Secret Service. This practice became a mentality and transformed the totalitarian state in some kind of omniscient judge of the human relations. The anonymous denouncing represented a substitutive thought, pretending the existence of an objective impersonal observer. In other words, the unsigned letter is hiding only for probing. After the collapse of the communist regimes all public debates were prematurely concentrated upon the *history* of secret services, thus confirming the efficiency of a classic dissimulation: from time to time, any secret service defines itself as a revolte one, in order to continue its activity without any disturbing. A fine example of this cynical operation is the organization of a KGB museum like a monument of the past, while the respective institution is still very well and alive nowadays.

In the context of a very prolonged instability, the lack of interest for the civil rights and liberties is tenaciously camouflated by the popular fear of anarchy, joined with a national ideology that excessively celebrates the historical state continuity. By analogy, the longevity of some of state institutions like Secret Service seems to be a great performance. Thus, the Romanian Informations Service gains a sort of heroic prestige, as a stability sign.

The secret is always necessary because its absence deprives the imaginary. Therefore, the power of the secret is to be *announced* but never *revealed*. To disclose the secret information *is* to break a taboo, to commit an useless sacrilege and to bring a collective bad luck. It’s just one more trouble. Now, these documents arise collector passions like the good old wines. The need to have new heroes transforms the functionary of the Secret Service in a *technocrat*, a person who has to endure the truth in our place.

The defending of secrets involves today another strategies, especially the simulation of the transparence, the claim that secrets don’t exist any more. All suffering from the communist past receive now an expiator sense and explain the present as a “historical necessity,” as an age of universal justice. It’s a present that must conciliate all contradictions and remove all troubles. Paradoxally, in nowadays Romanian eshatology the *present* tends to legitimate the *past*, not the opposite. What are the reasons? Romanian’s life is still dominated by the *gift economy’s models*. To obtain a possible access of the citizens to their own files, the authors of the law had to accept some compromisings. The most important of all was to maintain the power of the Romanian Informations Service to *keep* these documents. It’s a good example for a gift economy: the citizen recognize the unlimited power of the state institutions and, in exchange, the authorities

renounce to a part of their privileges in the consecrated form of public service – in our case, show more disposition (*benevolentia*) to allow the access to the files.

On the other side, in the name of an idealistic national reconciliation, the political class – shaped by national-communism – proposes a new social contract relied on the maintaining of the individual silences as state secrets. There is no guilties, no political crimes. The amnesty is thus assimilated to innocence. The political discourses “deliver” to the individuals a very limited social identity, reduced to the physiological needs. The idea of researching secret files is perceived like an intellectual pathology, or like a fantasy of a small and naive scholar group. This situation can be explained by the absence of a civic common culture, shared by the intellectuals and also the Romanian society.

For their communist past Romanians preferred a specific solution to conserve the memory in a nonpublic way, as a secret. Actually, it's only a domestication of the recent history in a restrictive framework. By hiding the secret files, the communist past is banished from collective memory and transformed in a very personal and confidential experience. It's also a way to remove this period somewhere in an undetermined space. It's the wellknown tendency to externalize the evil. The memory and the secret are two different kinds to keep, to preserve something. In our case the secrets of communism represent a *substitute* of the memory, an *efigia* may be. This situation remembers me *The Island from Yesterday* located by Umberto Eco not in *teritorial* but in *temporal* terms. *The Island from Yesterday* it's a *fabula* about a virtual border separating two different times, a magic and impossible land where the past (yesterday) and the present (today) can be distinguished in some material and still invisible way. I think it's a good analogy with the Romanian postcommunist memory.