

Post-totalitarian Difference and In-difference Différence Post-totalitariste et In-différence

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Résumé : Le but de cet article est de discuter le problème des attitudes post-totalitaristes envers quelques différences qui sont la conséquence des pressions sociales. D'une part, la pression d'être différent peut générer un résultat surprenant, la condition de devenir indifférent. D'autre part, l'investigation de ce qui se trouve derrière une différence conduit à une spécificité roumaine dans la manifestation factuelle et dans l'analyse critique. En explorant plusieurs articles contenus dans la publication *Dilema Veche*, je signalerai des hypostases comme l'utilisateur de blog adulte, le consommateur ethno-botaniste, la femme qui tient un journal intime, le uichendist dans Land of Choice, l'enfant autiste. Tous ceux-ci forment une liste de rôles qui occupent la première et la deuxième place dans la société roumaine. Ces sujets sont examinés par une variété d'auteurs flexibles dans leur argumentation et préparés du point de vue de la rhétorique à nous convaincre que ces caractères ont un statut qui les singularise. C'est une illustration de la réflexion de Henry David Thoreau qui croyait que si un individu ne peut pas s'intégrer c'est parce qu'il entend une autre voix. Je vais analyser les réalisations métaphoriques du posttotalitarisme et les techniques discursives que chaque contributeur à la publication *Dilema Veche* (M. Chivu, L. Popescu, S. Giurgeanu, E. Istodor et M. Șchiopu) utilise pour construire la thèse de la différenciation de l'individu qui entend une autre voix.

Mots clés : differentiation, model, pressure, social role, emotional support

This article purports to approach the issue of displaying post-totalitarian attitudes towards a few differences resulting from social pressures. On the one hand, the pressure for being different may generate a surprising outcome, the condition of becoming indifferent. On the other hand, the investigation of what lies inside a difference leads to a Romanian specificity in factual manifestation and in critical analysis as well [1]. While exploring materials contained in one *Dilema Veche* issue (#316/2010), I will point out hypostases such as 'the elderly blogger', 'the ethno-botany consumer', 'the female diarist', 'the uichendist of Land of Choice', 'the autistic child'; they all make up a workable list of roles that seem to hold primary and secondary positions in Romanian society. These 'patients' are scanned by a variety of authors flexible in argumentation and rhetorically prepared to convince about these characters' singularizing status. It could be like in Henry David Thoreau's reflection that, if a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. I will analyze metaphorical enactments of post-totalitarianism and discursive devices with which every contributor to *Dilema Veche* puts forth a thesis of differentiation for someone harking to a peculiar drumbeat [2].

The initial issue of picking on catchwords in the ideological discourse of today's Romania [3] has taken me to a belief that political ingredients are invading cultural areas, thus contributing to a new human mould for the younger generations unaware of what totalitarianism has meant. Am I dealing in this article with new, differing, dynamic or just problem-raising models? Let's go down to details. I shall use a few samples of what belongs to reality-based infotainment culture and assures us that things have not yet snowballed out of control. One more specification is required: whenever the pronoun *we* occurs in the text of the article, it should spell out the appositional idea 'we, Romanians'.

In trying to oppose the essence of a totalitarian situation with the subordination of all aspects of life to an authority, instead of a charismatic leader that should act as the ultimate authority, our day proposes the blogger as the ultimate authority in current dealings. Private needs are highly focused, probably not to see large-scale domineering negative forces legitimized. This personage has a variety of spelling renditions in Romanian, out of which I restrict my list to *blogar*, *bloghist*, *blogăr*, *bloggeriță*, even the accidental *blogangiu* (in *România literară*, 9&10/2007, Rodica Zafiu has a wide coverage of all the family of words). *Blog* rhymes with *log* and eventually is considered to refer to written accounts on the web (the lexeme is obtained from 'web' plus 'log') but it is not accepted by DEX among Anglicisms in Romanian. However, the family of words pushed

forward by Romanian texts is on the increase: *blogging*, *blogosferă*, *a bloga*, *a blogui*, and so on. Some believe blogging is playing in the form of online versions for a boarding-school missie's diary; others proclaim it a free space for graphomania. A key attraction for some bloggers is constituted by others' *comments* and their own. Why should the new idea of *blog* never deserve a translation into Romanian? It is assumedly the shortcut to international understanding. It is the formula of compromise, it is a hybrid in form, it is the journal online – a new cultural reality admittedly open in a democratic manner, enjoying media usefulness and a high rating. At the same time, it is time-consuming (even voracious), dispersive, exhausting and much too interactive to generate writing satisfaction and a feeling of fulfillment. Some say that the blog is only an illusion of creation: it is like opening a pair of alienating parentheses within earnest writing! In the circumstances in which a blog gives vent to personal hatred and venomous words against those you disagree with, the blog turns into a terrorist form of cultural dialogue. In one magazine [4] the activity of *blogging* is described as a way of granting happiness ('una dintre garanțiile fericirii' is the expression of the enthusiasm of a young Internetist!) because it offers a wonderful feeling of belonging: through what you write there, you become an opinion-creator, be it for five people or a few thousand. 'A pen sucks!' or 'Stiloul e deja fumat', so a mere tapping of keys and the world will read you. Others are of opinion that, thanks to blog authors, there is some likelihood that a new recipe for spreading cultural notions and practices has been initiated. Culture catches with the public when setting up a promotional system of small talk, gossip, 'innocent' urges, recommendation from a 'nobody' joined by a few other anonymous guys. Unfortunately this system tells on a nation that is insecure in the extant levels of education. Professor Paul Bradshaw [5] from the University of Birmingham identifies four types of contributors to blogs or other sites: *experts* (already enjoying a good reputation and fame for what they post on the web); *voices* (with the know-how for argumentation, actually rivalling professional journalism); *ears* (knowledgeable about what is going on from picking the brain of insiders); *occasional reporters* (with a video camera or mobile phone on them, they witness an event and upload the material on trusted sites). Perhaps this is a picture of the future for journalism in the world! In DV, 316/2009, Lucian Popescu signs the article bearing the half-Romanian half-English title «Blogul nu mai e cool» and the subtitle «Blogurile se clasicizează și se orientează spre mainstream» (perhaps the angles should have embraced those Anglicisms that need rewording in plain Romanian). This is the crux of the matter: youngsters' online communicative habits have changed, among others the very young teenagers showing preferences for socializing networks like Facebook and MySpace. With percentages and numbers, the article of L. Popescu documents the (Romanian too) alteration in the Web social contacts. The blog seems now much more attractive to elderly people, whereas their juniors no longer choose it, no longer go for unlimited public exposure, no longer accept the possibility of making their own errors widely diffused, and so on. A higher-level protection of what they understand by intimacy is desired at present. Diversity is still their point of honour, but they do not mean that their messages should be as universally accessible as before. What takes a back seat is the communicative effervescence (in this form) of five years ago or so.

A blogger being an avatar of the old-time diary-writer, it is easy to make the transition in this article towards the next role that captures attention, the female diarist. Constanța Buzea (out on the book market with *Creștetul ghețarului. Jurnal 1969-1971*) comes from a domestic hell, synthetically present in the review signed by Marius Chivu (DV #316). Buzea's sincerity – reworded by the reviewer – is the ideal mark for any diary, but this one in particular must be admired for making reference to household names, known personalities first on the literary stage, secondly in the historical *past* that was history's *present* in the totalitarian sixties and seventies. Chivu writes as follows, in my translation: "The diary opens eight years after the two got wed, at a moment when love is irreparably ruined, and the pages over-brimming with lonesome feeling do nothing but

record the daily practice of fidelity and resistance by the young wife who has already quit rebellion (if she ever tried that) or fight for fair-play in marriage. With one kid home and another one on the way, writing seems to be the only comfort in a wedlock above the parents' consent, thoughtless union marked by poverty and dragged through either too small or peripheral apartments that the lady of the house fails to turn into a home" [6]. This book, in which memories shape the self-concept, is not under our eyes; instead, the likely egocentric bias is counteracted by the indirect report presupposed by the writing of a book review. The projection of the reviewer, solely achieved from the woman's angle (making a compact group with the offspring), is not concerned with parental values, but perdition through infinite tolerance, analyzed transversally in time over a long number of years. In an oversized type of reality, personal options fade and a subsequent incapacity of responding to aggressive stimuli will lead to individual absorption into a whirlpool that drowns wills and causes biological suppression. Our glance at minor categories that refuse suppression has been and will be worth having, even though, one cannot say that one comes across 'beautiful' or 'inspirational' stories, such as the Romanian audiences usually crave for. To echo Radu Cosașu, who writes a column in the same publication (in DV #316, citing and quoting the English in their mother-tongue): "when you outsmart the enemy", you get one item on the list of "mici mari bucurii" (the little grand joys). Returning to the hardships indicated by the female diary's entries, I can generalize saying that – in totalitarian tradition – external social pressure on females prescribed the impossibility of separation, and also an urgency for 'saving the appearances'. In post-totalitarian years, in Romania, what is to be found out can be described with Voicu's (2008: 180) words in the chapter on "Family values in Romania and in Europe", "value orientation is not characterized by an increase in undifferentiated tolerance, but for assumed individual choices, for responsible life options". What persists and is cureless in post-totalitarianism is loneliness as such, described by Brehm (1990: 207) as the most common of all social deficiencies, probably occurring during any time of transition which simultaneously is a form of disruption. "Almost everyone has at some time felt lonely in a crowd and happy as a clam in complete solitude", Brehm writes. "In *social isolation*, a person wants but doesn't have a network of friends or relatives; in *emotional isolation*, a person wants but doesn't have a single, intense relationship" (ibidem). Since loneliness is associated by psychologists with anxiety and with depression, it is logically possible to go on with a discussion of antidepressants on the Romanian market of disillusionments.

From 'ethnobotany' defined restrictedly by DEX as the study of the folk denominations for plants, the media discourse and parliamentary debates have retained the euphemistic wish to point to illegal trade of psychotropic plants. In today's civilization, one aspect of much interest is to obtain an analysis of hallucinatory effects, for it is accepted that illusions can give rise to chronic patterns of self-destruction. French science explains ethnobotany as the investigation of the relationship between a certain community and its flora, therefore there is a strong environmental component. To it, the French add medical and magic practices alongside with the use of plants. There is a semantic problem for us, the pleonastic content of the expression 'plante etnobotanice' [7], already solved by canceling the noun and substantivizing the adjective, according to Anglo-American use too, 'ethnobotanicals' (cf. R. Zafiu's example, "nu vrea să renunțe la etnobotanice"). Stela Giurgeanu (DV #136) shows the readers – using a rhyming pun – how 'legal' became 'lethal' on the drug market. She says that [8] *Legal Smoke* is the place where you float elatedly. "Until the other day. For happy floating that lasted for two years has suddenly come to an end. People passed away. A prime-minister panicked. A health minister made a few cynical statements. Specialists (seven in all) came along with a discovery, as recent as all that, about noxious substances. To wash their hands of the matter, they put a ban. Better than to take upon themselves advising consumers, correctly informing while allowing for free choices. We close down as quickly as we license and we change one sound and two letters in the law, from legal to lethal. Overnight..." (my translation). In this text, the

author is primarily concerned with syntax that can put across the relevant message in small spurts – each spurt being one clause long. Thus the writer (and the reader) can focus better on only one small piece of the overall information about a problem of economic and public-health interest that cannot be whisked off with consumers at risk for potentially deadly effects. When therapy tries to reduce emotional sensitivity or depression, blunting sensitivity may do little good to those suffering recent setbacks or any form of personal loss. Nonetheless, instead of insisting that those on drugs do not really need them, it would be safer for authorities to figure out which treatment works for them, for their special needs cannot be dwarfed.

In a humorous vein (beginning with the lexical adaptation ‘uichendist’), the portrait of the weekend tourist [9] is composed out of the basic points of interest for the ‘escapist’ of two days for relaxation. The guidance comes from first-hand observation checked against other reports collected before the travel. The information in Istodor’s article is dense, pre-eminently about prices, objects to purchase and places to see in this order), in a fast-flowing presentation mirroring the behaviour of the hurried visitor who cannot trifle with time. The collection of practical platitudes making up Istodor’s text does not even call for reproducing, may they be short chunks, here. The experience that this text proposes is neither more cultured nor less motivated than its counterpart in totalitarian weekends that certain generations still carry in memory, yet the more exciting adventure now is feasible owing to the kind of freedom not to be disposed of previously. Consequently, the weekender can have an option between being home or being abroad; he can also very easily scoff at a weak minister or at the latest absurd national brand ‘Land of Choice’, meant to obliterate the previous incomprehensible blend, the portmanteau word ‘fabulospirit’. In the same DV issue, Cezar Paul-Bădescu epitomizes Romania as the country that makes one tough, that accustoms one to rough moments. If persons are books to read, the tourist’s host has fallen into the pitfall of judging a book by its cover. Since balance is created by reciprocity, visitors in their turn judge by appearances. It is perfectly true that, in considering differences and in-difference, there is some danger of looking only at spectacular surfaces and the country brand is rather expected to be rooted in matters of appearances by the side of cheap philosophy, easy-of-reach for the common ranks. When the author (any author) has recourse to an energetic scattering of images, the fact becomes as a rule highly effective in humorous discourse, and even though – as my case stands (see the texts in the appended notes below) – humour is out of question, one cannot rely either on the idea of moving the audience to graver feelings.

For the media construction of reality, things may or may not happen. The press never dozes off, it works amplifying, demolishing, restoring, inventing, analyzing, performing, hiding, flouting, blackening, whitening, handling subtexts instead of facts, and rumours instead of humours [10]. The discourse samples selected here are also interesting for interlocking material worlds with institutional worlds, on the one hand; the actants, on the other hand, are caught between material values and spiritual values even in one and the same experience. Moreover, if I reconsider and anticipate the situated meanings embedded in our sampled texts, I can see that every author co-constructs with his role-holding protagonist an identity that refers to the past without a sidelong glance at the implications for the future. This kind of projection reinstates failure and misery more than achievement and success. Finally, this takes me to the last case to act as counterpoint in the ‘stories’ I have selected from DV propositions.

Autism carries along with it the media-generated notoriety of the early millennium’s affliction. It is true that diagnostic possibilities have improved so as to signal even the slight manifestations at the debut. Anyway, there is good reason for worry. The only certainty refers not to causes but to awareness that there is no cure, and the help needed differs from one patient to another. Mihai, Catinca and other kids help M. Şchiopu build meaning in narratives: she writes their true stories and notes down [11]: “Movies like *Rain Man* starring Dustin Hoffman or books like our touching *M’s Portrait* by Matei

Călinescu promote a rather light version of the malady's 'high-functioning'. In about three fourths of the cases, autism is accompanied by retardation and symptoms occur correlated with epilepsy, motion deficiencies, violent outbursts. On the family side, there begins a daily assault on darkness. Full months of costly therapy to get the utterance of a word, the performance of a basic skill, such as going round an obstacle on the way or appeasing violent conduct with a potential for self-mutilation. A child isolated in his mind's fortress has to be gradually restored to our world. Every detail in the struggle for normal living is of importance: and it is so without anticipating miracles or amassing vain hopes. There is a whole world blogosphere kept up by autists themselves or their parents, siblings, therapists" (my translation).

The sad figure of speech saying that we, today's adults, are closer and closer to manifesting ourselves as autistic comes from factual, external developmental delays. Related literature on this particular disorder sounds encouraging with statements such as "autism is not a curse – it is just a difference, and a difference that can be worked around. Your loved one can still be a happy, stable, calm, successful and productive person" (from author Craig Kendall on the web).

In sum, what we have done above has been to check out whether difference must coexist with indifference – as part of the routine life of Romanians – and it seems it must; hopefully, I have not outsized the phenomenon. On the strength of the DV extracts given above, I might argue that oversize is, by itself, a metaphor for all the queries we leave unsolved while trying, day after day, to talk ourselves into believing that everything is as it should be. Are the people documented above enabled to find a refuge from the lack of personal accomplishments in their individual existence? The answer can be positive [12]. Eric Hoffer (2002) says that such an individual is, in a later stage, assimilated into a compact collective body and 'fact-proof screens from reality' are established. One conclusion from the enactments of post-totalitarian effects is that when humans are too soft, pleasure-loving and selfish to sacrifice for a higher cause, they are vitiated by an inner moral and biological decay. Another conclusion can be that it is not for the actor in a role and it is not for the story in a sad world to generate indifference about differences; what we have discussed is the aftermath of our lived experience in a post-totalitarian space.

NOTES

1. The Romanian totalitarian regime functioned, like all the others, by suppressing civil society. It is only during post-totalitarian years that Romanians can also begin to learn how to escape intolerance. For as long a period as the day of the Sophists until now, there has been an equality sign placed between politics and rhetoric. But then, the current discussion in the Romanian milieu about professionalizing political life is rooted in the unloved figure of the party-activist known to be dumb, brain-washed, hatefully good-for-nothing. In the passage from totalitarian to post-totalitarian icons, there can be risks for the analyst, while considering differencing phenomena and attitudes of indifference, to look at spectacular surfaces exclusively. Yet, people cannot show indifference (if they ever did) to what our politicians do, and proof to it is the number of summer schools that have been active during these two last decades. They are meant to lay foundations for a responsible training of those young figures who will dedicate perhaps a lifetime to correct governing or to wise parliamentary opposition in our country. The dilettante is not to be magnanimously ignored. Moreover, common expectation is that not only superior brains can make a difference, but also a character's rectitude.

2. The New World Encyclopedia (Internet source) stipulates that totalitarianism is a feature emerging only in the twentieth century as long as "the means for total social control did not exist before that time". Thus, one can look upon Thoreau as a predecessor of real fighters for the breaking of unfair total control resembling warping army discipline. In this article, I do not take into account big-time history and post-totalitarianism, but the stories of apparently less significant spokespersons for smaller groups in our country. The focus on them is worth our while since they trigger a different kind of indifference and this is not to be tolerated. Historians themselves, in fact, have taught us to believe the 'common ranks' with their peculiarities are as significant as rulers for the sound knowledge of History.

3. We can briefly illustrate with the following catchwords: 'a calling for exaggeration' / *vocația exagerării*, 'the power to reinvent oneself' / *forța de a te reinventa*, 'a pack mentality' / *instinctul de turmă*, 'a crisis of population' / *o populație de crizați*.

4. The mentioned magazine is *eu/ro* 26, no. 3/dec. 2007 and the original text about the pen reads as follows: "poți deveni rege numai prin simpla mănuire a tastaturii, că oricum stiloul e deja fumat" (p. 9).
5. Available at <http://onlinejournalismblog.com>
6. „Jurnalul începe la opt ani după căsătoria celor doi, când iubirea s-a degradat iremediabil, iar paginile încărcate pînă la refuz de singurătate nu fac decît să consemneze exercițiul de fidelitate și rezistență zilnică al tinerei soții care a renunțat, dacă a făcut-o vreodată, să se revolte, să mai lupte pentru ceea ce e corect într-o căsnicie. Cu un copil acasă și încă unul pe drum, scrisul pare singura consolare a unei căsnicii realizate fără consimțămîntul părinților, căsnicie pripită, marcată de sărăcie și plimbată prin mai multe apartamente mici sau de la periferie pe care femeia nu reușește să le transforme în cămin.”
7. See also Rodica Zafiu, “Etnobotanice” in *România literară*, 17/2010.
8. S. Giurgeanu: “*Legal Smoke* – locul unde plutești fericit. Pînă mai ieri. Pentru că plutirea fericită care a durat doi ani s-a întrerupt brusc. Au murit oameni. Un premier s-a alarmat. Un ministru al Sănătății a dat cîteva declarații cinice. Au venit specialiști (șapte) și au descoperit, abia acum, că respectivele substanțe sînt... nocive. Ca să se spele pe mîini, le-au inclus pe lista de interdicții. Mai bine așa decît să ne asumăm educarea publicului, informarea corectă prin care s-ar propaga liberul arbitru. Le închidem la fel de rapid precum le-am dat avizul de funcționare, schimbăm o literă a legii și le transformăm din legale în letale. Peste noapte...” Hence, there are constructs of culture (beneath and behind the interplay of surfaces) that suffuse legitimizing practices.
9. See the article by Eugen Istodor (DV #316) written in the following style: "Au două companii de transport, ACTV și ATVO. De la aeroportul San Marco se ia autobuzul pînă în Piazzale Roma. Preț, undeva pe la 3 euro sau 5,5 dus-întors. De aici... ori pe jos, ori cu taxi, ori cu gondola, ori cu alte vapoare, pe canale. Pentru turiști, pun la dispoziție abonamente valabile cîteva zile, atît pe autobuze, cît și pe vapoare. Au și transport de noapte, așa că poți ajunge ușor după ora 23 de la aeroport în oraș. " Etc. If we shift perspectivity from the Romanian tourist abroad to the foreigner visiting us at home, we quote from a translated opinion formulated by Rupert Wolfe Murray (DV #316): "Abordarea turistică a României este complet greșită. Și nu mă refer aici doar la acțiunile costisitoare și absurde puse la cale de diverșii miniștri ai Turismului, dar chiar și la nivel local oamenii nu par să înțeleagă ce anume trebuie făcut. Străinii educați din clasa de mijloc – publicul-țintă ideal, s-ar zice – nu caută vile kitsch cu acoperișuri albastre, televiziune prin cablu și aer condiționat în fiecare cameră. Ei vor să se bucure de viața rurală a României, pe care o percep ca fiind originală, exotică, prietenoasă și cu valoare estetică. Din păcate, tocmai acest lucru este greu de găsit..." Etc. The argument, along with the style, is qualitatively different. Both quotes make us ask: what is to our credit, ultimately? Istodor's discourse apparently is much more tightly involved with 'props' rather than feelings. Consequently, what is going on seems to be an interaction of discourses sooner than an interaction of humans, as desired by Murrey.
10. Rhetoric has humours. Walter Nash (1992: 167) comments: "Rhetoric in its humour is learned, elaborate, sly, often delightfully subtle; but its first requirement is a happy flouting of the rules of measure and decorum that sober practice imposes."
11. M. Șchiopu (DV #316): "Filme de tipul *Rain Man*, cu Dustin Hoffman, sau cărți cum ar fi, la noi, emoționantul *Portret al lui M* semnat de Matei Călinescu prezintă mai degrabă versiuni ușoare, „high-functioning“ ale maladii. În aproximativ trei sferturi dintre cazuri, autismul este însoțit de retard mintal și apar simptome corelate de epilepsie, deficiențe motorii, ieșiri violente. Din partea familiei, începe o luptă zilnică cu întunericul. Luni întregi de terapie costisitoare pentru rostirea unui cuvînt, învățarea unor deprinderi de bază, cum ar fi ocolirea unui obstacol apărut în cale sau calmarea ieșirilor violente, cu potențial de automutilare. Copilul izolat în fortăreața lui mentală trebuie adus treptat în lumea noastră. Fiecare detaliu în bătălia pentru o viață normală contează: și asta, fără să te aștepți la minuni sau să-ți faci speranțe deșarte. Există o întreagă blogosferă internațională întreținută de persoane autiste ori de părinții, frații, terapeuții lor. Încet-încet, existența autismului începe să fie recunoscută și în România. Pentru început, prin mărturiile părinților – de obicei intelectuali, locuind în mediul urban: bloguri-jurnale care descriu înfruntarea cotidiană cu boala.”
12. Our finding is that these cases disclose not so much differing models as problem-raising models for our social life. There is also a possibility for us to develop an overview discussing stress and coping. Every situation described above can be rephrased as a coping strategy, in which thoughts, feelings, behaviours are expressive of an individual's attempt to reduce stress, no matter whether it could turn out to be an ineffective response.

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