

George Voicu, The Evil Gods. The Culture of Conspiracy in post-communist Romania

Polirom Publishing House, 2000, 245p

Motto:
"The paradigm of conspiracy is thus a sort of *kitsch* in which the pattern of religion and the pattern of secularization coexist"
George Voicu

The intricacy of the notion of "transition" or "provisional times" is from a temporal point of view, tantamount to a moment of choice and from a spatial perspective it is tantamount to the image of crossroads. Essentially "transition" means to break up with a certain economic, political, cultural system, to exceed it and to pass to another system. But "transition" also means a certain change of the some system. Any change, either economic, political or cultural, comes along with this great need of breaking up with the "old" structures, seen, from an always new more pragmatic perspective, as ineffective.

How much does this breaking up mean the destruction, the exclusion of the old structures and how much it is less abrupt, thus trying a reconstruction, a reintegration of the old structures into new areas it is quite difficult to decide. The fact is that the Romanian society, after 50 years of prominent communism, (which modified it for good and all), does not have any other solution than to follow the "softer", second alternative from above, that of an "organic", step by step reconstruction" of its structures, reconstruction which somehow implies a return to something from the past – perhaps to the real understanding of the contexts that brought about the errors and the major crises of our history. Therefore it is understandable why we still do not have the bond-bursting means to became aware of the risk to never pass over these "provisional times".

The bridges that bind the old times to the new ones, that bind totalitarism and post-totalitarism, communism and post-communism exert an offer wearisome magnetism upon today's bewildered Romanian society. And if it is true what Gustave Le Bon assumed – that "the only important changes, which cause the renewal of civilization are the changes that occur in what regards the opinions, the conceptions, the beliefs", - it seems that 1989 event took place also due to the conceptual changes, paradigm shift, owing to a democratic urge.

For a convalescent Romania, convalescent after the communist illness, the dramatic break-up with the past

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KEY WORDS

Romania, jews, transition, post-communism, conspiracy theory

moment was more violent as it was more necessary, but what followed were the "soft" attempts to reform, to restructure [for neither structures nor people can be destroyed] , attempts that followed, of course, the honorable - because of their effective models/patterns of - Western societies. Those models'/patterns' functionality which fascinates, the desire to apply them to the Romanian reality, are the ones that constitute the real pillars of the European integrative attempts, and not, as bewildered people seem to think and encouraged by some statesmen, the power of some secret organizations' conspiracy whose plan is to rule the whole world. This mechanism of thinking is highly criticized by George Voicu in his book *The Bad Gods. The Culture of Conspiracy in post-communist Romania.*

After 1989, Romania was passing through a strange shock period, a time of demonstrations [for the crowd was then the one who represented power, it was the only power] and that period was also the time when the theories of conspiracy multiplied. The crowd was then so vulnerable and easy to manipulate that it seemed that it was no more able to distinguish what was truthlike and what was not, and it was very frail to rumours, myths and legends created at that time, to groundless stories [see the rumours about terrorists who were said to kidnap children and about all sorts of other criminals].These "underground" explanations n justified by the reed of meaning, of rationality, of coherence in that time's "new disorder", for by these explanations the social failure becomes understandable and born and it is not interpreted as personal.

The attempt to find the source of the evil is always surrounded by a mystical a magical halo and not in the least a rational one, even if its aim is to offer some rational answers and solutions to people's fears and frustrations. Conspirationism is all about a certain kind of self-victimization and lack of responsibility The superposition of pasivism regarding social and politic involvement on the incapacity to understand some social changes and on a certain type of trust in conspirationist discourses supported by the ritual of keeping a secret and preserving an illusion is accountable in post-revolutionary Romania. The Romanian society was used to blame the mechanisms of power and that institutional structures which represent it, so the people was used to blame an external court, a kind of "Evil Genius" for all its failures and for all our sorrows and sufferings.

For Romanians, the Conspiracy Theory is, one of the main elements invoked in ultra nationalist discourses of those statesmen who try to oppose globalization, federal type of state or multiculturalism which fully represents the evil New World Wide Order. On this background , and published ten years after The Romanian Revolution, published after ten years of observing the changes of the society, George Voicu's book offers a detailed radiography of the way by which the theories of conspiracy rise and are kept alive and vivid, of how they influence and intoxicate the Romanian collective fancy and of the way of perceiving other ethnic or religious communities.

With his book, George Voicu follows, in an excellent and honourable way, some of the forerunners of

the conspiracy theories' criticism like Popper, Eco, Girardet or Daniel Pipes, offering us not only a theoretical approach of the machanisms of conspirationist, paranoic, way of thinking, but also an ironic and healthy description of the Romanian political scene.

Voicu actually analygreses two levels which interfere-one is that of the neutral, objective explanation of the theory of conspiration and the other one is the more critical level of conspirationism that is, of political discourses that encourage people to belive such theories. One of the most important ideas of this work is that the conspiracy theory comes to replace a lack of religiozity, God's absence or God's death, it comes to fulfill people's need to belive in some Transcendent Power. The conspiracy theorie seems to come as a result of secularization for it replaces the Transcendent with some Imanent Power. And this power lies in the existence of a certain plan, but this plan is always seen as the worst diabolic one. This plan is alwais made up by a vindicative, exacting providence that lies beyond Good or Evil. This new providence's attribute seems to be in the conspirationists'opinions, wisdom and rationality. It power is outstanding because it is well hidden, but not irrational. Its power lies in people's knowing of its existance and the resistence of the theora of conspirancy is usually supported by means of rumour. There is a strange relationship between the rational, apparent but delusive character of conspiracy and its irrational, hidden but essential character.

Thus, the conspirationist is seen as a saviour of knowledge, that is, as Karl Popper said, of the search for the truth, the search for an objective explanation of the ultimate meaning of life and of the Univers. He pretends to be a criticist of what is only apparent and a person who, following a classic type of rationality, seeks the essence of things, which is always beyond appearences. He always starts speculatively and in an inquering way from the visible effects and he presupposes that there must be an invisible evil cause that makes things the way they are. His discontent and his feeling that he is exiled and thrown out in this world, that he is helpless and not free against his destiny characterizes the man who strongly believes in the existence of a conspiracy.

As Hannah Arendt said, when discussing Plato's dialogue *The Laws*, in her book entitled *The Human Condition*: "the actions of men appear –from this perspective- like the gestures of puppets led by an invisible hand behind the scene, so that man seems to be a kind of plaything of a god", but this is all about an evil God , which represents the secularization of a counter-Providence, for the traditional Providence is abbandoned, or a Providence who exists toghether with its victims.

The "directors" of the conspiracy exist by virtue of a certain demonic determinism, by virtue of a curse or of a gene of Evil which constitutes the ultimate substratum of the world. Analysing who are thought to be the conspirators, the author finds out that they always represent otherness, the strangers and the minorities or the Western individualist, self centred, unspiritualized and pragmatic human being . But the genuine source of the evil is, for some Romanian statesmen, always the

Jew. The author affirms that from a Romanian conspirationist perspective, those strangers always seem to have a reason and a legitimacy for conspiracy, that is, to dominate the the whole world and/or especially Romania, as if Romania were the "chosen" target of conspirationist plans of destruction and division. This represents according to Voicu, only the hybris of a little, not very signifiant nation or of a not yet definetively built identity.

The stake of the paradigm of conspiracy is not only a secularized size of a religious view - for in stead of the traditional Providence some very powerful, very intelligent but also a very bad beings appeared - but also an ideological and political one. The ideological roots of conspirationism could be found, according to Carl Schmitt in romanticism conspirationism is thus a means by which certain political an social ains are achieved. It is also away of explaining the existence of Evil negative principle in the world and of comforting people's fears in a frightful world . But behind the author's theoretical purpose to explain the particularitiesof Romanian conspirationism lies a rather more political one. Voicu criticizes conspirationism as a political ideology which aims at maintaining the old political and institutional structures, an authoritarian, closed society, and ultra-nationalist and xenophobic attitudes.

George Voicu's book is meant to be a radiography of today's Romanian society, of its preconceptions, superstitions, and , as every such radiography it has got a healing role and a purpose to help and to recover the analysed community, still ill of cliché's , stereotypes, erroneous images which constitute hindrances in Romania's way towards real democracy. For, as Vladimir Tismaneanu assessed, it is impossible to become a democratic country by means of myths.