

REVIEWS

Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Le jeune Staline*, Editions Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 2008, 766 p. (original edition – *Young Stalin*, Weindenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2007).

10 years of research in 23 cities in 9 countries. These are the impressive figures of the latest book by Simon Sebag Montefiore – *The Young Stalin*. The work of the British historian and writer completes one of his previous works, the biography of Joseph Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili's years of power – *Stalin: the Court of the Red Tsar* (2004).

The book's chronological framework (1878–1917) covers the unhappy and troubled childhood of Vissarion (Bessarion – Besso) and Ekaterina (Keke) Dzhugashvili's only child – Joseph (Ossip – Sosso), in the small Caucasian town of Gori; the turbulent adolescence and youth of the same – as seminarian in Tiflis, underground party activist in the big industrial cities of Georgia and Azerbaijan, and the awful years spent in the far and frozen Siberia – where, for several times, he was exiled by the tsarist regime. The book ends with a detailed evocation of the role that Stalin played in the events of 1917 and with an epilogue over the years: following the destiny of those who – to a smaller or greater extent – influenced the existence of the character that was to become one of history's most bloodthirsty dictators.

Sebag Montefiore's book is therefore proposing to the readers the image of a Stalin before Stalin, seeking to explain the rise of the young Georgian – an impressive odyssey of a destiny that follows the hard road from the periphery up to the centers of power: son of a shoemaker from Gori, idealistic seminarian and talented poet, underground activist of the Bolshevik movement, thief, bank robber, pirate, hunter in the frozen Siberia in 1914, climbing the steps of power after 1917, succeeding Lenin to the leadership of the Soviet Union.

Young Stalin could be considered to be a part of a trend that is gaining more and more ground in the Western historiography: the biographies of the early life of different historical characters – a reconstruction of the youth in order to explain the *becoming*. There are well known works of these types on Hitler¹, Winston Churchill², and Theodore Roosevelt³ or Franklin Delano

¹ Ian KERSHAW, *Hitler. 1889–1936: Hubris*, London – New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000; Brigitte HAMANN, *Hitler's Vienna. A Portret of the Tyrant as a Young Man*, New York: Tauris Park Paperbacks, 2010; Claus HANT, *Young Hitler*, London: Quartet Books, 2010.

² Winston S. CHURCHILL, *My Early Life: A Roving Commision*, London: Thornton Butterworth, 1930.

³ David McCULLOUGH, *Mornings on Horseback. The Story of an Extraordinary Family, a Vanished Way of Life, and the Unique Child Who Became Theodore Roosevelt*, New York: Simon & Shuster Inc., 1981.

Roosevelt's⁴ youth. Up until now, Stalin's early existence has attracted the interest of the researchers only fortuitously. Sebag Montefiore speaks about only two books that approach the subject: the political and psychological study of Robert C. Tucker, and Edward Ellis Smith's work – that is bringing into attention for the first time the controversial thesis of Stalin being a former Okhrana⁵ agent.

One of the author's merits is the rich information that the book offers to the readers, proof of the hard work entailed in discovering different traces within archives and libraries. The book is based, according to the testimony of the author, on a thorough research in various archives, most of them only now opened to the researchers' free access: the Archives of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow, the Archives of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Tbilisi (Tiflis), the Russian State Archives from Moscow, the Archives of Stalin Museum in Gori, the Azerbaijan State Archives in Baku, the Nikolaevski Archives and the Paris Office of Okhrana's Archives, these latter two being stored at the Stanford University Library, in the United States. The author confesses that he was aware of the fact that many of the documents studied had undergone a rigorous censorship in the '30 – especially those from the Caucasian countries – which were, at that time, under the strict control of the first secretary of Transcaucasia – Lavrenti Beria.

Another type of source that Montefiore made use of was the memoirs of the people who were close to Stalin at that time or those regarding different aspects of Stalin's past. Many of these memoirs were, up until now, inaccessible to the researchers. These sources also suffered corrections, additions or distortions during Stalin's *reign*, but many of the original manuscripts were not destroyed, but carefully preserved in special funds, especially in different local archives. The author was also preoccupied by the field work and by the gathering of oral testimonies, even if such a task may seem as futile given the fact that there are almost 100 years since the related events. Nevertheless, Sebag Montefiore managed to find and speak with some followers of the main characters of his book: in a sanatorium in Tbilisi he found and spoke with Maria Svanidze, 109 years old, a relative of Stalin's first wife – Ekaterina (Kato) Svanidze. Montefiore also obtained some valuable information from one of Stalin's nieces – Galina Dzhugashvili ("Gouliia"), and from the daughters of Grigori Ordzhonikidze ("Sergo" – Georgian depleted noble, friend and ally of Stalin during his youth) and Maxim Litvinov.

One of the central ideas of Sebag Montefiore's book was to try to explain the violent behavior and the paranoia of the dictator Stalin as a consequence of some serious psychological slippages that young Sosso suffered since

⁴ Geoffrey C. WARD, *Before the Trumpet. Young Franklin Roosevelt. 1882–1905*, New York: Harpercollins, 1985; Geoffrey C. WARD, *A First-Class Temperament: The Emergence of Franklin Roosevelt*, New York: Harpercollins, 1992.

⁵ *Okhrana (Okhranka)* – The *Department for Protecting the Public Security and Order* – , was the secret police force of the Russian Empire, part of the police department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD).

childhood, but also throughout his youth. His childhood and adolescence, considered until recently as the most poorly understood period of his life, are hiding a turmoil and extraordinary story, full of heaviness, serious psychological biographical ruptures and tragedies – elements that may have caused the shaping of a killer psychological profile of the Georgian.

The son of a drunken, paranoid, and extremely violent shoemaker, the young Sosso would have suffered the brutality of his father from the first years of his existence. Another event that could have had a strong influence over the child Stalin was a sinister spectacle of a medieval *mise en scène* – a hanging. Still a student in his home town – Gori, Stalin witnessed what was considered to be “*the most remarkable event in the history of the town in the 19th century*” – the execution of three Georgian peasants who stole a cow, killing afterwards a policeman. The “show” should have been a demonstration of force of the Russian, meant to inspire fear and impose respect among the Georgians. But the effect that the sinister “performance” had over the young student is very hard to be deducted. There are opinions that are saying that the event would have enhanced the criminal nature of Stalin. Sebag Montefiore believes that such an idea is somehow misplaced, considering that, most likely, the event would have influenced Stalin as to develop a rebellious and revolutionary spirit.

As a student of the theological seminary in Tiflis, young Stalin suffered the rigors of a strict education and those of some inflexible professors, who often were trying too hard to prove their zeal and their commitment to the Russian rule – within the seminar the mother tongue of most of the students (Georgian) was forbidden, the only accepted language being the Russian; and the professors sought that the compliance with that rule to be carried out with the utmost rigor.

The years of his youth didn't bring too much material or professional satisfaction to Stalin. Strongly committed to the Bolshevik movement, he was supposed to accept all the rigors of the underground life and activity: always on the run, in search for another home or just a place to stay, living permanently under the specter of an arrest and with the fear of being recognized, having to be alert to all those with whom he met, or those who seemed to pursue or supervise him. But the young Georgian seemed to like this kind of life, and no subsequent arrests, or the periods of imprisonment, not even the exile in the far and frozen Siberia managed to stop him. Young Stalin had obvious qualities – his ability to communicate both with the ordinary people, but also with the more influential and more educated members of the party, and his organizational skills – have made him a Charismatic member of the party, who will obtain an increasingly important role within its hierarchy.

The drama provoked by the death of Stalin's first wife – Ekaterina (Kato) Svanidze represented another important biographical rupture of Stalin's early life. Prolific lover, fond of petty love affairs, father of numerous bastard children – that he cared little about and often even refused to recognise them – Stalin was deeply shaken by the death of his first wife. The image of the

afflicted husband, attending in silence and sorrow the funeral of his wife is one of the few scenes in which Stalin appeared to be humanized by his feelings. It appeared also to be another important moment in the shaping of his pitiless and harsh character; if we were to believe the testimony of a witness, at that moment he would have said: “*This person – he pointed to the open casket – has softened my heart of stone. She died, and along with her, died the last sentiments of affection that could inspire the humanity for me*”.

Sebag Montefiore’s book also tried to refute the thesis that Stalin was a double agent, working for the tsarist secret police – Okhrana. On this particular topic, there were some suspicions, all of them based on a series of strange events: Stalin’s peculiar kinship with some secret police agents and his various escapes from the exile or from prison. All of these arguments seemed to make plausible such a scenario. But Sebag Montefiore carefully deconstructed all these suspicions, trying to prove that the idea of Stalin as a double agent was nothing more than a propagandistic scenario formulated by his detractors.

The main problems of Sebag Montefiore’s work are those regarding the credibility of the sources. As I said before, most of the sources used by Montefiore were subject to a serious censorship during the ‘30. Even though Montefiore is aware of this fact, he sometimes seems to accept some of them regardless. Another problem of the book is a certain tendency to always put Stalin in the center of the event – dominating the audiences, being always the hero of the scene, managing to keep his calm during tense situations, managing to escape for several times in some spectacular manners (dressed as a woman, disguised as a crippled old man). Most of these “stories” could have been nothing but rumors, but Montefiore accept them as facts, thus heroizing his character.

Is this how Ossip Dzhugashvili became Stalin? We do not know, but Sebag Montefiore’s book is trying to suggest it. Despite the numerous question marks that *Young Stalin* is raising, no other book succeeded in portraying in such a detailed manner the formative years of one of the most powerful and feared men of the 20th century. Throughout the biography, Sebag Montefiore is trying to make us understand the bases of the regime that was to be established in Russia after 1917. Gradually, the life of Stalin joined the history of Russia, managing to merge with it in the exciting days of 1917.

The work of Sebag Montefiore received the “Best Biography of 2007 Prize” – awarded by the Costa Books and the “Grand Prix de la biographie politique” in 2008.

Ștefan Bosomitu

Vlad Georgescu: *Politics and History. The Case of Romanian Communists (1944–1977)*, Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2008.

Vlad Georgescu graduated from the Bucharest Faculty of History in 1959 and between 1959 and 1963 he worked at the former Romanian-Russian

Museum; in 1963 he dedicated himself to the study of history as an affiliate researcher at the Institute of South-East European Studies managed by Professor Mihai Berza (p. 2). In 1979, historian Vlad Georgescu received a scholarship in the United States of America and emigrated together with his wife and son.⁶ In the 80s he worked as an associate professor at prestigious universities in the United States and continued to publish abroad volumes and articles on modern and contemporary history (p. 2). From 1982 he was appointed Associate Director and one year later Director of the Romanian Section of Radio Free Europe (p. 2). He held this position until his death in 1988 (p. 2).

Politics and History. The Case of the Romanian Communists (1944–1977) was completed in March 1977 but could not be published in Romania at that time. It was published in two successive editions (1981 and 1983) at John Dumitru Publishing House in Munich in a print-run of several hundreds of copies which made the work be known only within the Romanian emigrant circles⁷. Writing such a book in the 70s was an act of great courage on behalf of researcher Vlad Georgescu. It was the first critical analysis of the way in which the politic factor managed the historic study over the period 1944–1977. The severe criticism of the interference of the Romanian Communist Party into the study of the national history was considered as a ‘betrayal’ and investigated as such by Securitate. In his book of memories Professor Dinu C. Giurescu tells the story of the arrest of Vlad Georgescu on March 10, 1977. According to Dinu Giurescu’s statements written in his volume of memories, the work *Politics and History. The Case of Romanian Communists (1944–1977)* would have been the reason for his confinement by Securitate. Vlad Georgescu was freed in 1977 following the concern and the perplexity expressed by the university environment from the United States and by the American diplomacy represented at Bucharest by Ambassador Harry Barnes regarding the cause of such measure⁸. The text of the second edition of the *Politics and History. The Case of Romanian Communists (1944–1977)* issued in 1983 at John Dumitru Publishing House in Munich served as the basis for the edition that would have been published in Romania in 2008 at Humanitas Publishing House under the coordination of archaeologist and medievalist Radu Popa (who died in 1993). The volume aims to be a presentation and also an analysis of the connection between history and politics during the Romanian communism. The first four chapters follow chronologically the major lines of the Romanian contemporary history (1944–1960, 1960–1965, 1965–1971, 1971–1977). It presents the different interpretation of the history from one age to another, from one reign to another or even during the same rule. These chapters catch the way in which the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) has unnaturally

⁶ Dinu C. GIURESCU, *From Sovromconstrucții no. 6 to the Romanian Academy. Memories-Evidence*, Bucharest: Meronia Publishing House, 2008, p. 361.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

subordinated, to its conjunctural and contradictory political lines, the continuous modelling of the past which represents an objective datum that cannot be changed all the time without the risk of compromising history and politics. Historian Vlad Georgescu remarked that: „during the Romanian communists four moments when they discussed and reinterpreted both the theoretic global vision of the history and the clear facts were found in only three decades” (p. 2).

In each chapter, the critical analysis started from the documents of the party and went on with the official historiography writings. Each chapter included a presentation of the interpretations given to the main events, phenomena and historic processes. Special attention was given to the creation of the Romanian people and the Romanian language, the Romanian-Russian relationships, the Independence War, the first World War, the creation of Great Romania, the origins of the communist party and its place in the inter-war society, and the act of August 23, 1944.

The first chapter *The “Historic Front” establishes the truth (1944⁹–1960)* presents and critically assesses the process of integral rewriting of the Romanian history initiated in 1947, the phenomenon of ‘eradictaion’ of undesirable historians started in the autumn of 1947 (Gheorghe Brătianu, Ioan Hudiță, Victor Papacostea, Constantin C. Giurescu etc.) and the cancellation, one by one, of all the pre-war scientific institutions in 1948 (pp. 10–13). The broken alliance with Germany in the summer of 1944, the entrance into alliance with Russia during the second World War and the presence of the Red Army on the Romanian territory from the autumn of 1944 have imposed on Bucharest a new direction for its politics. In full compliance with the new Pro-Soviet trends adopted by the new regime installed in March 1945, historiography became a supporter of the party being emptied of any nationalist nuance incriminated as harmful. The old interpretations regarding the creation of the Romanian people and language, the Romanian-Russian relationships and the battle for independence have been passed through the filter of a pro-Russian and class vision and consequently they were greatly modified. Thus within the new history written after 1944, Latinity was overshadowed by the

⁹ Historian Vlad Georgescu considered in his book *Politics and History. The Case of the Romanian Communists (1944–1977)* that the first period of the new Romanian communist historiography lasted between 1944 and 1960. The author links the start of the turning point of the Romanian historiography in the communist period to the act of liberation from Fascism and Capitalism on August 23, 1944, based on which the communist regime was established in Romania. According to historic studies it may be said that the act of August 23, 1944 and the entrance of the Red Army into the Romanian territory in the autumn of 1944 created the circumstances for the establishment of the communist regime. Officially, it was established in Romania on March 6, 1945. Of course, the political events of 1944 generated the framework for radical changes to the methodology and the themes of the Romanian historiography but they did not occur in 1944. The first real changes to the historiography and to all that represented the Romanian academic environment took place in 1947 with the issuance of the *History of Romania* by Roller, mentioned by Vlad Georgescu too in his volume and with the first eradication from universities in the autumn of the same year.

“preponderant Slav element in the creation of the Romanian language”, the Romanians became a “Slav people”, the political union from 1918 was considered an “imperialist act” and the independence and the liberation obtained by Romanians following the wars were considered “presents” received from the “traditional” Russian ally (pp. 18–23).

The second chapter, *The beginning of the reinterpretation of the historic truth freshly interpreted (1960¹⁰–1965)*, is dedicated to the period of limited opening in Romanian culture in early 60s. In 1963–1964 the constant falsifier dogmatism of the 40s and 50s was left apart little by little and they proceeded to recover the Romanian cultural and literary heritage. As Vlad Georgescu wrote in his books: “the historic truth freshly interpreted started to be again reinterpreted in an as national sense as possible (p. 47). This change of direction was done few years after the withdrawal of the Red Army from the Romanian territory in 1958 and the “Official declaration of April 1964” considered as “the declaration of independence of the Romanian communists” marked the new political orientation of Gheorghiu-Dej.

In the third chapter, *Ideological relaxation (1965–1971)*, the author analyses the short ideological relaxation between 1965 and 1971. It coincided with the first years of Ceaușescu’s rule, with the “Declaration of independence at the end of August 1968” when Nicolae Ceaușescu proclaimed Romania’s rejection of Czechoslovakia’s invasion by the armies of the Warsaw Pact. Vlad Georgescu wrote: “the ideological relaxation occurred on the background of a policy of relative liberalization, decentralization and internal relaxation from early 70s” (p. 54).

The fourth chapter, *Culturnicii the False men of culture and the new myths (1971–1977)*, is a detailed analysis of the “cultural revolution” at the beginning of the eighth decade which, by sinking the national positive change from the middle of the previous decade into the cult of personality (inspired like the “theses” of July 1971 by the Maoist model and the North-Korean model) has completely changed the image of the past into a cartoon and placed again the historiography under the control of the party’s interests. During this period which Romanian culture passed through coincided with Ceaușescu’s official visits of June 1971 paid to China, a country in the middle of its cultural revolution, and to North Korea. In his book of memories, Professor Giurescu considered that those visits to China and North Korea helped Ceaușescu to publicly formulate his “proposals” of July 1971, while his firm belief on ideological factor had been formed as a party activist¹¹. This stage of the Romanian historiography (1971–1977) was the richest period in terms of false myths that historian Vlad Georgescu mentions in his work: the Thracian origins of the Romanian people, the very early completion of the ethno-genesis (IV

¹⁰ The volume *The Perfect Acrobat. Leonte Răutu. The Masks of Evil* by Vladimir Tismăneanu and Cristian Vasile mentions the years 1963–1964 as years of limited relaxation for the Romanian culture (Vladimir Tismăneanu, Cristian Vasile, *The Perfect Acrobat. Leonte Răutu. The Masks of Evil*, Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2008, p. 103).

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

century to consequently diminish the Slav element), the overbidding on no grounds of the Romanian spiritual and political unit along the centuries from the post-Roman period and medieval period, the role attributed to the party in the contemporary history (inter-war and post-war) of Romania (pp. 90–102).

The last two chapters, *The Historic Kitsch* and *Where the “front” is heading to*, try to decipher the impact on the Romanian society of the unnatural combination of a history repeatedly modelled by the party and an undemocratic politics. The author bitterly finds that: “the Romanian society is enriched with an invented past and is governed by a political class made of pseudo-values. Each moment of the present is connected to the past and the roots are driven in the depth of the centuries. The historic legal nature becomes an obsession as we do not know it has existed before in the past of this people” (pp. 118, 107). In his final chapter, Vlad Georgescu underlined several features of the historiography in the 70s: its genetic feature with the praise of the primordial biological background; its euphoric feature with “the apology of the past that extends over the present”; its anniversary feature “with adoration of all that had been burnt other time, without judgement or critical sense” (pp. 118–120). “History – Vlad Georgescu wrote – lost its autonomy, became the maid-servant of the new religion *historia ancillia politicae* – this is the conclusion drawn from each page of our study” (p. 120). “History becomes rhetoric not *ars bene dicendi*, but *ars politicae dicendi*, which means in an absolute compliance with the politics of the moment” (p. 120).

It is obvious that such a critical analysis written during the years of maximum censorship under Ceaușescu’s regime could only be classified as a “serious deviation”. The “Essay” *Politics and History. The Case of the Romanian Communists (1944–1977)* as humbly named by Vlad Georgescu says all that it could say at that time about the Romanian historiography totally subordinated to the communist party. As even the author mentioned in *Introduction*, the text is rich in quotations (from the party’s documents, treaties of history etc.) and the footnotes are full of hints which affects to some extent the fluency of reading. However, the documentary feature of the volume is incontestable and does not diminish its analytical and interpretative value. Vlad Georgescu let the texts speak out as he used to say: “they are often veritable pages of anthology of petty politics, opportunism, and incompetence” (p. 2).

Cristina Roman

Ralph DARLINGTON: *Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism. An International Comparative Analysis*, Aldershot – Hampshire UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2008, 323 p.

Highly interested in the complexity of labour-related topics, Ralph Darlington proved to be a tireless observer of the working relations referring not only to past events but also to the most recent, day-to-day problems that

occur from the interaction going on within the workers' part of the society¹². As a social historian, trained in social studies at Liverpool Polytechnic and in the sociology of labour and industrial relations at the University of Warwick, professor Darlington's expertise extends primarily to areas such as the changing nature of trade unionism, the relationship between union members and full-time union officers, and the interplay between shop-floor trade union militancy and general socialist politics and organisation. This inclination is shown through authored books such as *Dynamics of Work place Unionism* (1994), *The Political Trajectory of J.T. Murphy* (1998) or *Glorious Summer. Class Struggle in Britain – 1972* (2001). It is shown also through more than a hundred interventions either in edited books (for example, with Barker, E., "Turning Point for Poland", in Harman, C. (ed.), *In the Heat of the Struggle*, 1993), academic journals ("Labour history", „Industrial Relations Journal", etc.), encyclopaedias (for example, "Founding of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) in Moscow", in *St. James Encyclopaedia of Labour History Worldwide*, 2003) or conferences. At present, he is Professor of Employment Relations at the Faculty of Business, Law and the Built Environment from the Salford Business School in England and he is working on a project about the dynamics, limits and potential of radicalised political trade unionism in France and Britain.

As we can see from his books, Darlington has a special interest in the left wing of trade unionism. And especially for those groups and members who were reluctant to engage in any form of negotiation within the capitalist system, commonly known in western literature as syndicalism or revolutionary syndicalism. Originating in the writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and in the working environment from the end of nineteenth century France, their emphasis was placed on the overthrow of capitalism through the means of industrial class struggle. This means that, unlike most socialists who organized workers' parties, the syndicalists concentrated on organizing the working class through unions, which served a dual function, acting both as the organizers of class warfare and as the nuclei of the post-revolutionary society. The emancipation of the working class was to be achieved by direct action and general strike, not by parliamentary pressure or political insurrection designed to lead to state socialism; the aim was the control of both the economy and the society by workers¹³. Apparently similar to the communist ideology, at least with respect to its irreconcilable hostility to the capitalist world, the study of syndicalism is extremely useful in understanding communism, as it emphasises comparatively the particularities of communist (Bolshevik) *modus operandi*, especially when it comes to conquering power. Furthermore, it enables us to understand

¹² For an extensive presentation of professor Darlington academic profile, see <http://www.seek.salford.ac.uk/pp.jsp?DarlingtonRalph393>, retrieved on 30 May 2010.

¹³ Evan DANIEL, "Syndicalist Movement", in Neil SCHLAGER, (ed.), *St. James Encyclopedia of Labor History Worldwide. Major Events in Labor History and Their Impact*, Volume 2, N – Z, Thompson Learning – Gale Group, 2004, p. 283.

the unique and unprecedented character of communist goals, from where all the actions undertaken by communist states were determined and extracted.

Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism. An International Comparative Analysis is the most recent book by professor Ralph Darlington and was published in 2008 as a part of the series of Studies in Labour History launched in 1998 by the British Society for the Study of Labour History. The book analyses the revolutionary syndicalist movement at its peak, meaning the first two decades of the 20th century, particularly the period immediately preceding and following the First World War, from about 1910 until the early 1920s. Being not a simple descriptive attempt, but a scientifically oriented research, it has a challenging hypothesis. This hypothesis is extracted from the relationship between syndicalism and communism, two ideologies which were significantly influential at the time and which had quite a similar image in the eyes of those who were in power at the end of the War. As the author states, it is the first attempt at systematic examination of the relationship between them. By demonstrating this hypothesis, he offers “a distinctive comparative historiography of the dynamics and trajectory of the syndicalist movement on an international scale” (p. 8) calling upon a rich corpus of sources, both primary (newspapers and conference documentation) and research literature (pp. 289–310).

The following two paragraphs will delineate the structure of the book, which is one of its strengths, making it more intelligible and easy to follow from the point of view of its hypothesis. With a very ingenious organization, Darlington manages to underline for the reader the main aspects of the book's subject, both chronologically and thematically. By a simple run over of the content and of the subtitles we can see that in the first part, which covers two thirds of the book, he analyses the dynamic of the syndicalist movement and focuses on the years up to World War One. In the second part, which covers the last years of the War and the interwar period, he describes the process of transition from syndicalism to communism. Both parts are structured in chapters in accordance with the main themes that he is following. He uses this structure because his emphasis on the book hypothesis goes more towards the intellectual and ideological factors than to factual ones.

With respect to the dynamics of the syndicalist movement, which is analysed first, he goes through all the aspects related to it. Both ideas and practice are carefully described, though he stresses more on the latter, such as formation, organization, activity and demise. In this way, he portrays in an optimal comparative perspective, the image of what was to be the international syndicalist movement. Representing the left wing of trade unionism, this is a topic, though not as untouched as its fusion with communism, but at least precariously studied, because the researchers focused mainly on the national level¹⁴. In the second part, which comprises the main argument in support of

¹⁴ We can bring to mind in respect with the international approach a few works like: Wayne THORPE, *The workers themselves: revolutionary syndicalism and international labour, 1913–*

his transitional logic, he underlines more the ideological and political characteristics of syndicalism, both being the “battlefields” of these two traditions. In his view, subjects like the role of trade unionism and union bureaucracy, economics and politics (e.g. industrial struggle vs. political organization), state and revolution (e.g. general strike vs. armed insurrection) or the role of the leadership and of the party were those on which Bolsheviks had to work in order to change syndicalist views and to incorporate them. So they became subchapter titles in the second part.

The country movements which are studied in this way (the case studies) come from France (Confédération Générale du Travail – CGT), Spain (Confederación Nacional de Trabajo - CNT), Italy (Unione Sindacale Italiana – USI), Ireland (Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union – ITGWU), the United States (Industrial Workers of the World – IWW or “Wobblies”) and Britain (groups or members within the Industrial Syndicalist Education League – ISEL, Shop Stewards’ and Workers’ Committee Movement). The order in which we have enumerated them is not random, as they represent, beginning with the first, the degree of influence they had within the overall trade union movements of their countries. As we see, Darlington is dealing with a large spectrum of movements, going from the obviously dominating organizations (CGT), through those which were in competition with reformist trade unions, but stronger (CNT) or weaker (ITGWU) than those, up to pseudo-organizations, which were in fact just groups of ideas without any or very little workers’ support (Britain). Apart from the descriptive imperative about the movements, which is implied, the author is oriented to lay the stress on those common characteristics which made from it an international movement. These characteristics are essential, because in the general argument of the book they represent the ground on which communism approached syndicalism.

The research hypothesis starts from the premise that overall, although there were other important factors which contributed to its demise (like state repression after the War), “it was the seizure of state power by Russian workers under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party [...] which was to prove a decisive ideological and political challenge to the revolutionary syndicalist movement” (p. 3). In advancing this argument, Darlington also focuses on the conversion to communism, undertaken by key figures in the syndicalist movement across different countries (mainly Alfred Rosmer and Tom Mann, vice-presidents of RILU, and J.T. Murphy). In his opinion, this was one of the main factors in the process of transition. Although many of them returned soon after to their previous beliefs, it was too late because the movement had been already disintegrated and the communists took over the initiative.

1923, Dordrecht – Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1989; Marcel van der LINDEN, Wayne THORPE, *Revolutionary Syndicalism. An International Perspective*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990.

But this entire process was not homogeneous and unidirectional, meaning that it did not go without difficulties and represented only a takeover by the communists. In the centre of the controversies between syndicalism and communism was the problem of strategy regarding attitudes towards an entire set of problems, going from general aspects, as the approach to the capitalism system, to very particular ones, like the core cell of the workers' movement. Nevertheless, the initiative was by the communist side, as it is shown by the creation of the Third International (Comintern) and its correspondent structure at the trade union level, Red International of Labour Union (RILU). These two organizations underlined the Bolshevik desire to export their model and assume the possibilities of the others. Especially the latter organization represented the scene where all the fight took place and where Darlington had traced the inner characteristics of the process.

Above all, the author shows that, even within the communist side, there were a lot of different approaches towards the syndicalist organizations. On the one hand, there were the radicals like Zinoviev and Radek, who repeatedly accused revolutionary syndicalism of being no less than a deviation from the Marxist dogma. On the other hand, their opposition was counterbalanced by the authority of Lenin and Trotsky, who advocated cooperation. Quite natural, as it is shown in the first part of the book, and even more diffuse, was the attitude from the syndicalist direction, where the lack of concordance and synchronisation was significant. That is why a process full of disagreements and convulsive moments resulted. As it was unfolding, communists carried their point to the end, though not without stage loses and an overall result under their expectations.

All of these controversies brought a few key problems in the forefront. Apart from the issue of whether or not revolutionaries should participate in parliamentary activity, Darlington identifies three other main formal debates: first related to whether revolutionaries should stay inside the existing reformist unions to win them to their cause or set up new revolutionary union bodies to replace them ("boring from within" vs. "dual unionism" strategy); second to the nature of the organisational and political ties between RILU and the Comintern (independence vs. subordination); and third to whether a revolutionary political party was necessary (p. 191).

The conclusion of the research is that the real outcome of this process was more a fusion between the two ideologies, than a takeover by the communists. And the best proof of this, in the authors' view, is the series of revolutionary communist parties that emerged in western countries during this agitated period in Europe's history, which incorporated significant influences of syndicalism, both regarding its ideological and organisational principles and members as well (p. 280).

Our final assessment of the book goes to a very well organized and clear synthesis of syndicalism, which underlines its main features as well as the majority of the debates engaged over it. Though it leaves aside a strongly socialist space, like the German one and the subsequent movement of the Free

Association of German Trade Unions (FDvG), as well as other significant non-European movements, we can imagine that this is direction of research which forced the author to work on movements able to cover the entire spectrum at the international level and to give a balanced image of it. The analytical approach chosen by the author, who leaves out of focus factual aspects and events, may be a strong point in regard to the particularity of the movement within the trade unionism framework, as it could be a weaker one in respect with the communist absorption, determined more by pure contextual actions. Also related to the demise of syndicalism as a result of communist action, which from the title goes as the books' main subject, is the disproportionate coverage of this interaction.

Having strong expertise in the research of labour history, Ralph Darlington accomplishes here the difficult task of synthesizing one of the poorly studied parts of the international labour movement, syndicalism, as well as the virtually unknown process through which this tradition was undermined and confiscated by the Russian communists. The importance of syndicalism in the first two decades of the twentieth century was fully recognized, especially by the authorities at that time. Until the Bolsheviks took over power in Russia, suddenly transforming communism into the most potent danger to the capitalist-democratic world, in its place as the extreme left wing representatives of the workers' and socialist movements was syndicalism. The main attribute of this book is that he succeeds in showing both a movement and a historical process in a very organized fashion, highly intelligible for the reader, without damaging the comparative dimension of the research.

Dan Drăghia

Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009, 354 p.

Maria Bucur¹⁵, as her studies show¹⁶, has good knowledge of the Romanian and Central-European space. In the 7 chapters of this book (plus a convincing

¹⁵ Maria Bucur is John W. Hill Chair in East European History, Associate Professor of History, and Director of the Russian and East European Institute at Indiana University Bloomington.

¹⁶ Maria BUCUR, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania*, Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2002 (translated into Romanian: Eugenie și modernizare în România interbelică, translated by Raluca Popa, foreword by Mihaela Miroiu, Iași: Polirom, 2005); Nancy WINGFIELD, Maria BUCUR, (eds.), *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006; Maria BUCUR, Nancy WINGFIELD, (eds.), *Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Hasburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*, West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001; Mihaela MIROIU, Maria BUCUR (eds.), *Patriarhat și emancipare în istoria gândirii politice românești* [Patriarchy and Emancipation in the History of Romanian Political Thought], Iași: Polirom, 2002. The author also published

introduction, consistent bibliography and index) – for which the author used impressive resources and worked for a decade – she insists mostly on three periods: interwar, World War II and the Stalinist years of Communist persecution (1940–1953). Commemorative policies, a distinct area nowadays¹⁷, are understood by Bucur in connection with local history as “memory is linked to locally grounded events and context”. She also insists on the various components of memory for investigating the production of cultural identity markers. The novelty of the analysis consists in interpreting memory work in terms of permanent monumental sites and “especially through smaller funerary markers, rituals and other manipulations of space (...), as well as autobiographical writings, novels, and film” (p. 2).

Maria Bucur’s analysis starts in the 19th century, when the cult of the death had an important role in rural culture, Christian elements mixing with pagan ones. The remaining cultural differences regarding the burial practices, thoroughly identified by the researcher, were suddenly changed by the Great War. In Romania, the commemorative policies started late during the reign of Charles I, when 56 markers were erected, and when stamps and medals were inaugurated. Still, the author states “Mass education was not among his (Charles I) chief achievements, and thus many of this subjects, especially the vast majority of illiterate peasants, remained untouched and unmoved by the spectacle of monarchical glory or military success (1877–1878 and 1913), as well as other modernizing projects (bridges, railroads, and large buildings in Bucharest)” (p. 38). In fact, only after World War I was wartime suffering and victimization considered as heroic. Actually, rural communities took measures for reburial of a great number of victims before the state did (real pilgrimages were organised each spring in search of bones). This led to numerous religious matters given the soldiers’ confession. “For most communities, the focus wasn’t finding wide recognition for the sacrifices of their loved ones in a nationalist idiom, as heroes who had fought for their country. Rather, these community-based and individual rituals revolved more directly around dealing with the pain of loss.” (p. 59). Starting with the end of the war, the Romanian state had the will of being present in the local communities by the means of various commemorative strategies: Heroes Day (starting in 1920), the institution Heroes Cult (from 1919), the review *The Cult of Our Heroes* (later entitled *Heroic Romania*), Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Commission

numerous articles in prestigious journals (*American Historical Review*, *East European Politics and Societies*, *Journal of Women’s History*, *Rethinking History*).

¹⁷ A few titles from a large bibliography: Jay WINTER, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Jay WINTER, Emmanuel SIVAN (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Katherine VERDERY, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999 (translated into Romanian: *Viața politică a trupurilor moarte: reînhumare și schimbare postsocialistă*, București: Vremea, 2006); Catherine MERRIDALE, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia*, New York: Viking, 2001.

for Monuments (1929) etc. Generally, as Bucur observes, local monuments did not commemorate patriotic soldier or the fatherland, rather local boys and men. Local conflicts didn't fail to show, especially in Transylvania, where the conflicting local communities (Hungarians and Romanians) led to some curiosities, e.g. Romanians celebrated the "true" end of the war in 1919 (when Romanian Army defeated the Béla Kun regime in Budapest). The relationship between commemorative and religious practices remained remarkably strong inside the local communities (public monuments or integrated in the religious spaces). In cities, on the other hand, during the interwar period, building some public monuments (for instance, The Triumphal Arch, 1938) didn't have the same reverberation as in the smaller communities. Interested in the way in which literary production incorporated memory ("I see memory, Bucur says, as both a process and a product", p. 9) the author reviewed autobiographical writings (Marshal Alexandru Averescu, Alexandru Marghiloman, Vasile Th. Canticov etc.) noticing anti-Semitic sentiments and masculinist/masculinized versions of the society's descriptions. As a specialist in Gender studies, Bucur is very close to women's position (Sabina Cantacuzino, Jeana Col. Fodoreanu) in Romania especially during the war. Still, we cannot agree with the author's assertion that "women's autobiographical wartime writings flourished after the war, in part as a reaction against the masculinist amnesia of the post-war years" (p. 97). We strongly believe that the women's autobiographical wartime flourishing is connected with other important elements: the emergence of an important group of well-educated women, the increase of the book market in Romania, the seduction of the literary field etc.; besides autobiographical writings, the author also reviews works of literature and films.

Between the two wars, there was a tendency to centralize commemorative practices (even though there weren't any debates, currents or controversies which could interest important population segments), a tendency which was recovered and continued after the war by the Communist Party. "Over time, the rules of the central authorities seemed to become stricter, to exclusion of local colour, rendering impossible any real dialogue between local communities and the state authorities in Bucharest" (p. 108). The author investigated various archives (National State Archives, Heroes Cult Archives, National Military Museum Archive, The Office of National Patrimony Archives etc.), a fact clearly visible in different text approaches; she showed that nationalism was an important filter for various local commemorative initiatives, while the state's policies in this field didn't hold a central role. Local traditions, habits, the relationships between different participants in the community's life mostly influenced local initiatives. Therefore, concludes Bucur, the state had never controlled this field in Romania since 1918 ("My goal is to destabilize any impression that commemorative discourses somehow flow from the center to the margins", p. 14). Still, this didn't take the form of a resistance from local communities against the state's initiatives.

Bucur tells us the fabulous story of the most monumental Romanian commemorative marker of the Great War: the Mărășești Mausoleum erected a full

generation after the battle (1917/1938), where the government was neither the initiator, nor the main promoter. The main promoter was the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women, which could sound strange, but was not if we think of the mothers, sisters and wives of the lost people. Describing the festive ceremony of commemoration, Bucur skilfully notices how the battle of Mărășești, comparable in number of victims and intensity with the Somme battle, didn't raise the curiosity of foreign specialists. Also during the interwar period, a whole range of commemorative dates were added and/or maintained (24 January, 10 May, 8 June, 6 August, 1 December) which were packed with symbols on the way, rounded the image of a "cacophony of holidays and commemorative events of the war" (p. 114). "Struggles between the centre and regional/local actors in controlling the shape and meaning of commemorative memorials came to a head in 1938 [...] the government finally began to gain a better control over commemorative war efforts" (p. 141).

The most important chapter from our point of view is entitled "War Commemorations and State Propaganda under Dictatorship" and it covers the period from the "Crusade against Bolshevism" to Ceaușescu's cult of personality, 1940-1989. Bucur considers that the period of anti-Communist resistance cannot be viewed as separate from the war. As she interestingly observed, "Crusade against Bolshevism" contains elements of religion, ethnicity, ideology, etc.

A new form of commemoration initiated by King Charles II and then by Ion Antonescu, used the national state propaganda. The heroes and victims of the Soviet Union campaign, ("Crusade against Bolshevism") had, as Bucur notices, a different treatment from the authorities: "While the soldiers were being praised for their patriotism, many of their victims, most of them innocent Jews who had been murdered on the orders of the military for their 'Bolshevik' activities against the Romanian armies, remained forgotten." (p. 152). But the indications given by the authorities (especially by the Heroes Cult) during the Second World War were more inclusive (than exclusive), allowing the group burial of soldiers, civilians, volunteers, nurses and even war prisoners (only orthodox Christian symbols were used in burials). The author remarks, on various occasions throughout the volume, that self victimization replaced reflection on the responsibility for Holocaust. After the war, one of the first consequences was complete silence about the events and the campaign to the east, which immediately induced complete silence on the matter of Holocaust.

Bucur considers that for Moscow war criminal trials represented a way of "settling personal scores and getting rid of inconvenient political enemies. They were also the first occasion for creating a public record of wartime violence and constructing an official narrative about what witnesses and victims remembered of those actions. They were the first frameworks for postwar public memory work" (p. 155). The author quotes Gheorghe Buzatu and Ioan Coja, as specialists in the field, who state that "these trials fell short of rendering legitimate and transparent verdicts". But, the anti-Semite and negationist

views of these two quoted sources do not recommend them as trustworthy and not even as experts in war criminal trials. One of the problems raised by Maria Bucur in this chapter is the act of justice accomplished by war criminal trials in Romania. Tanja Penter tried to offer an answer to a similar question and it seemed to be a contradictory one, as there as there were, on one hand, fierce criminals convicted to harsh punishment and, on the other hand, criminals equally guilty who received milder punishment due to a series of attenuating factors. Therefore, a very important question, still without answer, arises: how many war criminals were convicted for their crimes and how many for political reasons. The flexible laws and procedures also offered a large degree of freedom to special tribunals¹⁸. Between the Soviet case and the trials that took place in the areas of occidental occupation or in Western Europe, there lays the untold story of eastern European states.

Immediately after the war, Soviet authorities together with the Romanian ones took measures for the reburial of Red Army soldiers (soviet soldiers' cemeteries were rebuilt until 1950), measure which generated "frustration and even outright resentment on the part of the Romanian officers, who saw themselves and their own military heroes marginalized and denigrated at the expense of this ideologically driven activity" (p. 159). After the retreat of soviet troops, distancing from Moscow's politics started also in what concerns the commemoration of Second World War. The department for Propaganda and Education within the Ministry of Defence ruled by Nicolae Ceausescu, offered commemorations a strongly nationalist aspect. In time, the army became the place of strong xenophobic sentiments (especially against Magyars) and of a pronounced cult for Ion Antonescu. Maria Bucur informs her readers that until 1957 in Romania there wasn't any public monument (with the exception of cemeteries) dedicated to the Romanian Army in the Second World War; by late 1950s, the department within the Ministry of Defence started to work on the Romanian soldiers' monuments.

The communist authorities' decision to give the Unknown Hero platform from Carol Park another memorial destination was extremely controversial. Here is what Bucur says: "If the Communist Party leadership was already moving on a path of nationalist rhetoric, why remove a nationalist monument that seemed to have no anti-Soviet symbology from a site that was not centrally located in Bucharest? [...] The only explanation I can offer points toward nationalist compromises in the complex ensemble of commemorative projects during that same two- to three- year period. The mythology of the pre-war Communist Party's activities was linked in part to the anti-war stance of the Communists between 1916 and 1918 and to clashes with the army in December 1918. In part, the Party's narrative about the 1920s was linked to the work the Communists had done illegally under a regime forged during World War I. The heroes who were to be buried in the new mausoleum were

¹⁸ Tanja PENTER, "Collaboration on Trial: New Source Material on Soviet Postwar Trials against Collaborators", *Slavic Review*, 64, No. 4, 2005, pp. 782–790.

intimately linked to this story, and it would have been rather difficult and even contradictory to display a narrative of heroic resistance to imperialism next to a monument that celebrated the patriotism of the soldiers who had fought in the same war” (p. 164).

Maria Bucur says that historiography and iconography completely ignored the figure of King Michael. Nevertheless, together with Ceaușescu coming to power, the role the King and “bourgeois parties” had in arresting Antonescu is appreciated in a series of articles published by the Communist Party History Institute¹⁹. Maria Bucur makes a large error in accusing King Michael in a footnote (Chapter 5, f. 61) that “the king never made a public apology about his symbolic role as head of the state during the period of the harshest anti-Semitic policies of the Romanian state” and also that the young king “remained passive in the matter”. King Michael and his family were always besides the harshly tried Romanian Jewish community. Before but also after 1990, the King had a close relationship with Alexandru Șafran and participated in commemorative moments for the victims of Holocaust or visited memorials (Yad Vashem²⁰). Moreover, there were moments when the King openly spoke about the tragedy of the Romanian Jewish community, between 1938–1944²¹. The message of King Michael at the commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust in January 2006 very clearly mentioned the responsibility of all Romanians: “We, all Romanians and including my Family, must continue to search our conscience about the immense crimes committed in our name or the name of our country.”²² King Michael and his family were

¹⁹ Robert R. KING, *A History of the Romanian Communist Party*, Stanford, California, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1980, p. 41.

²⁰ Marc S. ELLENBOGEN, “Atlantic Eye: Romania’s Crown Princess at 60”, *The Washington Times*, 1 April, 2009; “Comemorare la Sinagoga [“Commemoration at the Synagogue”]”, *Ziua*, 21 January 2005; “Comemorarea pogromului legionar din ianuarie 1941 [“Commemorating the Legionary Pogrom of January 1941”]”, *Realitatea Romanească*, 20 January 2005; “Scrisoarea rabinului Alexandru Șafran” [“The letter of Rabbi Alexandru Șafran”], *Arhiva (Cotidianul)*, V, No. 5 (48), 31 May 1996, p. 7.

²¹ Petru CLEJ, “Antonescu avea un respect foarte adânc față de mama mea” [“Antonescu had a very profound respect for my mother”] – interview with His Majesty King Michael, available online at <http://www.acum.tv/articol/2186> (August 2010).

²² “Even if we failed to save one of our Jews six decades ago, even if we ignored once the horrors and the misery of our Jewish citizens, we were guilty [...] The reality still is that all of us, all Romanians of whatever faith, could have done more. [...] Auschwitz, the camps of the Bug, the deportations of Transnistria, the death trains, the Pogrom of Iasi and the Pogrom of Bucharest (January 21–23, 1941) that we commemorate today: they all represented the end of humanity, the failure of Europe’s democracy and humanity [...] I am proud of her (Queen Helen) role, but I wish that we could have all done more. We, all Romanians and including my Family, must continue to search our conscience about the immense crimes committed in our name or the name of our country. We had one of the largest Jewish communities in Europe, a vast group of enterprising people, men and women of culture, people who helped and could have helped Romania today. Ultimately, all Romanians, like all European nations, were the losers from the Holocaust. We share the pain together, and the pain will linger for centuries.” (“The message of HM King Michael at the commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust”, January 20, 2005, available online at <http://www.princeradu.ro/news/350/23/The-Princess-Margarita-and->

in total dissonance with the anti-Semite politics of Antonescu²³. The most important proof is, in my opinion, the answer given by a team of famous researchers (Jean Ancel, Radu Ioanid, Vladimir Tismăneanu, William Totok, Robert Levy, Andrei Oișteanu, Michael Shafir, Leon Volovici etc.) to a similar accusation in 2005²⁴. Mrs. Bucur was at that time part of the group that defended the King, therefore her change in attitude we cannot understand.

The author's analysis goes until 1989, when she remarks the numerous faces of memory incorporated in shapes different from previous. Referring to the national holiday (1 December), Bucur says: "The fact that the post-Communist national day also ended up being a date linked to war was not a coincidence" (p. 226). Another decision regarding the commemorative process was that Ascension Day became again the commemorative day for all war heroes, starting 1995. Discussing different competing faces of memory, Bucur criticizes for instance, the fact that visiting the Jewish sites from Sighetu-Marmației (in the far north of Romania) was never a part of the extracurricular activities of the Memorial of the Victims of the Communism and of the Resistance.

An important merit of the book is the harmonious combination of different types of sources (local/central/private archives, memories, periodicals, scientific studies) as well as the fascinating approach of the complex subject. There still are some errors which could have been avoided in such an impressive volume: the European states (Germany, France and Great Britain) recognized Romania's independence in 1880 and not in 1881 (p. 24); Philippe of Flanders was born in 1837, not in 1937 (p. 24); Charles I was proclaimed King in May 1881, not on 10 May 1877 (p. 110); soviet troops retreated from Romania in the summer of 1958 not in 1957 (p. 9) nor 1959 (p. 160); October 25 wasn't inaugurated in the 50s as the Day of the Armed Forces and the liberation of the national territory, but in 1944 (p. 166); or the affirmations without a documented source, like "the ceremony (the coronation as king and queen of Ferdinand and Marie, October 1922) lacked any legal justification" (p. 112), "For Romanian women from Transylvania, 1 December represented the failed promise of full political rights" (p. 113) or that King Michael was "formal head of state" after 1944 (p.155). Another flaw of the book is the lack of an inventory of different types of commemorative monuments, as well as the fact that in most of the cases the author cites only the study/volume and not the pages under discussion.

Familiar with concepts of history, political science, literary criticism, visual arts, anthropology, ethnography, urban architecture elements, gender studies,

[Prince-Radu-attended-commemoration-of-the-victims-of-the-Holocaust-January-20/](#), August 2010).

²³ Dennis DELETANT, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally. Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-44*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 99-100, 212.

²⁴ "Replica la articolul din The Jerusalem Post către editorul ziarului The Jerusalem Post, Ierusalim, Israel ["Reply to the article in The Jerusalem Post, To the editor of The Jerusalem Post, Jerusalem, Israel"]", *Revista* 22, No. 799, 28 June - 4 July 2005, p. 9.

the author developed a fundamental study for the understanding of Romanian realities in the 20th century. The study is a milestone in the field, showing an excellent ability in the use of sources, a natural talent for interpretation and a fascinating power of conclusion. Maria Bucur reveals unedited information with incredible skill and builds an admirable scientific folder of the subject. A captivating book written by a famous specialist.

Andrei Muraru

Orlando Figes: *Les chuchoteurs: Vivre et survivre sous Staline*. Trad. de l'anglais (Royaume-Uni) par P.-E. Dauzat., Paris: Denoël, 2009, 793 p.

Après *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (1996) et *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (2002) Orlando Figes réussit de nouveau à impressionner son public en 2007 avec *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia*, dans la traduction française que j'ai consultée *Les chuchoteur: Vivre et survivre sous Staline*.

Si on voudrait résumé dans une seule phrase ce livre on pourrait dire qu'il évoque une histoire humaine de l'Union soviétique sous la tyrannie de Staline. Selon Figes, les historiens ont tardé à entrer dans le monde intérieur de la Russie stalinienne. La sphère privée des gens ordinaires demeurait largement soustraite aux regards. Comme le sous titre le montre de façon assez claire, *Les Chuchoteurs* n'est pas un livre sur Staline, mais sur la façon dont le stalinisme pénétra l'esprit des soviétiques et leurs émotions, affectant toutes les valeurs et leurs relations. Il ne cherche pas à élucider l'énigme des origines de la Terreur, ni à suivre l'essor et la chute du Goulag, mais à expliquer comment l'Etat policier a pu s'enraciner dans la société et amener des millions de personnes ordinaires à observer passivement ou à collaborer avec son système de terreur. Selon Figes, *le vrai pouvoir et l'héritage durable du régime stalinien ne se trouvent ni dans les structures de l'Etat ni dans le culte de la personnalité, mais, comme l'observa un jour l'historien russe Mikhaïl Guefter, «dans le stalinisme qui s'est insinué en chacun de nous»²⁵.*

Pour arriver à ce but, Orlando Figes a fait appel à un effort documentaire pas du tout négligeable. Une première direction de documentation a été représentée par plusieurs centaines d'archives familiales (lettres, journaux intimes, documents personnels, Mémoires, photographies et artefacts). Ces sources ont été complétées avec des longs entretiens réalisés avec les parents les plus âgés. Le projet d'histoire orale lié aux recherches menées pour les *Chuchoteurs*, diffère sensiblement des précédents histoires orales de la période soviétique qui demeuraient essentiellement sociologiques ou se préoccupaient des détails extérieurs de la terreur et de l'expérience du Goulag. La plupart des

²⁵ Orlando FIGES, *Les chuchoteur: Vivre et survivre sous Staline*, Paris: Denoël, 2009, p. 41

archives ont été recueillies par l'auteur dans une dizaine d'années. Son effort a été doublé par la collaboration avec la Société Mémorial, association d'histoire et de défense des droits de l'homme organisée à la fin des années 1980 pour représenter et commémorer les victimes de la répression soviétique. Déposées aux archives de la société Mémorial à Saint Petersburg, Moscou et Perm, la plupart sont aussi disponibles en ligne avec des transcriptions et des extraits sonores des entretiens. Pour raffiner ce travail, Orlando Figes a traduit en russe fragments du manuscrit pour permettre ainsi aux sujets de sa recherche de commenter et éventuellement des corrections²⁶.

La périodisation utilisée par Orlando Figes est celle classique dont les titres des chapitres en évoquent les étapes. «Enfants de 1917», le temps de la destruction systématique des liens familiaux, où tout doit être sacrifié à la grande famille communiste. Ensuite vient « La grande rupture » entre 1928 et 1932 : la liquidation du système social rural concerne alors 120 millions de personnes. «La poursuite du bonheur» ou la marche forcée des Plans quinquennaux: l'offre du «bonheur» est centrale en ces années (1932–1936). La «Grande peur», la Grande Terreur (1937–1938), puis les «Restes de Terreur» avec le temps du Pacte germano-soviétique. On retient son souffle. «Attends-moi», titre d'un poème de Constantin Simonov, longtemps stalinien, dont les étapes de la vie scandent le livre. «Attends-moi» est le mot écrit par le pauvre soldat soviétique à une femme, une fiancée, une mère, au moment de l'horrible épreuve de la guerre – qui détruisit ou presque pour un temps le communisme et provoqua une renaissance de l'esprit de liberté, mais sauva en même temps ce régime, car Staline fut encore capable de le faire renaître du patriotisme. Les autres titres sont aussi éloquentes : «Staliniens ordinaires», ceux de l'après-guerre, l'idéal ayant disparu au bénéfice de plus en plus d'arrivisme, de carriérisme et de corruption ; «Retour»: retour des camps, on se tait et chuchote ; «Mémoire», le temps des récits, alors qu'aujourd'hui le peuple russe est marqué par cette expérience, et vit un lendemain d'assimilation difficile. «Stoïcisme et passivité sont [devenues] des normes du social», écrit O. Figes, et ce n'est pas fini.

Tout au long de ce trajet historique ce qui conte et ce qui reste pour le lecteur est l'histoire ou plutôt les histoires qui forme le noyau du livre. Les histoires sont les histoires des familles, de leur vie sous le régime de Staline. Dans ce climat de traque, quelle part restait-il *in fine* à la sphère privée? O. Figes montre que les stratégies de survie adoptées par ses témoins ont souvent tendu vers un même but : se conformer extérieurement aux préceptes du régime. La dissimulation d'origines « koulaks » ou nobles était un classique, embrasser officiellement la cause soviétique pouvait aussi faire oublier une ascendance impure, c'est-à-dire non prolétarienne (ce fut le choix de l'écrivain Simonov, dont la figure jalonne le livre). Surtout, la méfiance a transformé l'URSS en un vaste empire de chuchoteurs. Ida Slavina, un des personnages du livre raconte : «*Mes parents s'installaient*

²⁶ A voire le site internet <http://www.orlandofiges.com/>

pour parler, passaient la nuit à chuchoter»²⁷. Pour d'autres, le refoulement s'est imposé car la peur omniprésente d'être dénoncé, déporté, ou fusillé les tétanisait. Une peur difficilement vaincue: O. Figes retrace le parcours d'Antonina Golovina -fillette de 8 ans exilée en 1931 en Sibérie avec sa mère et ses frères, car son père était un «koulak» – et conclut sur ces mots: «*Ce n'est que très progressivement, au milieu des années 1990, qu'Antonina surmonta enfin sa peur [...] et se décida à parler à sa fille de ses origines koulaks*»²⁸.

Orlando Figes donne dans ce livre la parole à ceux qui étaient menacés par l'oubli. La plupart des ouvrages qui ont eu comme sujet la Goulag, ont évoqué surtout les victimes, comme l'a fait Soljenitsyne. Or, au moment de l'enquête effectuée par Figes entre 2003–2006, la plupart de ceux qui avaient connu le système concentrationnaire n'étaient plus vivants pour raconter leurs histoires. Ce manque n'a pas été pour Figes un obstacle documentaire ou méthodologique, mais l'occasion pour apporter en premier plan toute une société qui a été traumatisée sous le régime de Staline: les femmes et les enfants restés à la maison, les voisins. Tous les habitants de l'URSS, jusqu'aux hautes sphères de l'Etat, vivaient plus au moins dans la peur. Sous Staline, quelque 25 millions de personnes ont été victimes de la répression : leurs biens saisis, ils ont été déportés vers le goulag et parfois fusillés. En 1940, cela représente environ 1 habitant sur 8, soit près de 2 familles sur 3. Selon Orlando Figes il est très difficile de trouver en Russie une famille ; dont aucun membre n'a été touché. On n'a pas arrêté tout le monde, mais chacun a été affecté par la répression et la peur ambiantes. A bord d'un autobus, on évite de parler nommément d'autres gens. Les enfants s'abstiennent de discuter à l'école, des croyances religieuses de leurs parents.

Le fil conducteur du livre est le destin de Constantin Simonov. Figes a utilisé ce personnage pour permettre à son public de mieux comprendre comment certains individus ont pu devenir à la fois victimes et auteurs de la répression. Simonov, né dans une famille de nobles, devient un des poètes préférés de Staline, tête de l'Union des écrivains. Alors que des membres de sa famille sont arrêtés les uns après les autres, il écrit des poèmes à la gloire de Staline et des grands travaux de l'époque. Pendant la campagne antisémite, à partir de 1947, Simonov doit dénoncer plusieurs de ses amis proches. Il le fait mais, comme il avait mauvaise conscience, il leur vient en aide financièrement. A la fin des années 1970, il écrit ses Mémoires et explique à quel point il a honte.

Du point de vue de l'historiographie, *Les chuchoteurs* continuent la ligne ouverte par Sheila Fitzpatrick sur la vie quotidienne dans son livre *Everyday Stalinism* et s'ajoute aux travaux d'Hélène Yvert-Jalu²⁹ et Katerina Azarova³⁰ sur la femmes et familles en Russie mais aussi sur l'appartement communautaire.

²⁷ Orlando FIGES, *Les chuchoteur: Vivre et survivre sous Staline*, p. 300.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 716.

²⁹ Hélène YVERT-JALU, *Femmes et famille en Russie – D'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: Editions du Sextant, 2008.

³⁰ Katerina AZAROVA, *L'appartement communautaire: L'histoire cachée du logement soviétique*, Paris: Editions du Sextant, 2007.

Difficilement pourrait-on trouver des points faibles dans la méthode ou dans l'argumentation utilisée par Figes dans *Les chuchoteurs*. Quelques discordances restent pourtant à signaler. Premièrement, le choix d'un plan chronologique a comme contrepoids le problème de la redondance du point de vue thématique. Dans un livre si dense du point de vue des anthroponymes et toponymes, chacun avec son propre histoire et faits exceptionnelles, le lecteur a des difficultés à se situer dans le récit. La reprise dans les 5 premiers chapitres des thèmes principaux comme: l'appartenance communautaire, la destruction des familles, la lutte pour survivre de ceux rester à la maison produit chez le lecteur un sentiment de répétition des faits et des actions présentés qui conduit presque à une banalisation de la malheur. Un autre reproche qu'on peut apporter est le léger déséquilibre narratif entre les premiers 5 chapitres et les 4 suivants quand, l'histoire de Simonov quitte sa place de fil conducteur pour prendre le premier plan. Le choix de Simonov comme «héros» de ce livre suscite une autre observation. En présentant sa méthode dans le travail sur *Les Chuchoteurs*, Orlando Figes a expliqué comment sa recherche a voulu toucher toutes les catégories et les milieux sociaux³¹. Or, les choix présents dans le livre montrent explicitement un certain penchant vers les catégories plus aisées, du milieu urbain, voir de l'ancienne aristocratie, le cas de Simonov faisant fois de cette situation.

Malgré le mécontentement de l'auteur vis-à-vis l'intérêt suscité par ce *Les Chuchoteurs* dans les pays occidentaux, surtout en Grande Bretagne et aux Etats-Unis, le livres a été traduit en 22 langues. Hasard ou pas, aucune traduction n'est disponible pour la Russie ou pour les autres pays de l'ex bloc communiste. Or, en ce qui me concerne, l'intérêt majeur qui suscite ce livre est le statut d'*exempla* comme démarche historiographique, comme méthodologie pour l'étude de l'histoire récente des autres sociétés communistes. Dans cette histoire de la vie privée et de la famille russe, construite autour du silence, de la peur, de la préoccupation constante de cacher un passé peu conforme à la morale de type staliniste, le public roumain reconnaîtrait ses propres mythes liés à la terreur communiste.

Mia Jinga

³¹ Interview Par Marc Epstein publié le 03/10/2009, disponible on line sur http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/le-fantome-de-staline-hante-toujours-les-russes_791812.html, document consulté le 29/07/2010.