

SHIFTING IDEOLOGIES AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES IN ROMANIA: NICUȘOR GRAUR'S POLITICAL MEMOIRS (1930-1946)

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Abstract: *The present paper focuses on Nicușor Graur's ideological shifts from the Right to the Left in Romania during the regimes of King Carol II and Ion Antonescu. In his two political memoirs, “În preajma altei lumi” (“Close to Another World”) and “Ion Mihalache et Comp.” (both published in 1946), Nicușor Graur, a journalist and former influential member of the National Peasant Party, justifies his leaving the party headed by the outstanding politicians and statesmen Iuliu Maniu (president) and Ion Mihalache (vice president). Built at the border of historical truth and personal need of justifying his choice, his discourse intentionally focuses not only on the so-described lack of congruence between the party's ideological and political propaganda and its actual actions, but also by looking to turn his former patrons and their followers into scapegoats. Such a political option, which was understood in his case sometimes as a proof of an authentic democratic commitment, other times as a careerist's act of treason or desertion that was sanctioned with incarceration, turned him from a dictatorship and extremism denouncer into a sympathizer of communism and of the Soviet Union. The paper follows not only Graur's ideological and political shifts but also the cultural and social implications in an interdisciplinary manner.*

Keywords: *Interwar Romania, ideology, cultural identity, political memoir, dissidence.*

Hard Times, Hard Decisions, Hard Blows

The first four decades of the 20th century signified in Eric Hobsbawm view “an Age of Catastrophe” for the society, which “was shaken by two world wars, followed by two waves of global rebellion and revolution, which brought to power a system that claimed to be the historically predestined alternative to bourgeois and capitalist society, first over one sixth of the world's land surface, and after the Second World War over one third of the globe's population”¹. Considering the world military and political alliances in the 1930s and 1940s, Hobsbawm observed that “this period of capitalist-communist alliance against fascism” embodied “the hinge of twentieth-century history” and “a moment of historical paradox in the relation of capitalism and communism”².

This “historical paradox” was also reflected in Romania's state of affairs. At that moment, communism represented for many people the only democratic alternative to the totalitarian regimes. In several countries, Hobsbawm stated, “mobilization against fascism was to produce a patriotism of the Left, especially during the war”³. The great challenge for the authentic democratic political forces was Romania's entering the war alongside the Allies, against the Axis, and opposing all forms of dictatorship, either from the far right or the far

¹Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century. 1914-1991*, London, Abacus, 1995, p. 7.

²Ibid.

³Ibid, p. 136.

left. It was a hard task especially for a country whose destiny would be finally dictated from the outside. “The main issue in Rumanian political life in the interwar period was, in Keith Hitchins’ comprehensive analysis, the contest between democracy and authoritarianism”⁴. In the 1930s this political opposition became evident and reflected the tensions in the international social-political context. In Hitchins’ opinion, it was a time of deep *crisis for Romanian democracy*. Romania was under the pressure of the world economic depression, the escalation of fascism and the rise of far right organizations such as the Iron Guard. Towards the end of the decade, King Carol ascended to the throne and began imposing his antidemocratic politics. This culminated with the establishment of the dictatorial regime in 1938, which “marked the end of the democratic experiment in Romania”⁵. The promulgation of the 1938 Constitution announced the advent of King Carol’s dictatorial regime, whose first target was the dissolution of the political parties and parliamentary system, followed by the concentration of the entire power in the hands of the monarch. According to António Costa Pinto, the king’s aim was to “create a single-party – the Front of National Rebirth (FRN – Frontul Renașterii Naționale) – and hold a plebiscite on a new corporatist constitution”⁶. In consequence of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu’s execution, together with several fascist leaders of the Iron Guard, the king had to conform to the “Nazi pressure” to incorporate them into the administration. He thus “reorganized his single-party, renaming it the Party of the Nation (PN – Partidul Națiunii)”, which integrated the “remaining” fascists⁷. The 1940s witnessed the clash of the political right and left extremes in Romania: abdication of King Carol II; his son, Mihai, appointed to “preside over a duumvirate constituted by General Antonescu and the Iron Guard, now led by Horia Sima” (1940)⁸; the establishment of General Ion Antonescu’s dictatorship (1940-1944), on the one hand, and the strengthening of the Communist Party supported by the Soviet Union, on the other; the forced abdication of King Mihai and the proclamation of the Popular Republic of Romania (1947)⁹. To conclude, Romania was passing “from one dictatorship to the other ... with a little democracy”, as historian Lucian Boia excellently captures the intellectual atmosphere of the 40s. “On 23 August 1944, Boia asserts, the fall of the Antonescu regime theoretically opened the way to democracy. It was from the beginning a truncated democracy, unbalanced and inevitably leading to communist

⁴Keith Hitchins, *Rumania. 1866-1947*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1994, p. 377.

⁵Ibid, p. 378.

⁶ António Costa Pinto, “Fascism, Corporatism and the Crafting of Authoritarian Institutions in Inter-War European Dictatorships”, in António Costa Pinto, Aristotle Kallis, editors, *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014 (87-121), p. 105.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹See also for details, Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria Partidului Național Țărănesc*, 2nd edition, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1994; Apostol Stan, *Iuliu Maniu: naționalism și democrație: biografia unui mare român*, București, Editura Saeculum I.O., 1997; Keith Hitchins, chapter “Desăvârșirea națiunii române”, in Mihai Bărbulescu et al, *Istoria României*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1998, p. 351-486; Dennis Deletant, chapter “România sub regimul communist (decembrie 1947-decembrie 1989)” in Mihai Bărbulescu et al, *Istoria României*, p. 487-582; Dennis Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State 1948-1965*, C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1991; Lucian Boia, *Romania. Borderland of Europe*, London, Reaktion Books, 2001; Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, New York, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1995; Ghiță Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania. 1944-1962*, London, Greenwood Press, 1976.

totalitarianism. If the extreme left had been excluded from interwar democracy, now the nationalist right was disappearing. In the distribution of power, the shifting to the left was manifest, exceeding considerably the real proportion of the left in the Romanians' options. The socialists and communists placed themselves on the same level of government representation with the liberals and national-peasantists. In fact the communists proved to be from the very beginning 'more equal' than all the others: it was the direct consequence of the country's occupation by the Red Army, whose result could not be other than Romania's communization"¹⁰. In Vlad Georgescu's analysis, it was the traditional parties' "weak leadership" and "factionalism" that practically "neutralized" them¹¹.

I will succinctly refer only to those historical events discussed in Nicușor Graur's political memoirs, *În preajma altei lumi (Close to Another World)* and *Ion Mihalache et Comp.* (1946), which make the object of the present analysis. Graur's career was closely related to the political development of the National Peasant Party in interwar Romania, first as an influential party member and, progressively, as a party dissident and detractor, who chose the path of Marxist-Leninism.

Interwar Romania was governed in turns by the two historical parties, the National Liberal Party and the National Peasant Party, both dedicated to parliamentary monarchy. Founded in 1926, through the fusion of the Peasant Party of the Old Kingdom, headed by Ion Mihalache and the National Party of Transylvania, headed by Iuliu Maniu, the National Peasant Party governed Romania between 1928-1931 and 1932-1933. Iuliu Maniu, the leader of the party, had a more radical attitude against any form of dictatorship and extremism during the reign of Carol II. On the contrary, Ion Mihalache's strategies were more conciliatory, accepting even to co-operate with the Front of National Rebirth, although Maniu declared it as non-constitutional in 1938¹². Maniu's intransigence proved to be realistic. Both the fusion of the two parties and the differences in the opinions of the leaders caused several defections¹³, but their number was insignificant compared to those "directed" by the communist activists in the 40s. In what the party's political program is concerned, it encouraged the Western investments in Romania applying its policy of "Doors open to foreign capital" ("Porți deschise capitalului străin")¹⁴. The two leaders agreed on major issues with regard to the necessity of improving the existing constitution, the support of economic development, with agriculture at its core and the consolidation of small-scale agriculture¹⁵. Nevertheless, the economic world crisis and the internal political tensions impeded considerably the

¹⁰Boia, *Capcanele istoriei. Elita intelectuală românească între 1930 și 1950*, București, Humanitas, 2011, p. 245. Excerpt in my translation. See for shifting ideologies and the elites' re-orientation towards the political extreme left in the 1940s Romania, chapter "From one dictatorship to the other ... with a little democracy", p. 245-295.

¹¹Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians. A History (Istoria românilor de la origini până în zilele noastre*, 1984), edited by Matei Călinescu, translated by Alexandru Bley-Vroman, Ohio State University Press, 1991, p. 224.

¹²Scurtu, *Iuliu Maniu. Activitatea Politică*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1995; p. 94.

¹³Hitchins, *Rumania. 1866-1947*, p. 391-394. See also Scurtu, *Iuliu Maniu. Activitatea Politică*, p. 57-67.

¹⁴Hitchins, *Rumania. 1866-1947*, p. 369.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 391.

achievement of these desiderata. Thus, the National Peasant Party's government could not prevent the economic crisis in Romania, but, instead, the "Doors open to foreign capital" policy deepened the country's external debts¹⁶. Taking failures out of their context, the National Peasant Party's dissidents, who fell under the influence of the communist activists, exploited them in the propaganda against the party leaders. Maniu's firm opposition to dictatorship did not count so much in their eyes as the circumstantial pact of nonaggression during the elections, signed in 1937 by the National Peasant Party with the Legionary Movement, the National Liberal Party (Gheorghe Brătianu) and the Agrarian Party (C. Argentoianu)¹⁷. This pact was sanctioned as a proof of fascist sympathies. Maniu's efforts to determine Romania's entering the war alongside the Allies (the Soviet Union thus included), the National Peasant Party's participation to Antonescu's removal, by joining the National Democratic Bloc (the National Peasant Party, the National Liberal Party, the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party) in 1944¹⁸, or the peasantists' eulogistic appeals to the Soviet Union, the Red Army and "Marshal Stalin"¹⁹ after the Soviets had entered Bucharest in 1944, did not count as good points either.

Nicușor Graur was the defectors' most vocal spokesman. All he saw was the party's failure to entirely put into practice its doctrine and program. 1946, the year when Graur published his two political memoirs was an auspicious time to put into effect his political re-orientation toward the far left. Romania had joined the Allies and deposed Marshal Antonescu on 23 August 1944. The armistice between Romania and the United Nations was signed on 12 September 1944 and Romania was placed in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, despite Maniu's efforts of convincing the Western countries to prevent it from happening²⁰. On 27 September 1944, the Communist Party announced the foundation of a new political coalition called the National-Democratic Front (with the Social Democratic Party and the Ploughmen's Party, among the most important representatives), which officially denounced the previous collaboration agreement with the National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party in the frame of the National Democratic Bloc²¹. On 6 March 1945, after having gradually reduced the historical parties' access to power, the Soviet Union imposed the government headed by Dr. Petru Groza, who organized the 1946 parliamentary elections that were fraudulently won by the National-Democratic Front, despite the National Peasant Party's higher scores²². These events would culminate with the peasantists' leaders capture on 14 July 1947, their trial, conviction and imprisonment²³.

¹⁶Scurtu, *Iuliu Maniu. Activitatea Politică*, p. 52.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 88.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 115-116.

¹⁹See Ana Selejean, *Trădarea intelectualilor. Reeducare și progoană*, București, Cartea Românească, 2005, p. 29 .,

²⁰Scurtu, *Iuliu Maniu. Activitatea Politică*, p. 115-118.

²¹ Ibid, 119.

²²Ibid, 134-143.

²³See Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă, editor, *Procesul lui Iuliu Maniu. Documentele procesului Partidului Național Țărănesc*, Vol. I, *Ancheta*; Vol. II, *Parts 1-2, Procesul*; Vol. III, *Sentiința*, București, Saeculum, 2001.

In his two memoirs, Graur exploited inter- and post war political tensions to build his most profitable and safe status on the political stage. According to the social and political context, his stance ranged from somewhere at the center left (the National Peasant Party) to the far left (with the “help” and “guidance” of the Communist Party). He finally decided to turn towards the left and abandon his former mentors, protectors and colleagues²⁴. Political dissidence was more visible in the 1940s, under the supervision and control of the Soviet Union, as in the case of Anton Alexandrescu’s dissenting peasantist party²⁵. This process, however, had been carefully prepared since the 1930s. Consequently, in his political memoirs, Graur’s justification for his defection turned to past events that, in his opinion, determined the radical change of his political options in 1946. The scapegoats were the National Peasant Party and its leaders, while the charges were the same with those invoked by the Communist Party ideologists in their struggle against the historical parties and against what they stood for.

Based on Graur’s memoirs, this paper analyses not only Graur’s ideological and political shifts but also the cultural and social implications, relying on conceptual and methodological tools characteristic to cultural studies and history. *Ideology* is understood here in terms of its relationship with personal or collective *cultural identity*. As defined in the frame of cultural studies, ideology has an interdependent relation with a person’s cultural identity, his/her system of standards, principles, thinking and behavioral patterns, self-representations and representations of the others. According to Raymond Williams, while archaeology and

²⁴ Graur’s resignation from the National Peasant Party signed on 7 June 1946 and submitted on 8 June 1946, was highly praised in the *Scântea* newspaper, the official of the Communist Party. See *Scântea* XVI.544 (9 June 1946): 3.

²⁵As Narcis-Dorin Ion states in his article “Partidul Național Țărănesc – Anton Alexandrescu. Scurtă istorie (I)”, published in *Revista Arhivelor*, Arhivele Naționale ale României, LIX. 2 (1997): 101-156, the National Peasant Party (Anton Alexandrescu) “faithfully observed the directives received from the Communist Party” (101). Its goal was “to discredit Maniu’s party, to create breaches within its ranges and to attract the potential dissidents” (102). Anton Alexandrescu had been a National Peasant Party member, elected as general secretary of the Romanian National Peasant Youth Organization on 24 March 1930. During the war, the Siguranța (the Secret Police) was aware of his pro-communist activity and he was imprisoned in the Târgu Jiu camp (November 1942 - March 1943) (104), in the same period with Graur’s detention in the camp. At the end of the war, he left Maniu’s party and, on 23 February 1945, he founded his own party, which joined the National Democratic Front and collaborated with Petru Groza’s government. Alexandrescu was appointed Minister of the Cooperation (6 March 1945 - 28 November 1946). After the 1946 elections, he became deputy of Vâlcea and, through the dissolution of his own party, vice-president of the Ploughmen’s Front in 1948, together with other peasantist dissidents (104). In an appeal to the National Peasant Party members, the new peasantists proclaimed the necessity of the old party’s “radical restructuration”: “the determined fight to democratize the party life and to exclude all the collaborationists, all the exploiter landlords, all the pro-fascists, all the saboteurs” (105). The minutes of a Communist Party meeting on 17 February 1945, in the presence of Anton Alexandrescu, demonstrate the latter’s commitment to observe the communists’ directives. They were conditioning their support for the foundation of his new party on his obedience, his fervent pro-Soviet propaganda and his activity in attracting new peasantist dissidents. Alexandrescu obeyed unconditionally, for it was in fact his best option: “I don’t want to graze the sheep in the Urals for Maniu’s sake”. (See Cristian Popișteanu and Maria Ștefan, “Căderea României în Comunism. ‘Nu vreau să pasc oile în Urali de dragul lui Maniu’”, in *Magazin istoric*, XXVIII. 5 (326) (1994): 21-28. See also Narcis-Dorin Ion, “Partidul Național Țărănesc – Anton Alexandrescu ...”, p. 118). See also Gheorghe Onișoru, “Dizidențele partidelor politice din România după 1944”, *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie “A.D. Xenopol”*, vol XXX, 1993, p. 345-362.

cultural anthropology refer to culture mostly in terms of “material production”, history and cultural studies discuss culture with regard to “signifying or symbolic systems”²⁶.

Ideology and culture are key concepts in cultural studies and they are often interchangeable: they “cover much the same conceptual landscape”, as John Storey observes. Nevertheless, Storey continues, “the main difference between them is that ideology brings a political dimension to the shared terrain. In addition, the introduction of the concept of ideology suggests that the culture/ideology landscape is inescapably marked by relations of power and politics (...)”²⁷. Cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz embraces a more complex and dynamic definition of culture: “Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in web of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning”²⁸. In other words, the analysis focuses on the “symbolic dimensions”²⁹ of such aspects of social life like culture, identity, and ideology. Geertz states that ideology has been defined until now according to two principal interpretations of its “social determinants”: the “interest theory” and the “strain theory”, which in fact, are not “necessarily contradictory”³⁰. In the first case, which follows the Marxist tradition, ideology is perceived as “a mask and a weapon”³¹, while, in the second case, it is seen as “a symptom and a remedy”³². In the interest theory, ideology has a conflictual character since it is set in the context of a “universal” struggle of “advantage”. In the strain theory, it is set in the context of the “chronic effort” to rectify “sociopsychological disequilibrium”. In the first, ideology reflects a power relationship, while, in the second, ideology reflects the need to escape anxiety³³. If science is the “critical dimension” of culture, Geertz concludes that ideology is its “justificatory” and “apologetic” dimension³⁴. The complementarity of the two theories is also evident in the

²⁶ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 91.

²⁷ John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, Volume II, Pearson Education, 2006, p. 4.

²⁸ Clifford Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System”, in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, (193-234): p. 5.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 30.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 201.

³¹ In an interview with Michel Foucault (1976), asking about Marxist phenomenology the interviewer uses two synonyms of “mask” and “weapon”, namely, “screen” and “obstacle”, which stand for two concepts “ideology” and, respectively, “repression”. In his interpretation of ideology as discursive construct, Michel Foucault considers that it should be used with circumspection for three reasons: The first is that, like it or not, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else that is supposed to count as truth. [...] The second drawback is that the concept of ideology refers, I think necessarily, to something of the order of a subject. Thirdly, ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something that functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant, and so on”. It is specifically the subjective side of ideology and the secondary importance given to its social-economic determinants that makes Foucault circumspect in using the respective concept. Michel Foucault, *Power*, Edited by James D. Faubion, Translated by Robert Hurley and Others, *Essential Works of Foucault. 1954-1984*, Volume III, London, Penguin Books, 1994, p. 119.

³² Clifford Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System”, p. 201.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 231.

analysis of the discursive construction of cultural identity through ideology in Graur's political memoirs.

In a similar way, semantically, the concept of *cultural identity* is a border concept with a double connotation. Firstly, it is understood individually as analogous to *cultural difference* (or what makes a person different from the Other). Secondly, it has a collective significance related to *cultural diversity* (the multiplicity and variety of differences)³⁵. Both ideology and cultural context influence an author's discursive construction of his/her cultural identity in the (literary and historical-documentary) border genre of political memoirs³⁶.

A Politician's Masks and Weapons

In fact, Graur's political career was due to the memory of his father, a highly valued member of the National Peasant Party, particularly esteemed by Ion Mihalache³⁷. In turn, Dr. Șt. Nicușor Graur was a Doctor of Law, member of the National Peasant Party, Head of the Putna District Organization, elected Deputy of Putna in 1928, 1931 and 1932. He had a permanent home address in Focșani and a temporary one at the "Royal Palace" Hotel in Bucharest³⁸.

In his political journal, Ioan Hudiță, a prominent National Peasant Party member, drew an acid portrait of Graur in the context of his careerist political evolution³⁹. Hudiță found the Focșani National Peasant Party organization in a lamentable situation. The elder lawyer Graur, the founder of the Putna county organization, had left the organization in his son's care. Nicușor Graur was instead "an untrustworthy man who did not follow his father's footsteps. Worthless as a lawyer, dishonest from a professional point of view, and on top of all, a great drunkard, well known all over the county", who was not able to lead the organization⁴⁰. Several peasantists had already left the party in sign of revolt because Ion Mihalache was always protecting Graur "in his father's memory"⁴¹. Hudiță continues Graur's portrayal in the same critical tone, stating that Graur had no time to work with the

³⁵See for details related to the relationship between the concepts of cultural difference and cultural diversity, Carmen Andraș, Cornel Sigmirean (coord.), *In-between Difference and Diversity: Studies of Cultural and Intellectual History*, Sibiu, Editura "Astra Museum", 2013. See also Jorge Larraín, *Ideology and Cultural Identity. Modernity and the Third World Presence*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994.

³⁶ See for the discursive construction of identity and difference, and their relationship with memory, Carmen Andraș, "Discourses and Counter-discourses of War: Cultural History, Memory and Identity", in Carmen Andraș, Cornel Sigmirean (coord.), *Discourse and Counter-discourse in Cultural and Intellectual History*, Sibiu, Editura "Astra Museum", 2014, pp. 22-53.

³⁷ Ștefan Graur senior was a lawyer, licentiate of Law and Literature of Sorbonne, Head of the Putna Bar, member of the National Peasant Party and Honorary President of the Putna District Organization, Deputy in 1907-1911, 1926-1927, 1931 and Senator in 1928-1930, 1932-1933. During the war he was sent by the Germans as a political exile to the Bulgarian Concentration Camp. See International ReferenceLibrary, *Politics and Political Parties in Roumania*, London, International ReferenceLibrary Publishing Co., 1936, p. 455.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 455-456.

³⁹ Ioan Hudiță, *Jurnal politic (7 septembrie 1940 – 8 februarie 1941)*, Vol. II, Introduction and notes by Acad. Dan Berindei, Iași, Institutul European, 2000, p. 180-181.

⁴⁰Ibid, p. 180.

⁴¹Ibid.

organization, since he “was getting after Mihalache to detach himself from Maniu and to search for an agreement with Carol. When Mihalache accepted the appointment as a royal counselor and dressed himself in the uniform of the National Renaissance Front, Nicușor Graur was a regular visitor in Mihalache’s house from Dobrești, where he was staying for weeks. Even now his replacement from the organization’s leadership is difficult because of Mihalache”⁴².

Graur joined the National Peasant Party (Anton Alexandrescu) in the summer of 1946⁴³. Propagandist Hagic Boos succeeded in convincing Graur to take this decision after having already resigned from the Permanent Executive Committee of the National Peasant Party⁴⁴. On 7 June 1946, Graur sent a letter of resignation from the National Peasant Party to Ion Mihalache, describing the reasons of his decision⁴⁵. To prove Graur’s unreliable attitude toward his colleagues, historian Narcis-Dorin Ion goes back to January 1944, when, not even imagining that he would join Alexandrescu’s party, he sent a report to the National Peasant Party leadership, which denounced his “dearest friend” Alexandrescu (as he would call him in the volume *În preajma altei lumi*), for being either a Siguranța or a communist collaborator, or both. In fact, in 1946, Graur’s dream was to become a Communist Party member, but he was “allocated” to Alexandrescu’s party⁴⁶.

Nonetheless, a comparative approach is necessary in order to reconstrue Graur’s complex personality based on self- and hetero-representations, both negative and positive. Thus, in October 1946, Graur evoked in his introduction to *Ion Mihalache et Comp.*, some encomiastic appreciations, dedicated to him in the same year by the *Dreptatea* newspaper, the official of the National Peasant Party (Iuliu Maniu). The cited articles praised Nicușor Graur’s “painful and magnificent exaltation”. He was described as “a democrat of passionate essence”, “no. 1 martyr of the National Peasant Party”⁴⁷.

Recollecting his visit to his father⁴⁸, Baruțu Arghezi remembered Graur as a “kind man, a little exhausted, with gentle speech but bright spirit. If my memory is not mistaken, he was imprisoned for his political left preferences ... He was playing as well, from time to time, cards with the playwright (*i.e. Victor Eftimiu*), who was not intimidated by the financial

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³ Gheorghe Miron, “Aspecte privind viața putneană în anul 1946”, in *Cronica Vrancei*, ed. Horia Dumitrescu, Focșani, Editura Pallas, 2013, p. 222-235 <http://cimec.ro/http://muzeulvrancei.ro> According to Gheorghe Miron, in June 1946, the National Peasant Party (Anton Alexandrescu) counted 6000 members in the Putna county organization, owing to Hagic Boos’ propaganda (227). Hagic Boos had a very good relation with Gheorghe Apostol, who was an important leader of the National Peasant Party (Anton Alexandrescu) – the Putna Branch, and both had close relations with the Communist Party (228).

⁴⁴Ibid, p. 227.

⁴⁵ Narcis-Dorin Ion, “Partidul Național Țărănesc – Anton Alexandrescu. Scurtă istorie (III)”, in *Revista Arhivelor*, Arhivele Naționale ale României, 61. 1-2, 1999 (164-184), p. 166.

⁴⁶Ibid, p. 167-168.

⁴⁷ Nicușor Graur, *Ion Mihalache et Comp.*, București, Editura Dreptatea Nouă, 1946, p. 5-7.

⁴⁸ The renowned prose writer, playwright and poet Tudor Arghezi, who was confined in the Târgu Jiu camp in 1943 for having written an acid pamphlet against fascism and the fascist representatives in Romania.

embarrassment of his playing partners, offering instead to give them loans on condition that they would pay later ... On such an occasion, Nicușor Graur had lost and, not having the means to ‘honor’ the master, the latter pretended instead his blue woolen blanket as forfeit. My father saw him carrying under his arm this blanket taken from Nicușor Graur’s miserable bed. It was in November 1943 ...”⁴⁹

A Militant Author: Memoirs, Memoranda and Manifestos

Graur’s memoirs, *În preajma altei lumi* (*Close to Another World*)⁵⁰ and *Ion Mihalache et Comp.* are both documentary sources regarding the interwar Romanian political life, with particular interest in the doctrine and activity of the National Peasant Party, and reflections of the author’s need of justification for his political choices, through self-victimization and culpabilisation of the others. The two volumes were not accidentally published in the same year, 1946, that is the year of his defection from the National Peasant Party and his move to Anton Alexandrescu’s dissident National Peasant Party. It was not by chance either that the second volume, *Ion Mihalache et Comp.*, was published at the “Dreptatea Nouă” (“New Justice”) Publishing House, bearing the name of the new National Peasant Party (Anton Alexandrescu) official, in contrast to the original, *old* “Dreptatea” (“Justice”)⁵¹.

În preajma altei lumi revolves around the two periods of dictatorship: the royal dictatorship of Carol II (1938-1940), with descriptions of Graur’s clandestine activities and manifestos against the regime, his trial, imprisonment, escape and exile in the Republic of Czechoslovakia; the dictatorship of general Ion Antonescu (1940-1944), with his manifestos against Antonescu and, the most critical one, against Antonescu’s wife, which caused his detention in the Târgu Jiu camp (1943-1944). *Ion Mihalache et Comp.* represents a final attempt to justify his actions, by culpabilising this time Ion Mihalache, his first mentor, protector and supporter, for all his past sufferings and ultimate decision to leave the party. The volume ends theatrically with the letter of resignation addressed to Ion Mihalache on 7 June 1946.

Graur designated himself as the innocent victim of tyranny. In his view, all the adversities started from the 1838 coup d’état and the instauration of the royal dictatorship, which determined him to write and spread manifestos “by which we violently protest against the royal camarilla and the new dictatorial regime, sensing all the misfortunes that were going to befall on our country”⁵². He was consequently sentenced to imprisonment by the War Council in Brașov, but his appeal was admitted and, after a few days of incarceration, he was free to go back to Bucharest on “moral warrant”⁵³. The final trial took place on 15 April 1938 in

⁴⁹ Zenovie Cârlușea, “Baruțu Arghezi. Lagărul de la Târgu Jiu – 1943”, in *Revista Portal Măiastra* II, 2 (6) (2006): (1-4), p. 3.

https://zenoviecarlușea1950.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/revista_maiastra_nr-26_2006.pdf

⁵⁰ Graur, *În preajma altei lumi...*, București, Editura, S.A.R.E.C., 1946.

⁵¹ Narcis-Dorin Ion, “Partidul Național Țărănesc – Anton Alexandrescu. Scurtă istorie (I)”, p. 101.

⁵² Graur, *În preajma altei lumi...*, p. 9-10. My translation from Romanian.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Braşov and, in spite of Iuliu Maniu's presence as witness Graur was sentenced to 25 year imprisonment⁵⁴. He was allowed to travel to Bucharest to arrange his personal belongings, but he chose the exile and eloped to Czechoslovakia instead of going back to prison⁵⁵. His exile would last one year. Constantly chased by the Romanian authorities and under the pressure of war, Graur decided to come back home at the end of 1939. Thus, the second stage of his political memoranda began, this time against Antonescu's regime. In what his political discourse was concerned, his detention in the Târgu Jiu camp in 1942-1943 marked a radical turn. If until then he still acknowledged himself as a National Peasant Party loyal member and described the party's struggle against dictatorship, after the Târgu Jiu episode, in the company of his fellow dissidents, he manifestly expressed his disagreement with the peasantist political doctrine and actions, preparing thus his final defection. In 1941, for example, in a description of Ion Mihalache's personality, Graur was still writing the most appreciative characterization. He visited his "great friend" I. M.⁵⁶ in June and found him very sad and preoccupied after a meeting with Ion Antonescu: "I knew him too well to be mistaken; we were true friends, bound and united by the strongest communion of souls, pure ideals, noble aspirations. I was bound to I. M by a quarter of century's political life"⁵⁷. He continued his dramatic, almost pathetic discourse: "My beginnings in the political life almost overlap his beginnings. We have met and loved each other from the first moment; and I can declare that, during all this time, I nurtured not only a profound, real, total friendship for him, but also **an endless devotion**"⁵⁸. Ion Mihalache synthesized his appeal to Antonescu's understanding, by showing that during the last decades he demonstrated his abnegation toward the Romanian people and, particularly, the peasants who had been "pillaged, exhausted and exploited with no shame"⁵⁹. He also led other "battles": "with the liberal constitution, with the electoral law, with so many forged elections and tainted by blood, with the conversion and usury, with bank frauds and the plunder in the cooperation, with the right wing parties supported by the governments, against the 11 February 1938 coup d'état, with Carol's dictatorship, with the Iron Guard, and during all this time, **the every day's struggle to maintain our foreign policy, for peace and against the revanchist, aggressive, racial and belligerent Hitlerism**"⁶⁰. Ion Mihalache's speech, in Graur's version, finally turned towards the Soviet Union and socialism as the only viable solutions to save Romania: "Europe has but one solution to succeed and this is socialism", "this renewing ideological wave that was accomplished in the great and very strong U.S.S.R.", which "will spread beyond the borders of old Europe". Romania will thus make no exception: "the best model of socialism is here, in my opinion, continued Mihalache/Graur, 'PEASANTISM', **in the form it was founded and sprang from the depths of Romanian realities**"⁶¹.

⁵⁴Ibid, p. 19-23.

⁵⁵Ibid, p. 30.

⁵⁶Ibid, 116. Cautiously, Graur uses only the initials of Ion Mihalache's name.

⁵⁷Ibid, 115.

⁵⁸Ibid, 116. The underlying belongs to Graur.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid, p. 121. The underlying belongs to Graur.

⁶¹Ibid, p. 123. The author's underlying.

Graur wrote his first manifesto in April 1942, seeing that “The National Peasant Party, which took from the beginning a determined attitude against the government’s policy” found itself in the impossibility to act “through a vivid movement of public opinion”. Graur concluded that “its only possibility of action were the written protests addressed to the ‘Leader’ of the State, showing in detail the mistakes of the official policy and the catastrophe to which the country and nation were pushed by this fatal policy”⁶². Graur thus integrated his clandestine activity meant to influence public opinion into the general frame of the National Peasant Party’s policies and actions, by “organizing a subversive campaign, especially based on clandestine manifestos” written by himself⁶³. Undoubtedly, Graur’s manifestos reflected his sincere aversion toward authoritarianism, dictatorship and inequality. Among them, “The protest - manifesto against the Jews’ deportation to Transnistria ...” is most impressive and convincing: “Thrilled with horror, shocked, tears in my eyes, profoundly disgusted, horrified by the idea that I am still living, I am for the first time in my life ashamed to be a Romanian”⁶⁴. The manifesto related to Maria Antonescu’s “councils of patronage, affairs, and occult policies” had aroused considerable interest and reactions from the public opinion⁶⁵. Because of this manifesto he was chased by the “Gestapo” and “Secret Service” and, finally, imprisoned in the Târgu Jiu camp⁶⁶. The camp was to some extent a *political purgatory*, “welcoming”, as the *Welcome* sign on its frontispiece suggested, a great variety of *political sinners*, ranging from peasantist leaders or dissidents, communists, legionaries and ... Jews!

Some of them would leave the camp cleared from their *sins*, ready to enter again the political life on the winners’ side.⁶⁷ Graur found himself among friends there: the first persons he met were the peasantists Zaharia Boilă, Victor Eftimiu Nicu Carandino (director of the *Dreptatea* newspaper, imprisoned during the process against the peasantist leaders), intellectuals like Radu Cioculescu, Tudor Arghezi (for anti- fascist attitudes), his best friends and party dissidents, Mihai Ralea and Anton Alexandrescu, or Communist Party members like Ion Gheorghe Maurer, etc. “In fact, Graur confesses, there were two parties represented in the camp: the communists, several hundreds, all in the 2nd group, and us, the national-peasantists”⁶⁸. Besides playing poker almost every day, the peasantists decided to organize themselves.

They held meetings twice a week and agreed “to collect money for the communist group” and to “found the ‘Democratic Bloc’”⁶⁹. During these meetings, Graur distinguished two different

⁶²Ibid, 131.

⁶³Ibid, 133.

⁶⁴Ibid, p. 161-167,

⁶⁵ Ibid, 191-196

⁶⁶“Baruțu Arghezi. Lagărul de la Târgu Jiu – 1943”, p. 4.

⁶⁷ According to Baruțu Arghezi, the camp was “an island of refuge organized by the Romanian authorities, where so many communists, legionaries, enemies of the belligerent regime, Jews with important business (like Max Auschnit, great factory owner in Reșița) had their existence saved, escaping from Killinger’s bloodthirsty pressures”, Ibid, p. 3. See about the Romanian writers’ political detention, Graur included, during the regimes of dictatorship, Mircea Anghelescu, *Poarta Neagră. Scriitorii și închisoarea*, București, Cartea Românească, 2013.

⁶⁸ Graur, *În preajma altei lumi...*, p. 253.

⁶⁹Ibid, p. 257.

trends among the peasantists: “the first, represented by Boilă, Nicu Carandino, Radu Cioculescu, who were constant partisans of a midline and, the other, represented by me and Anton Alexandrescu, who were exponents of categorical left wing policy”⁷⁰. Victor Eftimiu did not participate in the meetings because he preferred playing cards, while Mihai Ralea would join them later because of the suspicions he had aroused by joining King Carol’s Front of National Rebirth in the past, although he was at the time a member of the Social Democratic Party⁷¹.

It was the right time and place for Graur to openly declare his ideological re-orientation toward the far left. He gave electrifying speeches to all the political groups in the camp: peasantists, communists or legionaries. He gave the legionaries, for example, a lecture about “Russia’s grandiose history”, about the “Romanian – Russian brotherhood” and the Soviet Union’s “magnificent achievement meant to bring a new breadth of life into the world”⁷². It was, as expected, a fulminant success, followed by applauses and his comrades’ appraisals. Among them, Eftimiu “couldn’t stop his eulogy”: “– Dear Nicușor, you’ve been magnificent! You’ve knocked them down, you’ve killed them, and you’ve liquidated them! Oh! I can’t wait the peace! ...”⁷³.

I will not insist here on Graur’s prison life and intense political activity, turning instead to the second volume of memoirs, where all the previous laudatory characterizations of Ion Mihalache’s contributions to the National Peasant Party and, generally, to Romania’s political life in the name of democracy, were capsized. Mihalache was this time skeptical about the Soviet Union’s victory⁷⁴ and he was a partisan of Romania’s entering the war alongside Germany⁷⁵. Graur did not contradict the rumors about Mihalache being either a billionaire and, thus, not a genuine peasantist⁷⁶, or a childish, weak, inconsistent character⁷⁷.

Mihalache and the other peasantist leaders became in Graur’s discourse the “reactionaries”, while Anton Alexandrescu’s group that represented the far left oriented branch of the party, were the future⁷⁸. The volume ends in Graur and Alexandrescu’s virulent diatribes against the “old”, retrograde peasantists, with their bourgeois, anti-democratic political views and actions. This quasi-trial against the Maniu-Mihalache political line culminated with Graur’s letter of resignation, where he stated that the time had come for the young generation represented, among others, by Petre Andrei and Mihai Ralea, to change the world according to their “ideals and purposes”: “a) the alliance of our party with the workers’ parties; b) the

⁷⁰Ibid, p. 258.

⁷¹Ibid. See about Ralea’s political inconsistencies, Hudiță, *Jurnal politic (7 septembrie 1940 – 8 februarie 1941)*, p. 171.

⁷² Graur, *În preajma altei lumi...*, p. 314-315.

⁷³Ibid, p. 316.

⁷⁴ Graur, *Ion Mihalache et Comp.*, p. 12-13.

⁷⁵Ibid, p. 16-17.

⁷⁶Ibid, p. 56-57.

⁷⁷Ibid, p. 61-62.

⁷⁸Ibid, p. 158-175. The chapter contains the description of the meeting in support of Anton Alexandrescu’s reforms.

annihilation of all the fascist wrecks all over the country; c) the total alliance and friendship with the Soviet Union”⁷⁹.

Conclusions

Graur’s readiness to shift ideologies and search for new political mentors was not a unique case in interwar Romania and it was representative for an unstable political background. The dissidents of the historical parties, namely the National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party, were the communists’ targets. The new excrescences of the two parties, specifically the National Liberal Party (Gheorghe Tătărescu), opposed to the main National Liberal Party (Gheorghe Brătianu) and the National Peasant Party (Anton Alexandrescu), in contrast to the original National Peasant Party (Iuliu Maniu), were produced through the classical policies of *divide and rule*. They were meant to be gradually enrolled in the growing numbers of Communist Party members.

The democratic opinions on social equity, peasants’ welfare and agrarian reform supported by the National Peasant Party were distorted by Graur into a virulent anti-capitalist propaganda (based on the notions of the proletariat’s class struggle or conflict with the bourgeois system, social and economic inequity, exploitation, etc.), undermining the very essence of democracy, the multiparty and parliamentary political organization. The same democratic values shared by the peasantists led by Iuliu Maniu and Ion Mihalache, in their struggle against any form of extremism (fascism, anti-Semitism, the totalitarian regimes of King Carol II and Antonescu, and, finally, communism) were now exploited by Graur as great democratic achievements of Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Graur’s ideological shifts influenced not only his political career but also his cultural background, namely his self- representations and representations of the others, the way he was seen by those around him and his position in society, his principles, and, finally, his discourse in the two volumes of memoirs, which were primarily meant to justify his political choices and less to contribute to the Romanian memorialist literature.

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⁷⁹Ibid, 201-202.