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FROM CHEAP ONE-WAY TICKETS TO PROHIBITIVE LUXURY RIDES. DUMITRU POPESCU ON ROMANIAN NATIONAL COMMUNISM AND THE POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION

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Abstract

As a main ideologue of Ceaușescu's communist regime during the 1970s and a key public figure throughout its entire existence, Dumitru Popescu's reflections on Romanian national communism, a local brand of national communism that he helped to create, are not to be disregarded. Likewise, special attention must also be devoted to his analyses of the post-communist transition. So far, Popescu's political thinking has not been systematically investigated in scientific endeavors. Moreover, it tends to be overlooked or considered as a sort of appendix to his impressive body of literary works and journals. This article aims to explore and critically discuss the way Popescu's national communism evolved during the 1970s and 1980s and how it endured and recalibrated itself in the first decades after the 1989 anti-communist revolution within a new ideological framework, that of overtly predatory capitalism. It does so by analyzing Popescu's ideas of personality cult, social class, and youth, all representative of the official socialist discourse.

Keywords

ideology, national communism, transition, capitalism, youth

Introduction

A prolific writer of poetry, short stories, travel journals, socially oriented essays and, most of all, novels, Dumitru Popescu is renowned for his political-cultural role before the 1989 Romanian revolution¹, when he secured the nickname ‘God’; the origins of the nickname are disputed. He started his career as journalist for different papers, the most notable being *Scînteia*, (*The Spark*), and continued it as vice-president for the State Committee for Culture and Art, member of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), member of the Executive Political Bureau of RCP and president of the Council of Culture and Socialist Education and, finally, rector of the ‘Ștefan Gheorghiu’ Academy throughout the 1980s (Tismăneanu 2011). He was considered, according to a prominent Romanian historian, ‘the party intellectual par excellence’ (Vasile2019, 392–396).

Memoirs of former East-European political leaders are numerous (Marin 2007, 248–259; Dubcek 1993; Djilas 1963; Halliday 1986). As expected, many memoirs of this kind attempt to whitewash the socialist past to some extent while fiercely criticizing and sometimes amplifying the post-communist difficulties their countries experienced. Taken with a pinch of salt, such works are highly useful in providing historical insight into the political struggles, daily life, and the social, economic, and cultural policies of former socialist regimes. Moreover, the diagnoses that some of these writings provide for understanding part of the main contradictions of post-communist transitions are not to be neglected.

Here is where the books of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s main cultural censor step in. Up to date, no systematic study has been devoted to Popescu’s political and social thinking. His memoirs were used by local historians writing on different topics, but less so by social scientists (Marin 2007, 248–259). Analyzed carefully, his works – diverse, prolix, pretentious, and exuberant – cover a vast range of topics and are deeply socially involved. Such topics reflect, *inter alia*, his critical engagement with the Romanian socialist regime, both before but mostly after 1989, and a critical repudiation of capitalism² after 1989. To some extent, the socialist and post-socialist periods are accurately analyzed by Popescu as a historical continuum. This will become obvious as the study unfolds. However, the 1989 revolution is a political event that remains, for Popescu, covered in a thick layer of discontent and conspiracy theories. Moreover, with the COVID-19 pandemic and especially with the Ukraine war that started in 2022, the global order enforced after the end of the Cold War is definitely over. So is, as a local part of that global order, East-European post-communism. Here is an additional reason to study Popescu’s analyses of Romanian society before and after 1989: his world has finally come to an end, too.

¹ Though often described as a coup d’état or a counter-revolution, the Romanian 1989 uprising was not a Marxist revolution, but a popular revolt soon to be confiscated by the former socialist elite which conveniently embraced capitalism. What started in 1989 as a worker’s revolution was turned in no time by the post-communist regime into a social counter-revolution that mimicked almost to perfection the discourse of Western liberalism (Copilaș 2002, 564–580); for a critical cultural and social analysis of the 1989 revolution (Petrovsky, Țichindeleanu 2009).

² We refer to Romanian post-communist capitalism, which evolved from predatory anti-social in the first part of the transition, to technocratic and digital-friendly versions, upon Romania’s accession to the European Union. In its Marxist sense, capitalism is still understood as the main model of political economy developed in the West, as a mode of production that restructures whole societies according to the logic of profit and, as Marx once briefly explained it in economic terms, as the privatization of gains and the socialization of losses.

Romanian communism had an intricate political development. From total obedience towards the Soviet Union until the early 1960s, it evolved, mostly due to economic reasons, into an autonomous regime, critical both towards the West and its former political protector, Moscow. At the same time, it was ruthlessly pragmatic: during the late 1970s, socialist Romania became a member of the so-called Group of 77, representing the non-aligned movement within the United Nations. However, by remaining a member of both the Warsaw Treaty and the Council of Economic Mutual Assistance, that is, in the military and economic structures of the 'socialist camp' – Ceaușescu's Romania could never claim the same degree of political independence as Tito's Yugoslavia did, for example. There were political, economic, and also geographic limits that socialist Romania would not dare cross in its quest for international independence, and those limits were imposed by the Soviets. Aware of these constraints, Ceaușescu's regime resorted to a strident 'multilateral diplomacy' that, in addition to the aforementioned pragmatism, was also a form of virtue signaling, criticizing the hegemony of the two great powers in international affairs while simultaneously courting the Third World due to its rich and cheap resources. Nevertheless, socialist Romania was also trying to make profit out of the partial lack of political experience of former colonies – exactly what both the United States and the Soviet Union did on a larger scale. Trying to achieve a balance between Soviet resentment, on the one hand, and Western and Third World opportunities, on the other, socialist Romania adopted an overall political stance that was, at first glance, somewhat contradictory, reflecting its own unresolved political contradictions: 'simulated permanence', in order to appease the Soviets, and 'simulated change', in order to convince the West that it was gradually opening up towards liberal political values (Shafir 1985).

'Multilateral diplomacy' reflected socialist Romania's (rather cautious) strive for independence in foreign policy. In domestic affairs, a new form of nationalism that paralleled this international trend was developed. It was labeled either as 'national communism' (Shafir 1985; Verdery 1991; Petrescu 2009, 523–544; Petrescu 2007, 27–55; Copilaș 2015) or as 'national Stalinism'. Scholars like Vladimir Tismăneanu and Marius Stan (2021), among others, firmly distinguish between national communism and national Stalinism. Tismăneanu (2012) argues, for example, that national communism should be interpreted as a rather dynamic and regenerative political regime, one that replaces, in some cases, previous Stalinist regimes with the promise of a certain international independence, doubled by limited domestic liberties. Examples include Tito's Yugoslavia and Gomułka's Poland, applicable (at least) to the first years of its existence. National Stalinism, according to Tismăneanu (2012), differs from national communism by being significantly more authoritarian in political, economic, and cultural matters. Instead of a post-Stalinist regeneration, national Stalinism ends up offering a new form of political 'degeneration', one that never truly breaks away from the Stalinist legacy of extreme centralism, suspicion, manipulation, and crime.

In this context, Ceaușescu's Romania, Enver Hoxha's Albania, Todor Zhivkov's Bulgaria and, to a certain extent, the German Democratic Republic ruled by Erich Honecker qualify as adequate case studies. In Tismăneanu's (2012) own words, national Stalinism 'was narcissistic and anachronistic; it valued uniformity and exploited tribalist resentment and primordialist allegiances. Its goal was the achievement of the Leninist utopia, even at the cost of generalized poverty. The fundamental values of such a regime are the following: political voluntarism, sectarianism, radicalism, cult of hierarchy and authority,

scorn for parliamentary democracy, and constitutionalism' (Tismăneanu, 2012, 462; see also Tismăneanu 2004, 40–41; Tismăneanu 2003; Tismăneanu 2021, 456–462; Petrescu 1998, 239–251). Other ways of characterizing national Stalinism would be 'anti-Sovietism without anti-Stalinism' (Tismăneanu 2016, 10).

While the distinction between national communism and national Stalinism may bring particular conceptual advantages, our paper maintains that national communism, understood through all its local variations, remains the core concept in this regard, due to a number of reasons. To begin with, we do not necessarily agree that Romania under Ceaușescu's leadership fostered a process of 're-Stalinization', as Tismăneanu and Stan argue (Tismăneanu, Stan 2021, 458). Indeed, starting in 1971, the socialist regime would grow more authoritarian and more nationalistic and the emphasis on heavy industry, a key feature of economic Stalinism, would be maintained, and even accelerated – but Stalinism as a specific political regime needs to be understood in its historical context. At the same time, it arguably disappeared with the death of its founder. During the 1970s and 1980s, Romania was, although reluctantly, more open towards migration and, culturally, towards youth, allowing scarce concerts performed by well-known foreign rock bands, for example, and tolerating, to a certain extent, the existence of youth subcultures. These aspects, no matter how simulated or pragmatic, were almost unthinkable during the Stalinist phase of the regime's existence, a phase which lasted, in our view, up until the early 1960s, when Romania started a quiet but steady process of distancing itself from the Soviet Union. Secondly, political repression, another hallmark of Stalinism, diminished significantly during Ceaușescu's leadership. The vast majority of political prisoners had been released even before that, namely in 1964. It never disappeared altogether, but it became more nuanced, more insidious, and also less life-threatening. Thirdly, we consider the concept of national Stalinism as rather schematic and reductionist, since it fails to consider the tremendous changes that affected all socialist regimes upon Stalin's death, even the ones most reluctant to change, which strived to mitigate or simulate de-Stalinization according to their own political ends. Moshe Lewin insisted that many social scientists analyzing the Soviet Union tended to be distracted by two 'frequent errors': 'The first lies in considering anticommunism a study of the Soviet Union. The second – a consequence of the first – consists in 'Stalinizing' the whole Soviet phenomenon, as if it had been one giant gulag from beginning to end' (Lewin 2005, 378). With all due respect, this conclusion can also be extrapolated in the context of Romanian socialism.

However, what ultimately matters is that this rampant nationalism, especially during the last two decades of the regime, holds a prominent place in Popescu's writings. As one of the main ideological architects of this peculiar form of nationalism that emerged during the 1960s, Popescu's works provide us with various psychological, emotional, and contextual glimpses of the development and consolidation of Romanian national communism, on the one hand, and in the (dis)continuities it experienced after the 1989 revolution, on the other.

Methodology

Our study covers several directions. First, it explores Popescu's dissociation from the early socialism practiced by Gheorghiu-Dej's regime – an endeavor undertaken by all major representatives of Romanian national communism (Copilaș 2018, 78–115).

Secondly, it dwells on several key elements of national communism as theorized by Popescu: class, youth, and personality cult, insisting on youth as a possible substitute for a socialist civil society. Thirdly, it arrives at the post-communist transition and its main features and characters according to the central figure of the study. Finally, the conclusion section summarizes the main findings, along with our complementary and critical remarks.

Our main research questions can be summarized as follows: are Popescu's political ideas relevant to understanding our contemporary political national, regional, and even international context? If so, why? And how? Does Popescu's reading of national-communist ideology contribute to expanding the understanding of the same concentric contexts, before 1989? What political myths are debunked by Popescu, and what political myths are reinforced? What elements of Popescu's memoirs, novels, and journals are useful for historians, sociologists, and political theorists, and which are less useful? Although Popescu produced a great and diverse body of literary works, one can extract from it, after a careful and systematic analysis, important considerations that contribute to a better understanding of both previous Romanian national-communist ideology, and of post-communist ideology. Furthermore, the overwhelming magnitude of Popescu's literary activity should not deter the reader from identifying a rather coherent and powerful social and political worldview behind it. This personal worldview is not always reputable, as we strive to argue in the following pages.

Our present endeavor highlights the necessity for careful and selective use of Popescu's political ideas in order to support the advance of theoretical discussions regarding both former socialist and contemporary capitalist ideologies in 20th century Romania and beyond. Furthermore, our main objective lies in applying and putting into perspective the aforementioned selective appropriation of Popescu's political ideas in order to show that Popescu's interpretation of current capitalist ideology is, with all its inaccuracies, definitely more pertinent and progressive than his interpretation of the national-communist ideology he helped develop in the first place.

However, we do not disregard the highly complex, convincing, and critical nuances that Popescu uses in order to suggest social and political diagnoses of the previous socialist regime. Nonetheless, we think that they have primarily contributed to the consolidation of a regrettable nationalist political mythology that was first developed in the early 1950s and continues to remain relevant today (Copilaş 2018, 78–115). To conclude, we think that while Popescu offers interesting and powerful insights into debunking the contemporary Romanian capitalist ideologies, he fails to do so when interpreting and, especially, white-washing national communism.

The essential prerequisite of Romanian national communism: critical dissociation from Gheorghiu-Dej's regime

Three main intertwined narratives constitute the backbone of national communism's discursive genesis. The most comprehensive one consists in incriminating the period of socialist consolidation entailed under Gheorghiu-Dej's regime (1948–1965) on the partially righteous account of political errors, political crimes, generalized political repression, national – minorities ruling the Romanian Workers Party (RWP – the official title of the communist party between 1948 and 1965) and, through it, the whole country. The second

lies in blaming Romania's strict international dependence on the Soviet Union, a situation that had long prevented the country from achieving its much-needed independence. Thirdly, national communism can be examined through a political conflict that divided the elite of the RWP in 1952. The so-called 'right-wing deviation' included the country's then Foreign Affairs minister Ana Pauker, Interior minister Teohari Georgescu, and Finance minister Vasile Luca. They were all expelled from their high political positions, and even from the party, after coming in conflict with Gheorghiu-Dej regarding the desirable pace of socialist transformation in Romania. Since they wanted to temporize the impact of the nationalization of industry and of the collectivization of agriculture upon the well-being of precarious classes, they were labeled as 'rightist deviationists' aiming to sabotage socialist construction undertaken under the inviolable banner of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, they were also branded as 'Muscovite', foreign communists, while Dej and his associates became trustworthy and courageous 'native' or national communists (Shafir 1985; Copilaş 2018).

This last political episode marked, according to recent studies (Copilaş 2018, 78–115), the event that witnessed the inception of national-communist ideology. First, the 'Muscovite' – 'native' distinction was deeply flawed. Both sides were faithfully Stalinist, although they had minor disagreements regarding the proper policies needed for Romania's socialist transformation. Furthermore, there was no ethnical homogeneity involved: both larger parts were ethnically diverse (Shafir 1985). Thirdly, what matters for the purpose of the present study is how this 'Muscovite' – 'native' narrative paved the way for national communism by allowing the future national-communist elite of Ceauşescu's regime to contrive its own political genealogy by critically separating itself both from 'Muscovite communists' and, eventually, from the whole regime of Gheorghiu-Dej.

Popescu's works cover all three key components of national communism. Firstly, he is keen on debating the fake de-Stalinization campaign of Gheorghiu-Dej's regime that allowed the prime-secretary of the RWP to safely maintain his dominant position by accusing the former 'right-wing deviationists' of being the only Stalinists in the country, Stalinists that the party was able to dispose of even before the death of Stalin himself. This simulation of de-Stalinization ran parallel with administrative and local political abuse perpetrated against former 'illegal' communists from the interwar period, against small party members and against numerous simple citizens hoping for political normalization (Popescu 1981, 312–313, 413–414, 456, 458, 478; Popescu 2013, 246–247; Popescu 1967, 29; Popescu 2011a, 133; Popescu 2021a, 173–174; Popescu 2021b, 69–71). Secondly, the grotesque cult of Stalin's personality and the rigid indoctrination of students and minor activists is also invoked (Popescu 1980, 90, 150–152, 154–157, 165; Popescu 1973, 84) – even if these students and activists were ethnically diverse, thus contradicting the 'natives-Muscovites' mythology. Political crimes (the Pătrăşcanu case, for example – Giugariu 1996) were not forgotten, along with the infringement of 'socialist legality' (Popescu 2011a, 157–158; Popescu 1981, 480–481; Popescu 2017, 130). Art, and especially movies, from the Gheorghiu-Dej period are labeled as obsolete and even 'bad' in one of Popescu's novels written before 1989 – due to the increased focus on class relations (Popescu 1985, 158). Lastly, the 'dogmatization' and 'absolutization' of Marxist classics are also considered a feature of early Romanian socialism and its clumsy process of ideological consolidation (Popescu 1973, 68–69; Popescu 1980, 298; Popescu, 2022a, 57–59, 61–62; Popescu

2019, 49). Interestingly enough, Dej himself is considered less rigid than Ceaușescu, creating the impression of a paternalist calmness that could, however, dissipate in a moment (Popescu 1993, 88–89). Furthermore, the behavior of Red Army soldiers during the postwar years is clearly condemned (Popescu 1981, 115–117). After the fall of Ceaușescu's regime, the red Army is criticized on par with the presumed interference of Russian tourists within the Romanian revolution of 1989 (Popescu 2013, 105–106, 296).

Moreover, Popescu relentlessly reproaches the Soviet Union its interference in Romanian domestic affairs, ranging from late 1940s to late 1980s (Popescu 1981, 412–413; Popescu 2011a, 29–30; Popescu 2022b, 162–163). There seems to be almost a political, if not logical fracture here: the Soviets should have implemented socialism in Eastern Europe after the Second World War, Romania included, and then simply let it develop by itself, without trying to exploit their political 'investment', nor ensure their security in case of subsequent conflicts. One should not forget that most East-European countries were, willingly or not, allies of Nazi Germany. Still, Popescu reluctantly acknowledges that it was Gheorghiu-Dej's regime, not Ceaușescu's, that initiated the gradual process of separation from the Soviet Union (Popescu 1993). Thirdly, by crediting the 'natives-Muscovites' political mythology in the ways mentioned above, Popescu is conveying his interpretation of national communism while also legitimizing its ideological and historical genealogy.

In his seminal and already cited novel *Fist and palm*, which had produced various reactions in the Soviet Union due to the sharp criticism directed at the postwar Red Army and Soviet society (Popescu 2021a, 345–363), Popescu systematically and thoroughly ridicules Ana Pauker, the most important member of the 1952 'right-wing deviation' (Popescu 1981, 319–322). Consequently, Popescu adheres to the 'Muscovite' – 'native communists' fallacious dichotomy of the 1952 political conflict within the elite of the RWP, siding, of course, with the 'natives'.

Class, youth, and the personality cult³

As the supervising ideologue of Ceaușescu's regime, Popescu's contribution to national communism is effectively overwhelming. However, his criticism against it is not to be disregarded. While Popescu is not very fond of Dej's regime, he nevertheless acknowledges, even if reluctantly, the central position that class occupies within the public and cultural policies of Romanian socialism during its consolidation stage (Popescu 1981; Popescu 1985). Within the latter stage, that of 'mature' national communism, class combativeness decreases in favor of a more socially integrated approach. This is the moment youth policies step in, instituting a sort of permanent social peace project that Ceaușescu's regime proposes to a society deemed immature, yet educable in communist terms (Popescu 1994, 183). But youth policies do not employ only tactical awareness and an openness towards leisure and fun the previous regime denied, or at least grudgingly tolerated; the overall project of social rejuvenation corresponded with a communist doctrinaire feature, namely its self-perception as revolutionary youthfulness struggling against bourgeois and/or feudal senescence (Lenin 1970; Popescu 1994, 206; Popescu 1967, 191–192). Last but not

³ Although a class-oriented analysis of the Romanian society during and after the fall of communism would have been useful, it would have also pushed the analysis beyond the scope and the means of this article (Petrovici 2017; Poenaru 2017).

least, aging communist leaders were undergoing long and tedious facial and bodily rejuvenation processes in order to stay handsome, inspiring and in line with the rejuvenation of society and also with their ideological convictions (Popescu 1994, 329). According to Popescu, young revolutionaries from yesterday turned into 'heroic old men from today' were guiding contemporary youth on the deserving, yet shaky path to socialism (Popescu 1967, 238–239). However, the same youth abandoned the regime as soon as the opportunity arose, thus playing a 'reactionary' role during the 1989 revolution (Popescu 2020, 265). The austerity policies of the 1980s were taking their toll: workers and peasants became increasingly alienated from Ceaușescu's regime (Popescu 2019, 68–69, 123–125).

Through the increased focus on the youth, the RCP was quietly abandoning class positions, becoming an 'elitist' (Popescu 1994, 183) and also a socially integrative party (as contradictory as this association may seem). Moreover, one can argue that Popescu's notion of youth can be considered a form of ideologically contained socialist civil society. This may seem peculiar, since socialist regimes did not tolerate official political opposition, and the latter represents one of the key dimensions of civil societies as modern forms of association. However, this newly found social integration drive of the RCP amounts, in the last instance, to a distorted and well-tempered civil society. This is because civil societies are ultimately an expression of rising bourgeois societies of the 18th and early 19th centuries, being defined by commercial, not necessarily political relations. At least this is how GWF Hegel, the famous German philosopher that basically coined the term, perceived them (Hegel 2008, 180–196; Bourke 2023, 176–177).

Furthermore, youth in postwar Western societies was mostly a market creation in order to adjust to the baby boom and the unprecedented level of prosperity that needed to be kept in motion. This market was understood in cultural terms, but its structural roots nevertheless ran deep within the political economy of postwar capitalism (Brake 2003). As a cultural phenomenon, Western youth influenced, especially through modern media, the youth of socialist countries. Consequently, this commodification drive that went along with cultural aspects like clothing, (rock) music, partying, found ways to become influential among the youth of socialist countries as well, although, of course, to a lesser extent, and under the careful eye of authorities, which allowed the socialist youth to embrace Western youth culture as long as they were using it as an innocent form of frivolous and politically irrelevant fun. Youth leagues and associations from socialist Eastern Europe followed and even amplified this trend for all sorts of advantages, material or not. They collaborated, for example, with local rock bands, in order to become more appealing to young people in general. In this process, the rebellious, innovative, and entrepreneurial mindset of Western youth, at least of those who controlled the youth cultural market, was gradually transferred upon the youth of Eastern, socialist countries. Former members of Romanian League of Communist Youth, for example, were among the most psychologically adapted citizens in order to cope with the harshness and shortcomings of the post-communist transition (Copilaș 2019). Popescu's youth, perceived as a form of distant and distorted socialist civil society, is therefore resonant with Hegel's theorizing of civil society as associations of entrepreneurs that still refer to the political authority of the state as something external, and even obtrusive.

Moreover, RCP's 'elitist', nationalist and populist tendency was consolidated by the gradual elimination of Marxism from the ideological economy of national communism (Popescu 1993, 25; Copilaș 2015, 165, 198). The term *elitist* is best reflected in the aspi-

ration of the new regime to represent an educated and ultimately respectable society on the whole, not just the old, manly working-class marked by rudeness, sexism, and often anti-social behavior. As for the term *integrative*, the party strived to represent the entire society, not just some privileged classes on the expense of others. This evolution affected not only the party's relation with society, but the party composition itself, creating an increasingly wider gap between the old and young party members (Popescu 1994, 96–97). This is a very interesting social and political evolution that needs to be placed in a broader, even global context. Starting with the late 1960s, after the uprising of students and hippies within the Western world, revolutionary and critical theory's attention shifted to the youth as the new subversive force able to topple capitalism (Marcuse 2007).

This social and cultural dynamic is also present within the American mass-media. During the late 1960s, the liberal media progressively abandoned working-class environments in search of a fresher and more sophisticated public. While white working-class men – the basis of former clientage – were rude, xenophobic, misogynistic, sexist, and semi-literate, students and the progressive youth emerged as the complete opposite. The latter cared for ecology, human rights, feminism, sexual freedom, tolerance, racial justice, political correctness, etc. As the old working class became more conservative, the conservative media stepped in to fill the gap and to amplify the already considerable prejudices within predominantly white working-class environments. Thus, a new cultural cleavage was created, a clash that has since stood the test of time (Ungar-Sargon 2021).

Playing more on the integrative than on the elitist side of this new social and cultural dynamic, Ceaușescu's regime retrieved and also recycled the historical past in order to appeal to the patriotic feelings of the whole society, young and old alike. A new form of nationalism, centered around the party and its political imperatives of authoritarian social integration and relentless industrial progress, not on an uncritical and reactionary appropriation of the past, emerged. National-communist ideology, which has been already analyzed in depth from different angles (Shafir 1985; Verdery 1991; Petrescu 2009, 523–544; Petrescu 2007, 27–55; Copilaș 2015), was even appealing to the religious feelings of the population in order to discursively consolidate itself. If the bourgeoisie proclaimed its adherence to Christian principles – Popescu argued during the late 1960s – then it would be the task of socialism to truly and consistently apply those principles according to everyone's needs (Popescu 1967, 105–106). In his poetry, Popescu made references to patriotism, understood within the ideological economy of national communism, heroic ancestors, all coming together as the 'army of communism' marching under the 'flag of justice' (Popescu 1968, 13–15, 22, 35; Popescu 1972, 23).

As for Ceaușescu's personality cult, Popescu went from (rare) encomiastic attitudes to rather frequent, although subtle, critical remarks. In his novel *Fist and palm*, written between 1980 and 1982, he made veiled allusions to Ceaușescu as a young and fearless leader, promoter of refreshing criticism against the Dejist stagnation and also against the ruthless internationalism of the Soviet Union (Popescu 1981, 395–396; Popescu 2021c, 131–132). After 1989, he would interpret the latter as a hypocrite discursive camouflage for Soviet nationalism (Popescu 2011a, 18–20; Popescu 2021c, 221–222). From the young, inquisitive, and highly promising political leader, Ceaușescu metamorphosed into an authoritarian and inquisitorial despot that identified the RCP and the whole country with himself, while covertly lamenting that he was not the leader of a global superpower (Popescu 1993). His personality cult was both a consequence of international fear with reference to the Soviet Union and

the Western world, as well as of an increasingly rigid ideological attitude towards a society that did not comply with his moral and professional standards (Popescu 1993, 154–155).

Before 1989, Popescu had embedded his criticism against Ceaușescu and the national-communist regime mostly in novels and poetry. *Manole Suru*, one of the main characters featured in *Fist and palm* (along with *Vladimir Cernea*), is centered, according to Popescu, around Ceaușescu himself (Popescu 2011a, 186–187; Popescu 2021b, 350–351). He is transformed from a careful and serviceable young student into a superior activist growing increasingly frustrated with the people he is supposed to serve. His motto changed accordingly, argues Popescu, from ‘struggling for the people’ to ‘struggling with the people’ (Popescu 1982, 221–222). Here is a striking description of Suru, whose resemblance to Ceaușescu probably did not go unnoticed: ‘Suru is the character who deprives man from enjoying life – in this I find his main fault. He became a gendarme of precepts, a new type of angry theologian. Suru has a great moral ascendant – virtue! But this too has turned into a vice. Because virtue aware of itself becomes egoistical and domineering. It does not suffice itself, it wants to proliferate, to be imposed, to be generalized. There, this is the canon. Suru is prophesizing virtue enslavement’ (Popescu 1982, 235). It must be noted how the aforementioned Christian-like arguments are once again invoked by the main ideologue of a fiercely atheistic political regime.

Part of Popescu’s poetry written before 1989 also alludes to the growing discontent between the national-communist regime and the rest of society. ‘Sermons of dust’, ‘great words’ running on ‘small feet’, ‘obese numbers’ metaphorically portrayed as ‘malignant beasts’ lying in shadows and ‘devouring number after number’, ‘snails’ lacking ‘spines’, ‘great republics’, ‘sinking towards enslavement, or towards freedom’, a question that remains seditiously open (Popescu 1974, 47, 80, 94, 158); shortly before the 1989 revolution, Popescu experiences a growing feeling of approaching historical finitude for the ‘self-proclaimed castellan of the Country of Nobody’ ‘showing and also selling, with ‘sugary smiles’, from generation to generation, ‘rounded beads from resultful holly wood’ (Popescu 1989, 170, 175).

The novels written by Popescu before 1989 abound in adulterous and slightly promiscuous scenes (Popescu 1985; Popescu 1988), an artistic attitude that challenged the rigid and paternalistic morality of Ceaușescu’s regime, where family held a key position. However, the most blatantly critical novel Popescu wrote during this period is definitely *The wax museum*. In addition to adultery, the novel subtly captures the feeling of socialist professional and even ontological alienation, as a fine young engineer advances to a top position in an industrial state-owned company only to become more and more disillusioned and disinterested in his work, up to the point where he silently tolerates and even mounts an internal ‘mutiny’ against his privileged position in order to be released from his overwhelming professional duties; nobody understands his apparently absurd gesture apart from one of his mistresses (Popescu 1984).

After the fall of the communist regime, Popescu’s memoirs paint a bleak yet consistent portrait of the former RCP leader. Ceaușescu had, according to his chief ideologue, ‘no sense of ridiculousness’, while being also ‘highly unforeseeable’, ‘secretly’, he was also an ‘admirer of American capitalism’, whose productivity he hoped to implement, within a different political ontology, within his own country (Popescu 1996, 66, 72–73, 163–164). According to Popescu, Ceaușescu’s main fault does not lie in ‘aberrations’ like undermining the national economy or killing ‘tens of thousands’ of people, both part of the accusations faced during and in the aftermath of the 1989 revolution (Szabo 2013) – but

in turning the RCP into an 'empty shell', tying it exclusively to his 'ascetic', interrogative and ultimately unbearable, workaholic personality – and thus compromising its political future (Popescu 2021d, 112–113; Popescu 2021a, 239–240; Popescu 2011a, 153; Popescu 1993). The disproportionate praise he received both domestically and internationally contributed to this regretful outcome, fueling his already stark ideological fanaticism (Popescu 1993, 230–231, 247–248). His wife appeared to have a negative influence on him, convincing him to insist on the supremacy of his arbitrary will with reference to the legal system. 'We made the law, we can unmake it', she supposedly affirmed alongside him on several occasions (Popescu 2021e, 140).

However, we think that accusing Elena Ceaușescu of the steady deterioration of political relations with the West and also of the wave of austerity ravaging the country throughout the 1980s (Popescu 2021a, 234–235) is almost dishonest and even misogynistic on Popescu's part (Popescu 2018, 205). Furthermore, it can also be perceived as an invalidation of the critical structural methodology used by Popescu in his rather accurate social and political analyses. Although not systematically Marxist, this methodology was nevertheless deeply influenced by Marxism. According to Cornel Ban's innovative study (Ban 2014), there were important structural and global factors like the energy crisis of the 1970s that hit – for a number of reasons which do not fall within the scope of this study – the emerging economies of socialist countries very hard. As for the causes of the regime's growing lack of political popularity during the 1970s and 1980s, these are also diverse (Copilaș 2012) and they definitely cannot be tied down to the speculative wrongdoings of a certain person, like Popescu does with reference to Elena Ceaușescu.

Before transitioning to the next section, it is important to note Popescu's ambivalent political attitude towards youth: while he notices and somehow laments the decline of militancy of the RCP upon embracing this youth 'strategy' over former class-oriented policies, he also fiercely criticizes the Gheorghiu-Dej's regime which, despite its numerous and major shortcomings, was nevertheless a firm promoter of class policies. Furthermore, if one considers youth subcultures as well, the picture changes almost dramatically. Popescu, a reluctant admirer of jazz (Popescu 1982, 362–363; Popescu 2015, 59–62), is definitely an opaque critic of rock music, associated with Satanism (Popescu 2011b, 410–412), and of punk-rock and the hippie movement as well, even if he correctly understands these musical subcultures, as already argued, in terms of products of consumerist Western society slowly pervading socialist society with their supposed anti-civilizational ethos (Popescu 1989, 79–80; Popescu 1973, 91–92, 95; Popescu 1994, 94).

Overall, Popescu's evaluation of the former socialist regime resembles his understanding of youth subcultures. Although it started as an undermining force against 'traditional values' (Popescu 2013, 457), communism eventually ended up as a conservative regime (Popescu 2011a, 99, 153–156), dwelling on the 'power of words' (Popescu 2011a, 126–127) and also of numbers, on truncated techniques of fact selection (Popescu 1994, 272–275; Popescu 2021d, 8–9) and of reducing politics to economic factors like productivity, efficiency, and cost-reduction (Popescu 1994, 18, 41–44, 102). This managerial-like and therefore increasingly capitalistic vision of communism produced activists who traveled abroad, became understandably frustrated, and were eager to get rich, richer than the official national-communist political order allowed (Popescu 1994, 197–198; Popescu 2021d, 117–123). Furthermore, early socialism based on class animosity was continued by a hostile and militant way of doing politics during Ceaușescu's regime. This feature would remain visible after the anti-communist revolution of 1989 and would express itself

as general lack of empathy doubled by social ‘cruelty’, both indispensable components of post-communist capitalism (Popescu 1994, 344–345).

However, as we have maintained during the previous section, and partially in this one as well – despite shedding some light on these insightful intricacies and contradictions of the former socialist regime and its late national-communist ideology, Popescu is ultimately consolidating this ideology by strongly reaffirming its founding myth of 1952, that of the distinction between ‘native’ and ‘Muscovite’ communists.

Romania’s post-communist transition: main features and characters

If, according to Popescu, communism basically reduced politics to economic matters, post-communist capitalism did exactly the opposite and renounced economic matters, becoming a metaphysical void that blurred the class antagonism emerging after 1989 (Popescu 2011b, 339). Anti-communist dissidence and an overall anti-communist ideology prevailed in the public space as a fresh and powerful central political discourse, one that reduced the previous socialist regime to a schematic caricature, exclusively emphasizing its negative traits without considering or, at most ridiculing, its social and economic achievements – while simultaneously overstating individual gestures of defiance by transforming them into political opposition against Ceaușescu’s regime (Popescu 1994; Popescu 2011a)⁴. In striking contrast to the previous political elite, as well as increasingly educated with the passing of time and deeply patriotic, the new political elite is characterized by Popescu as ‘bunch of modern lumpen (proletarians)’ (Popescu 2019, 225). Consequently, the Dej period and that of post-communism are considered similar in terms of their negative impact upon society as a whole (Popescu 2020, 102–105).

In contrast with his rather accurate and vivid analyses of socialism and especially capitalism, the 1989 revolution is perceived by Popescu as a Soviet and foreign conspiracy against socialist Romania’s debt-free independence, a conspiracy that continued during the early 1990s with the trial of former communist leaders (Popescu 1992; Popescu 2013, 277–278; Popescu 2022a, 284, 324–327. This trial, held in 1992, which witnessed Popescu’s condemnation to several years in prison, along with other prominent members of the former nomenclatura – is labeled by Popescu as ‘Stalinist’ (Popescu 2019, 228). Romania paid all its foreign debts in 1988, with huge social costs. Now, Popescu argued, Ceaușescu disposed of enormous resources but, instead of using them to increase domestic consumption, he preferred to defy the threateningly young Soviet leader Michael Gorbachev, as a more experienced builder of socialism, since the Soviet leader was permanently asking the West for financial loans and criticizing Romania as a dogmatic and retrograde country (Popescu 2013, 105–106, 296; Popescu 2021d, 11–12; Popescu 2021f, 215).

Surprisingly enough, Popescu is also perfectly aware of the fact that the 1989 revolution was a consequence of Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe (Popescu 1994, 395–396). He also hinted, in his most ‘political’ post-communist novel, that the 1989 revolutions were also actively supported by the West, including the Vatican, involved in the fall of Polish communism. Why did the ‘Prague spring’ of 1968 not prevail? – Popescu rhetori-

⁴ We note that there are different variations of anti-communism as ideology in post-communist Romania. Some are voiced by radical and extremist right-wing political currents (that include worryingly numerous ultra-nationalist historians, sympathizers of the interwar fascist movement entitled ‘The Legion of The Archangel Michael’, members of Greater Romania Party and, nowadays, of the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians), while others are inspired by conservatism, liberalism, and/or social-democracy

cally asks. Because, he quickly replies, it was not supported from abroad (Popescu 2013, 363). While this remains a matter of speculation – despite the West being interested in the emerging East-European markets – what is clear is that the primitive capitalist accumulation, that disintegrated the fiber of society and also turned aggressive individualism into the dominant social and political philosophy, was here to stay (Popescu 2021g, 181–182).

Post-communist freedom of speech also paved the way to freedom of prejudice, as well as to reclaim radical right-wing military figures of the recent past such as marshal Antonescu, an increasingly acceptable character for the national-communist regime as well, especially during the 1980s (Shafir 1985). Popescu openly acknowledges his admiration for this controversial World War II figure that sided Romania between 1941 and 1944 along Nazi Germany and against the Soviet Union (Popescu 2011a, 59–60; Popescu 2022c, 252). Furthermore, he also disseminates in his works racial, homophobic, misogynistic, and cultural prejudices of all sorts, from stigmatizing Roma and ‘gypsy music’ (‘manele’), without understanding the latter as a popular reverberation of capitalistic induced individual aggressiveness and social distrust, to criticizing gay people and objectifying and over-sexualizing women of color (Popescu 2013, 233; Popescu 2011b, 430–431; Popescu 1992, 80; Popescu 2021g, 158–167; Popescu 2020, 324–325; Popescu 2022d, 70–71, 84). Nevertheless, there is one prejudice that does not make it on Popescu’s post-communist list: ageism (Popescu 2021g, 308–313). Moreover, it is highly likely some of those prejudices were formed during the national-communist regime, or even earlier (Popescu 1965, 50–52). Still, not only racial and cultural semi-prejudices were acquired by Popescu during his travels around the world as a young communist activist, but also promising anti-colonial attitudes (Popescu 1962, 54–55; Popescu 2021h, 387; Popescu 2020, 225–228; Popescu 2018, 250–253; Popescu 2017, 66–67).

Consequently, it should not come as a surprise that Popescu considers former national-communist poets reinvented as far-right leaders of extremist parties such as Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the former leader of Greater Romania Party (GRP) – left-wing voices, due to their insistence on the vulnerabilities experienced by the poor during the post-communist transition (Popescu 2021g, 254–255). This is a perfect example of how national communism evolved in post-communism: freed from previous ideological forbearances, it developed its xenophobic, misogynistic, sexist, and homophobic features to the last consequences, while simultaneously rehabilitating right-wing radical figures like that of marshal Antonescu and even that of the former Iron Guard leader, Corneliu-Zelea Codreanu. Social issues remained important for this new type of former-radical-now-extremist political discourse, as it gradually advanced from the left (before 1989) to the right (after 1989). Its engagement with them was, however, rather propagandistic, and fortuitous, not systematic, as applicable before 1989, when class policies were already on retreat during Ceaușescu’s regime. As Slavoj Žižek (1993) poignantly noted – without trying to justify this type of discourse – political violence and extremism marking East-European countries during the 1990s has more to do with capitalist-induced social upheaval than with the influence of former state-socialist ideologies.

In addition to Vadim-Tudor, Popescu (2021g) also discusses figures of anti-communist dissidence from the late 1980s such as Mircea Dinescu, who is portrayed both as a talented poet and as a histrionic public figure. Anti-communist political essayist Vladimir Tismăneanu and his impetuous and rather shallow project regarding the official condem-

nation of the socialist regime are also examined (Popescu 2021g, 247–253)⁵. Each of them paints the bleak and simultaneously strident picture of a post-communist society less capable and willing to honestly understand and reinvent itself as a meaningful and prospective social project.

Next, Popescu rightfully laments the ‘mass-mediatisation’ of post-communist society, with its excess of television commercials and its obsession with favorable ratings (2013, 276; 2021g, 172–175; 2015, 20; 2017, 7, 182–185). As with national communism that used statistics as an ideological tool for its own project of society, the capitalist post-communism uses ratings for its own project of social atomization through consumerism. This overall capitalist anti-social project seems to have affected Popescu as well, since, other than *Artemis or the usurpation of feeling*, published in 2013, many of his other post-communist novels and short stories are, with certain exceptions, highly introspective, melancholic, and even resigned with reference to an alternative political project (2015, 2010; Popescu 2021i; 2016). Popescu (1999) ended up by assimilating socialism with a transitory ‘flash in the pan’ within the overall dialectical picture of modern history.

Furthermore, the capitalist processes of dispossession, representative of the post-communist period, are examined by Popescu mainly through nationalist lenses developed before 1989. He quickly accuses ‘foreigners’ of ‘stealing’ through fraudulent privatization Romania’s economic assets, while using multiculturalism, minority rights, and the threat of xenophobia to protect and expand their interest at the expense of local ones (Popescu 2016, 55–57; Popescu 2017, 154–156). Still, Popescu (2018, 235) insists – although not convincingly – that his nationalism is just a reaction to foreign capitalist excesses experienced after 1989; a nationalism born out of necessity, not out of conviction. Economic capitalist aggression is doubled by cultural and philosophical aggression as well, since postmodernism, the new philosophical mantra of post-communism, represents a dissolution of social values and of humanism in general, according to Popescu. Socialist humanism, he argues, with its rigidity and doctrinal clumsiness, was nevertheless more honest than postmodernism. Nowadays, a new type of humanism is needed, one that is definitely more socially emphatic than current liberal inspired humanisms (Popescu 2010, 122–123; Popescu 2022d, 299).

Moreover, Popescu is very critical of the new ideology of anti-corruption⁶, used mostly during Băsescu’s regime (2004–2014) in order to concentrate power, delegitimize political opposition, and discredit the social aspirations of precarious classes (Popescu 2017, 193–

⁵ There are different variations of anti-communism as ideology in post-communist Romania. Some are voiced by radical and extremist right-wing political currents (that include worryingly numerous ultra-nationalist historians, sympathizers of the interwar fascist movement entitled ‘The Legion of The Archangel Michael’, members of Greater Romania Party and, nowadays, of the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians), while others are inspired by conservatism, liberalism, and/or social-democracy (Friling, Ioanid, Ionescu 2004; Ernu et al. 2008),

⁶ Anti-corruption can be considered a development of the anticommunist ideology that achieved public consolidation during the early 1990s. As the post-communist bourgeoisie gradually became more diverse and less interested in vehemently denouncing the communist past, anti-corruption stepped in. Exploring the discursive implications of a chain of equivalences forged during the socially disruptive transition of the 1990s — communism-state-corruption-inefficiency-lack of (entrepreneurial) freedom — anti-corruption re-actualized the old ideology of anti-communism as an ideology of the emerging corporate bourgeoisie, different from the previous anti-communist bourgeoisie from the early post-communist transition which thrived through state contracts, developed an oligarchic political regime, and occasionally preferred to envision itself as part of the surviving interwar aristocracy (Poenaru 2017; Copilas 2020, 84–94).

196). This neoliberal regime⁷ was responsible for transferring the costs of the 2008 global economic crises upon the shoulders of the most vulnerable sectors of society; whenever criticized for its systematic anti-social orientation, Băsescu's regime argued that it was corruption, incompetence, and fear of meritocracy which drove this kind of reproaches, not real social needs. Thus, the ideology of anti-corruption basically continued and actualized the older anti-communist ideology from the first decades of the post-communist transition (Poenaru, Rogozanu 2014; Poenaru 2017). A political context is mandatory in this situation. We do not affirm that Romanian post-communist capitalism produced dire social and economic effects only during this decade, namely 2004–2014. In the first half of the 1990s, as well as during the early 2000s, various forms of capitalism that were orchestrated by the social-democratic party (perceived by citizens and scholars alike as a sort of political heir of the now defunct communist party, took their toll on Romanian society (Pasti 2006; Zamfir 2004; Gallagher in Stan, Vancea 2015, 171–192). Furthermore, beyond ideological considerations regarding the aforementioned anti-corruption, corruption used to represent (and does to this day) a major political, economic, and cultural issue in Romania, eroding the country's efforts towards democratic consolidation (Ristei 2010; Ristei 2012; Deletant 2015, 219–240; Gross 2015, 127–148; Ranesz 2017). Major popular protests against widespread corruption took place in Romania between 2017 and 2018. The social-democratic government responded in an unusually repressive manner, hundreds of protesters being victims of aggression by the gendarmerie (Vulcan 2021).

We still maintain, however, that the process of democratic development cannot be reduced to its (nevertheless tremendously important) procedural, normative component, while neglecting and minimizing the ever-growing social inequalities and the expanding gap between rural and urban areas. Otherwise, popular feelings of 'communist nostalgia' will continue to grow. They should be deciphered more as a failure of contemporary democracy to integrate precarious classes and to deal properly with poverty than as a lack of civic culture and/or an issue of retrograde mentalities. Capitalism tends to favor procedural, political, and cultural democracy, along with individual rights, while generally neglecting the social dimension of democracy; socialism insists on the latter and also on collective economic rights but devalues them by minimalizing and overlooking political and cultural aspects that are also intrinsic to democracy.

Last but not least, since we dwelled on the topic of youth as (im)possible socialist civil society in the previous section – it is also worth mentioning that the Romanian post-communist emerging civil society was rapidly coagulated along these new anti-social ideologies like anti-communism and anti-corruption. However, this right-wing civil society has not – at least in the last decade – been defining for the whole civil society⁸. New left-wing voices became visible during the 2012 protests against neoliberal austerity, as well as dur-

⁷ Neoliberalism is approached here as a form of speculative and deregulated capitalism that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a reaction to the oil crises of the decade, in states like Great Britain and the United States. In Romania, neoliberal policies started to be implemented especially in the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis (Ban 2014; Poenaru, Rogozanu 2014).

⁸ As previously argued, we understand civil society in its old, Hegelian sense, as an interface between citizens and the state: the realm of private interests, where laws, regulations and, ultimately, political power – are still perceived as something coercive and external. Therefore, civil society and political community do not overlap. Thus, Immanuel Kant's moral imperative of relating to one another as 'purposes', not as 'means' to different ends, has no proper place within civil society (Bourke 2023, 176–177; Dufour 2023, 212).

ing the ensuing protests against projects of cyanides exploitation of the gold reserves from Roșia Montană and the exploitation of shale gas, bearing damaging consequences for the environment and local communities (Poenaru 2017).

To summarize this section, we consider that Popescu's analyses of post-socialist Romania and the ideological varieties accompanying its capitalist development are, despite all the above-mentioned shortcomings, more accurate and thus more useful for social scientists than his analyses of national communism. By pinpointing the social and economic crises unfolding along the primitive accumulation process Romania underwent during the 1990s, Popescu's insights contribute, not directly, but as potential primary sources, to the augmentation of the existing critical literature on post-communism (Zamfir 2004; Pasti 2006; Ban 2014; Poenaru, Rogozanu 2014; Poenaru 2017; Zamfir 2018; Caradaică, Stoiciu 2018; Gog, Braniște, Turcuș 2021; Gog, Stoiciu 2024).

Conclusions

This study has explored the evolution of national-communist ideology before and after the 1989 anti-communist revolution, as reflected in Dumitru Popescu's manifold works, a central ideological figure of the 1970s. It has identified and critically discussed both progressive and anti-progressive elements marking this peculiar and often contradictory political narrative. National communism was by no means an isolated ideology among Eastern European states of late socialism. In addition to Romania, the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria, and especially Albania, embraced specific forms of national communism adapted to local political needs (Soulet 2006). Romanian national communism was one of the local brands of national communism, with Popescu's intellectual, cultural, and administrative contribution to its genealogy, consolidation, and even post-communist renewal, being a decisive factor.

The article has also dwelled upon Popescu's perception of post-communist capitalism, placing it in close connection to the metamorphosis of former national communism into both far-right political discourses, like that of the GRP, and also briefly tracing its autonomous evolution as an increasingly xenophobic, non-integrative nationalism, doubled by homophobic, misogynistic and sexist elements.

In the end – according to the main character featured in the *Artemis* novel – the socialist regime turned increasingly nationalistic generated the demise of traditional values, while post-communist capitalism produced the demise of all values (Popescu 2013, 457). This conclusion should be corroborated with the previous social-political metaphor from the late 1960s of principles as (one way) tickets for the socialist ride. Travelling without a ticket was punishable by law back then, as it is now (Popescu 1967, 114). The post-communist transition became a luxury ride for most passengers of the capitalist ride. While the previous regime ensured modest, yet dependable 'transport' infrastructure for everyone, the post-communist regime ensures a superior type of infrastructure only for the ones able to afford it. For the others, the previously built decaying infrastructure will have to do. For how long? As it turns out, tickets are no longer required for control. Possibly because there is no clear direction in which society is heading, no proper ontological project in sight, according to Popescu.

Popescu is also acutely aware of the growing tensions undermining global capitalism and forcing it to aggressively search for new markets everywhere. He also argues about

how American capitalism driving globalization is relentlessly pushing aside social human rights like work, education, and health in favor of individual human rights, reduced to a narrow and egotistic understanding of freedom and/or minority rights. Thus, a quiet, yet subversive 'freedom desperation' steps in. Popescu hopes it will be able to question global capitalism to its very core (Popescu 2021g, 211, 329–333). This remains to be seen although, with the unfolding of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is more likely that 'freedom desperation' will blend with military, economic, and digital desperation and provide American capitalism with an unexpected and lasting boost.

Our article strived to map out Popescu's political ideas, extracting them from the many memoirs, novels, and journals he has published during the last sixty years. Taking into account the analysis we developed in the previous sections of the article, an analyses that closely mirrored some of Popescu's stances on national communism and post-communism, while also placing them in different contexts and perspectives – we can now argue that the research questions, hypothesis, and objective presented within the methodological section of the article were, in general, satisfactorily addressed, although the article reads rather dense and maybe even confusing at some points. This has to do, besides, of course, the authors' responsibility, with Popescu's laborious and convoluted prose itself. We showed how and why Popescu's political approaches to issues like national communism and post-communist capitalist ideology matter in order to contribute to the literature regarding Romania's development within the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century.

Even if Popescu offers a complex and dynamic picture of the former socialist regime and its ideology, as we have already argued, he nevertheless directly endorsed the latter by supporting political myths like the distinction advanced in the early 1950s between the so called 'natives' and 'Muscovite' communists. Furthermore, he consolidates the metamorphoses of national-communist ideology in post-communism by offering a conspicuously conniving interpretation of the 1989 revolution, along with an anti-progressive understanding of the capitalist transition from the 1990s and beyond. As already argued, his left-wing nationalism, which is a direct continuation of the former national communism – fuels different xenophobic, misogynistic, sexist, and homophobic approaches that were repressed before 1989 – although he is a keen observer of the effects capitalist transformation induced upon the post 1989 Romanian society. In this way, Popescu ends up losing and maybe even discrediting some of the scientific accuracy he demonstrated in his analyses of international capitalism or in his interesting sociological interpretations of issues like socialist youth, social class or, to a lesser extent, personality cult, for example.

This is why we conclude by reaffirming the objective of the article, namely to demonstrate that Popescu's political ideas ultimately (may) contribute more to the Romanian scientific literature regarding post-communist capitalism and its various ideologies than on the literature regarding the previous, socialist regime (for the latter, see Shafir 1985; Tismăneanu 2003; Gilberg 2019; Fischer 1989; Copilaș 2015). Here, his approach, however meticulous, nuanced, careful, and critical – is mainly fueling some of the founding myths of the Ceaușescu regime and its ideology, myths that were developed both before and after the 1989 revolution.

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