

**THE RE-EDUCATION PROCESS
IN THE COMMUNIST CONCENTRATION UNIVERSE.
THE “AIUD” METHOD**

General considerations

In the complex scenery of the totalitarian régimes the re-education process is an aspect of major value. To re-educate in a non-democratic system means to imbue people with information, beliefs, attitudes, according to the political and social line, adopted by the almighty party. The re-education of undesirable persons is a complex process which doesn't lack morality accents of the moment, because “nothing is absolute, the moral rules depend directly on the distribution of power, the main morality is mostly that of winners”¹. Considered as “religio illicita”, the belief in democracy, the communist regime was preoccupied with re-educating its opponents, causing “amnesia” following which the self becomes a stranger, isolated and departed, indifferent, a simple spectator in the drama of life and history. The next step brings in anamnesis² by evidencing the personality desired by the regime, by assuming the self according to the mirror of the single speech. In an early stage, the totalitarianism proclaims the necessity to eliminate elements of society that early on have constituted the political, social moral nucleus, or the outcasts (criminals, prostitutes, unemployed, etc.), declaring them responsible for the disaster of the nation, because the extreme parties are successful only in moments of great instability: social, moral, economic, or of identity.

“Using the label of social hygiene, the state understands to cure society, clean and reduce it. «Noxious bugs» are gathered in alternative stages and «socialist labor» (of any kind might be, and done by laborers) transforms them. The first hit is given to the outcasts that threaten political, ideological, cultural, social hegemony, of the party and its leaders. Political and religious opposition is reduced, same thing happens to the fuss created by the workers, and peasants' revolts, villages are restructured, «unemployment» is suppressed, by suppressing the unemployed ...”³.

The actions of the rising totalitarian party defy normality and any act of social penetration supposes a re-education under different aspects and levels.

¹ Berlin 1996, p. 162.

² **Anamneza** – the recall of the ideas the soul once knew in a previous existence. It derives from the French term *anamnèse*. Source: *DEX*, p. 34. The political prisoners were considered as being mentally ill by the communist system; a treatment meant to reintegrate them in the society might be apply on them but this was a forced reintegration in the new socialist society.

³ Glucksmann 1991, p. 98.

This massive social re-education is meant to create the premises for an absolute dominant regime, and the inoculation is manifested in all areas, regarding everything.

“The successive expurgations were not errors, they went along with the stages of power changing, step by step. The state, greedy and bloody, destroyed any opposition both the existing and supposed one, in order to make itself accepted.”⁴

The methods of social re-education are multiple, but all based on diversion, exploitation of communitarian lacks. Anguish states are induced, in order to ensure its success. “The era of suspicion is needed in order to remodel human.”⁵

The existing or created social rifts are rigorously exploited with the precise purpose of obtaining full obedience. Their methods and intensity are dictated by each moment, and the dominant feeling is fear. “When you start fearing, when all affection ties are broken, we all become the toy of a gang of cynical adventurers.”⁶ Political police uses the power of example, choosing important people from community to apply the “treatment”, experimental firstly. Fear is easily thought and this fact is successfully exploited within the re-education process. Intensity oscillated between simple methods of tempting and persuading, till threats, excessive pressures and torture which will lead to automatic behaviour, insanity, suicide or death. To avoid any probability of the experience’s failure, the physical and social environment is under thorough control. They focused on the destruction of any attachment towards any non-communist formation, or persons that were close intellectually or affectively. The way of thinking, life attitudes, system of values, orientation points considered incorrect are the subject of the experiment searching to develop unconditioned loyalty towards the communist party and its values.

The successfully accomplished social re-education becomes the nucleus of social atomization, generated by fear, lack of confidence, moral verticality defeated along with its every psychological result. People stop being individuals and become alike persons, characterized by obedience. Social aggregation becomes utopia, and the newly formed social group has intentionally deformed bases, superficial with an overwhelming result. So “loving the person next to you like your self, was an excessive demand, but trying to harm them, wasn’t”⁷.

The strong ones of the day intervene by brutal persuasion in the lives of the communities, inside personal universe, where “no one will survive unless he transforms”⁸. The demand of transformation is excessive, inhuman, an abnormal

⁴ Glucksmann 1991, p. 135-136.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 137.

⁶ Călinescu 1998, p. 109.

⁷ Todorov 1994, p. 38.

⁸ Călinescu 1998, p. 126.

process. "All forms of intervention in people's lives, the attempt to model them against their own will following a new standard, controlling their mind and indoctrinating them, are nothing but a denial of what makes from them humans, of their last values"⁹.

This social uniformisation process is never successful completely. There are strong human individualities, motivated, against which the means of persuasion never reflected any success. This way, they become an element that jeopardizes the new success and its extraction from the community becomes imperative. They end up in prison where their options are limited: acceptance or death. Re-education in prisons has a larger success due to the extended possibilities towards controlling the subject's behavior.

The XXth century's prisons have excelled in an ample dehumanization process of their victims. In the totalitarian systems prison became an efficient tool of rulling the society. The prison space becomes "school", meant to produce by a reversed educational process, docile and obedient characters with regard to the system. The success of the re-education inside prisons is supported by several elements: the possibility to control the enviroment of the subject, the amount of time given to the process, the large number of instruments the re-educator has: torture, hunger, cold, darkness, excessive promiscuity, psychical shocks.

Temporally speaking, torturers have hours, days, weeks, months. Sometimes even years. Time is at the torturer's disposal, while the subject's horologe is broken. In "brainwashing", where the purpose wasn't information, but re-education, the victim was allowed to get used to its statute of "being in school" and meditate at possible tortures"¹⁰.

"Brainwashing" was used on a large scale within the totalitarian systems, and it proved indispensable for the survival of the system. U.S.S.R., China and their satellites apply this formula of re-education in various ways, but with the same purpose: moral uniformisation of society.

"In a first form, «brainwashing» was initiated during the great Stalinist framed processes in U.R.S.S., the method, as technique being a hybrid between tsarist Okhrana (political police in Tsarist Empire) and communist ideology. The purpose was that the victim comes to a stage where he no longer knows who he is, doubts himself, causing a confession in which he himself to believe. The Mao type of «brainwashing» was given a new nuance; it was subordinated to the idea of the worshiped, god-like political leader, that everyone else must listen to unconditionally, because he is the only one able to integrate an eternal order. This order claims total obedience and absolute discipline."¹¹

⁹ Berlin, 1996, p. 221.

¹⁰ Cesereanu 1998, p. 198.

¹¹ Cesereanu 2001, p. 58, 59.

This way prisons became an important point in re-educating society through ex leaders now declared undesirable. Prisons become “psychic gas chambers”¹². Here the victim was submitted to a demoralizing environment, to the daily physical or psychic torture process, followed by re-education. “The world of the victim becomes impossible, at a symbolic level, the only possible order is that of the *suppliciter*. Step by step he comes to respect his torturer and hate the other victims, only because the torturer represents the only visible order.”¹³

The re-education is made through various methods, some even paroxysmic, and the every day life was full with news about deceases of these extremes of behavior. Re-education through work in special built labor camps (in agriculture, mines, industry, constructions, etc.); re-education through “black” (physical) or “white” (psychic) torture, had only one purpose: breaking the moral verticality of the victim and obtaining from him a declaration of adhesion to the system, whose sincerity was repeatedly quantified. The finality of re-education was not limited to the adhesion, but involved self critics by which the victim condemned his own personal beliefs, leaving a void which the specialized functionary filled with information for “the new man”, without identity and personal beliefs, but only assumed through subversive inoculation.

“Pretending to be a «perfect stronghold», solar, the communist society claims a «perfect» citizen: the new man. The gulag’s function is to re-educate those who do not fit obediently to the new human model, or, at its limits, to exterminate them, since the political prisoners show a structural incompatibility towards the system.”¹⁴

The new man is a creation of the human philosophy, a human and not divine creation, it represents the man who doesn’t undertake the structural moral concepts that form the nucleus of modern society. The new man is the “self-created, meaning not created by God”¹⁵ product.

The concept of “new man” was born in the U.S.S.R. where the system is trying to break the ties with the divinity and institute others, based on the adoration of the political leader. “The Slav concept of praising the new man counted on the idea of self perfection, but without connection to transcendental. Later on, during the XX century, the «new man» takes control over God, and discovers hate as socio-political technique. The absolute superior of the new man is the proclaimed charismatic leader, worshiped impostor, having the attributes of a supreme Pater of the masses, taking place of the deposed God.”¹⁶

The Marxist-Leninist ideology preaches the worldly paradise in which the

¹² Glucksmann 1991, p. 35.

¹³ Cesereanu 2001, p. 184.

¹⁴ Cesereanu 1998, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

ideal inhabitant is the NEW MAN. It is a perverted paradise in which the price of being a new man equals the NON MAN as generally accepted.

“*Homo sovieticus* is not just the brainwashed inhabitant of the ideologic adapted paradise, but also the virtual torturer; he is no longer just a man, because being a man means having a moral sense and being a victim. When denunciation becomes existentialist, the worldly paradise becomes bloody.”¹⁷

Prison always follows the major ideology, associating a series of techniques to the idea that the “new man” is the man who doesn’t need any system of reference, doesn’t depend on any context. Circumstance is by definition, palpable. The human and humanity are independent abstractions by any palpable context. A real live person can not create and build outside that context. The communists understood a very important thing – the connection between the individual psychic and a contextual collective matrix – and here they attempted to create definite rupture, but the new man was made neither in Pitești, nor in Sighet – the prisons failed in manufacturing the “robot-man”.

The Romanian prisons successfully applied part of the re-education process of the political prisoners, the methods raging the absurd, from the humane point of view.

“The gulag – as human microcosm – is a reaction towards the absurd of the macrocosm that the communist society generates.”¹⁸

The towers of re-education at the Aiud prison

The re-education system in Romanian prisons took a variety of shades, among which there was the re-education system in Pitesti, an atrocious experiment based on self critics and the adhesion under the pressure of continuous torture; the re-education through labor, present in the labor colonies all throughout the country from the Danube Delta to the Apuseni Mountains and the Chinese re-education system (through persuasion) in Aiud. Nicolae Călinescu elaborated a “map” of the communist re-education system in Romania, dividing the human guinea-pig experiments into three categories:

1. The Pitești phenomena – 1949-1952 – testing human limits having as antecedents: Târgu Ocna Prison, Ocnele Mari and Târgșor.
2. Experiences to the limits, whose object was the metamorphosis of human guinea-pigs within a controlled environment. This stage took place in: Jilava, Gherla, Aiud, Periprava, Râmnicu Sărat, Miercurea-Ciuc.
3. The Aiud formula (1960-1964) where the slow methods are perfected, psychic shocks, the Chinese drop and mutations meant to alter the balance of the

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 62, 63.

¹⁸ Braga 1996, p. 5.

prisoners' psychic¹⁹.

The re-education in Aiud is quite different from the one in Pitesti, they renounced physical torture methods, to re-education and embraced less brutal means, nevertheless cynical, that took a more complex process based on physical and psychic "wearying out" of the victims.

The Aiud formula supposes a long process quantified in years, during which the inmates were brought back to the "school-child-like" status by: continuous isolation, hunger, cold, humiliations, unexpected tortures and the alternation of all these, all culminating with mass misinformation, in expectation of the "new education".

The extermination regimes practiced in prisons were based on permanent cellar isolation, during which the prisoner was tortured by the guards, subjected to hunger, cold, lack of medical assistance, which was – at best, formal – lack of information, newspapers, books, radio, writing paper, pencils, or especially mail exchanging with the family²⁰.

Accepting the re-education, was for the prisoner, equal to the normalization of his situation as a prisoner: more food, better living arrangements, liberation. The rejecting of this process brought extreme detention conditions. Another valence of the re-education aims at the moral side. The re-educated is suffering a moral death that will radically change previous perspectives. At its first step, the re-education process, well researched on details, focuses on the assault against the victim's identity, destroying the markers previously attained. This process supposes the support of several capital factors: isolation, hunger, cold, exhaustion by work, etc.

Isolation is one of the determinant factors in bringing the state of psychical manipulation on to the prisoners. "One of the cruelest and unbearable conditions from prison, created in order to perpetuate the suffering was isolation from society and family, that has perfected itself constantly. The fact that the prisoner is completely isolated from the outside of the prison's walls, is the hardest thing to bear."²¹ Due to this isolation, the prisoner loses in time the psychical markers that once made him a social being. The lack of these markers induces a state of depersonalization, derealization in an acute state of affective poverty. In the solitude a tomb-like silence of the Zarka²², time no longer had measures. No

¹⁹ Călinescu 1998, p. 26.

²⁰ Toma 1999, p. 182.

²¹ Marinescu 1996, p. 25, 209.

²² **Zarka** is the old part of the Penitentiary from Aiud city, build under the rule of Maria Theresia, the Empress of the Habsburg Empire (1740-1780). The harshest detention was in Zarka from the Aiud's Penitentiary; the living conditions were inhuman and destined to eliminate psichically the oponents of the communist regime. The accounts of those who were there depict the wet walls, the cold, the dark. It was used especially for the important politic prisoners and in the re-education process.

event ever came to rustle its way nothing ever happening, not having land marks you couldn't say that time passes. It was flowing. Endlessly flowing slowly ensuring the moral and physical rust upon the prisoners whose life was consumed slowly, slowly, up to the end here²³.

Isolation induces the intra-psychic ataxic syndrome, lack of psychic function coordination, both in the mind as in the daily chaotic manifestation. Man is a social being and isolation is an abnormal factor which distorted his ability to react, the person suffers a severe intra-psychic dissolution translated through serious behavioral and mind perturbations. Actions and attitudes that would normally be unimaginable, are now being dictated by instinct.

“Silence and waiting drive us insane. I am happy that I have a place under the prici²⁴ and I am out from the terror of sights. Semidarkness suits me.”²⁵

Detention is a distortion factor of the personality. Long term isolation leads to the loss of the fundamental ability to use the reality's coordinates for straight forward polarization that takes the subject out from the normal circuit of life, driving him towards failure. By isolation it was intended to “disturb the senses' level which supposes the induction of physiological and psychic anomalies by eluding the role of the sensitive stimuli”.

Isolation from any exterior influence leads in time to the loss of the reference programs that situate man in the world. Isolated and frightened, with his private security threatened, he suddenly wakes up with an empty conscious, impoverished, ready to accept from now on other reference criteria, ideas, norms of moral conduct, aside from any reason. “Short-circuiting the informational horizon supposes the interruption of the logical circuits from the nervous system.” Depriving of information leads to a ruin of the intellect and affective sides, and narrows the knowledge horizons. It also appears the subject's inability to model and remodel his psychic: behaviors, attitudes, creativity. “Negative psycho induction supposes being bombed with negative information of the subject and his environment. He ends up being ashamed of himself and blames his own environment.” Mind changes, reverses, and the moral and psychic integrity are permanently affected²⁶.

Right from the start political prisoners sought to counteract these factual states, mostly unconsciously, driven by the natural wish of human integration. “Even from the beginning when these isolation restrictions were established, the prisoners found a way to break this blockage, starting communication through the walls with the help of different systems, eventually using the Morse code,

²³ Ioanid 1999, p. 474.

²⁴ **Prici** – a rudimentary bed, especially a bed made from boards for a large number of persons, used as common bedrooms; it comes from the Germ. *Pritsche*.

²⁵ Călinescu 1998, p. 104.

²⁶ Ioniță 2000, p. 149-157.

encoded.”²⁷ These communications created a human micro community where the limited contacts morally supported the prisoners, preserving their psychic structures. “They knew everything that took place in the country. Where from I do not know ... it surprised us many times. They used the Morse code through the heaters, and they were in touch with each other and they knew ... you are from there, this one is from there, this is a priest, this is an engineer ... despite all security ... They tapped Morse into the pipes. Due to this, the political police had its headquarters in the heating station and recorded everything. They were being monitored from all points of view.”²⁸

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Other major factors in the physical and psychical degradation process of the political prisoners were cold and hunger, madly intensified in the carceral environment. “If cold was easily tricked, hunger was undefeated, the only exception was a huge ego and will effort, mainly because hunger was an instrument specialized in dehumanization. Hunger in detention differs from hunger in freedom; as the second one is normal, the first is a terrorizing organic suffering, leading to screams, as if an open wound.”²⁹

The big prisons in totalitarian Romania undertook periods of extreme hunger. The Aiud prison had several periods when detention conditions were altered by hunger. “In 1946-1947, when hunger overtook Moldavia, an opportunity rose to Soviet agents Pantiuşa, Bodnăraş, Nicolski, Teohari, Georgescu, to expand it to Aiud, where a large number of prisoners died.”³⁰ During this period (1951-1952), a harsh starvation regime dominated Aiud. People ended up being live skeletons that would, one at a time, enter the last phase of dystrophy, where edema and cachexia appeared and the tissues would swell by not eliminating water. It was the final consequence of starvation. On a daily bases there were five-six deaths, and it went on for months. Salvation seemed impossible and desperation reached its peaks³¹.

The lack of food had major effects on morality, which surrenders in front of the devastating effects of starvation. A struggle appears between body and reason, and where almost each time preservation instinct regarding the body wins. “The destructive influence of constant starvation upon the subject’s will is deeper than any hunger strike, even when it ends in forced alimentionation. The brain of the

²⁷ Marinescu 1996, p. 211.

²⁸ Interview with T.I.A. **T.I.A.** – noncommissioned officer at the Aiud Penitentiary during 1962-1977. Knows all the sections of the prison, especially “Zarka” and “Celularul”. Nowadays he is retired.

²⁹ Cesereanu 1998, p. 138.

³⁰ Marinescu 1996, p. 117.

³¹ Ioanid 1999, p. 126.

person on strike is not yet shattered, it still has strength, and the spirit can still command the body.”³² Degradation of the body brings degradation of the mind. Total or temporary loss of reason are common facts in the prison from Aiud. The communists weakened the body in order to obtain control over the mind because “physical and psychic torture make a two headed body”³³. The reserves are lost to starvation and represent, as seen by the prisoners, “a step back”.

By starvation you would get to a long process of physic and psychic degradation. Some would loose all reason and fear of death when faced with the same pails of junk, because the preservation instinct dominates. Governed by hunger and the fear of death, they suffered an interior fall down to the lowest stage and lent themselves to breakdowns and decadence³⁴. Prolonged starvation was dictated both by conditions in the country and the management of the prison.

“They would have, for a room, 125 gr. of bread, that was called “limbă”³⁵, and a 400 gr. cornbread. In the morning they had tea and marmalade, at lunch two dishes: soup and that ... with pickles (weak), the ones working, had 450 gr. of bread and cornbread and food.”³⁶

The rules of the militarized prison demanded an accurate preservation of the leaders’ claims. “We had to give them only what they were entitled to. Not even a gram more”³⁷.

Another policy regarding food in Aiud prison used food shocks that weakened the prisoners’ ability to resist and prepared them for re-education. “The calculated food shocks obviously had a negative impact on our organisms and especially on the liver. I think that all those alternated changes, a «cold one» and a «warm one» were nothing but well calculated psychological shocks, meant to strike at the resistance of the political prisoners. The effects came up when the re-education after 1960 started to function in Aiud. Most of the ones imprisoned for many years, with big convictions, who experienced such shocks of alternative treatment did not have anymore psychic resistance to endure and surrendered.”³⁸ Food shocks rise in number during re-education by the reduction of the time given to each phase. “We were surprised that they gave us new potatoes, the pails full of food. We said «darn’ ... they’re not killing us». That was in ’61. Then ... winter came ... bad food. In ’62, in spring, it started to be good again.

³² Şalamov 1987, p. 182.

³³ Cesereanu 2001, p. 61.

³⁴ Marinescu 1996, p. 101, 102.

³⁵ **Limba** – *tongue* en. In fact it was a slice of bread of very small dimensions.

³⁶ Interview with T.I.A.

³⁷ Interview with Ioan Kis. **Kis, Ioan** – prison guard during 1961-1964, takes part in the re-education system from the Aiud Penitentiary. Couldn’t take the pressure and renounced when his contract expired.

³⁸ Marinescu 1996, p. 160, 164.

Meaning that it was enough meat, the marmalade was smaller, but three times more (than before). In Aiud I saw people going insane of starvation”³⁹.

The mind of a body that’s tormented by starvation has only one preoccupation – food. This way it was avoided that the prisoners mentally create a structure, resistant to re-education. “Step by step the organism consumed its reserves, a terrible hunger conquered your body, and this physiological demand takes after it a psychological hunger being overwhelmed by this sensation.”⁴⁰ “The starvation of the prisoners, their humiliation and their reduction to simple starved animals was what was going on in prisons and it was all based on a scientific plan.”⁴¹

The psychological effects of starvation were only visible in the behavior of some persons who denied their life long believes for a crumb of bread. Famine would destroy any remains of human dignity and made “a former minister declare that «there is no God» to be able to «lick the pail» and have four-five spoons of gruel to put an end to his hunger.”⁴²

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“Through work to liberation !” was a slogan loved by the communist regime. Punishment through work had devastating results among prisoners due to their extreme exhaustion. The working schedule varied in time: in 1948-1960 in the factory, from the Aiud prison a shift was twelve hours, in 1960-1964 the prisoners were offered a sample of normality – the eight hour shift. “Only when we got to Aiud, in October ’51, did we know labor as a political prisoner.”⁴³

If the regime considered labor as a way to “correct” the evil elements, reality, meaning the lack of payment for these works leads us to the profitability of these slaves’ work for the regime. “We would work forced, hit, cursed, insulted, under inhuman working conditions to pay our oppressors, their salaries, clothes, all the rights they would receive, their bonuses, plus the M.A.I.’s expenses for us, that made us now prisoners in our own country. Forced labor in the Romanian communism was a way of life.”⁴⁴

Communism authorized a confusion between punishment and cure, this quasi-identity of the gesture that punishes those who heal. “If labor is the very essence of man, forcing to labor means turning each to humanity. Is forced labor man’s reconciliation with man?”⁴⁵

³⁹ Interview with Ioan Lupu.

⁴⁰ Diaconescu 1998, p. 70.

⁴¹ Marinescu 1996, p. 159.

⁴² Lățeș 1993, p. 119-120.

⁴³ Marinescu 1996, p. 235.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 243, 244.

⁴⁵ Glucksmann 1991, p. 101.

The work regime implied advantages on both sides except for the economic ones, for the prisoners. The prisoners, despite their physical incapacities chose to work for two reasons: the right to a packet and letter and the opportunity to escape the monotony of their cell. “When they came out to politics’ work, they gave them the right to packets, mail and were taken to the working point. At Ciurbrud we had a brigade of sixty politicians. They worked, they were fair ... they didn’t get paid.”⁴⁶ “After we got out to the factory, in ‘62, we all got the right to a packet and at lunch we got two dishes. At noon we were full. I ... was full⁴⁷. They would work and receive two dishes: soup and second course. More than those who didn’t work.”⁴⁸

The dimensions of the factory’s workshops in Aiud were quite impressive. “There were over eight thousands prisoners. Some worked in the factory, others were in the cells⁴⁹. There would work 400-600, depending on how they needed.”⁵⁰ The working schedule after 1960 gave prisoners the normality that the regime wanted to give under the circumstances of an honest self-re-education. “In the factory there was work on three shifts⁵¹. At half past six in the morning they would go into the factory, at seven I would ring, they would take position, I would count them and they would go to work again until two when they came out to eat ... and others came.”⁵² Although in the prison’s factory existed “only politicians” there is a matter that demonstrates that the selection of those who would work is not made at random. “*The heads* didn’t work. They were at Zarka.”⁵³ The prison’s administration wanted to make a group re-education without supplying the affective pillars that might establish connections between them. “This is what they wanted: physical and moral defeat. I now remember the writings on the walls from the factory in Aiud. In the beginning you could read everywhere «through work to liberation». After a while it became something else «through work to re-education». Those who eventually survived had to re-educate themselves vanishing as a person with their own will.”⁵⁴

Assuming these factors: starvation, cold, forced labor, isolation, continuous humiliations, promiscuity, the behavior of the guardians was actually hell. “The archetype-like map of the Gulag is the descend ad infernos. But this inferno has other levels, there is a «gentle inferno, a first circle» where freedom maintains a

⁴⁶ Interview with T.I.A.

⁴⁷ Interview with Petre Lupu. **Lupu, Petre** – arrested in the “Garda Albă” lawsuit. He was imprisoned in Jilava, Gherla, Aiud. He is also an opponent of the re-education system in Aiud.

⁴⁸ Interview with Ioan Kis.

⁴⁹ Interview with T.I.A.

⁵⁰ Interview with Ioan Kis.

⁵¹ Interview with T.I.A.

⁵² Interview with Ioan Kis.

⁵³ Interview with T.I.A.

⁵⁴ Stănescu 1999, p. 18.

relative appearance; then progressive «circles» (more likely regressive), where Lucifer reigns, the never ending evil, the last circle.”⁵⁵

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An important factor in the re-education process and in its first stages were the guardians. They are the ones who apply the rules of the prison administration turning the lives of the prisoners into nightmares. They represent a major feature in the process. The guards were carefully selected from the needy part of the population with “clean” descendents. “When I was hired, I was wearing clean clothes and I was told «you shouldn’t really be here. Here we need poor men». They didn’t hire you unless you belonged to U.T.C.⁵⁶, or were a party member and had a minimum of seven classes. Characterizations were made according to any parents or relatives attending the legionary movement.”⁵⁷ After being hired “the employees” were subjected to training regarding the interior order that mentioned their future behavior towards the prisoners, according to the regime. “When I got the job I was told to be very strict, severe, not to have any relations with them, otherwise I would be imprisoned too.”⁵⁸ In order to ensure the obedience to the rules and regulations among the non commissioned officers hired by the prisons there were also spies, from the security, passing as non commissioned officers. “Among us there were twelve non commissioned officers as first sergeant. These were all security officers and worked on sections like us. They were employees. They had the mission to observe how the employees and prisoners react. It was a double security ... both for the prisoners and for the employees. The employees on how they behave with the prisoners and if they respected the interior rules.”⁵⁹

The guards’ attitude was carefully quantified by the prison’s administration, any deviation would be severely punished, up to incarceration. “You were not allowed ... we were more scared than the prisoners. Guardians were condemned for deviating from the rules. They got in touch with the prisoners’ families ... mail. Should you want your daily bread, you must follow the rules. The secret ... comes first. You didn’t spoke outside, or inside with the prisoners ... just the strictly imposed elements⁶⁰. I had to do my job disregarding my feelings, or else I would end up in jail. There were guards who ended up in jail ... I don’t know what he did, because they stripped him and dressed him up as a prisoner.”⁶¹ The

⁵⁵ Cesereanu 1998, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Young Communists’ Organization

⁵⁷ Interview with T.I.A.

⁵⁸ Interview with Ioan Kis.

⁵⁹ Interview with T.I.A.

⁶⁰ Interview with T.I.A.

⁶¹ Interview with Ioan Kis.

guards who didn't do their job by the imposed limits were discharged, because the success of re-education depended on them too. "Most of the «normal» guardians were sanctioned when brutality and torture was not applied in evil rage. There was therefore a terror of the guards, easy to comprehend for a system governed by repression that was meant to induce panic on both sides of the wall; there have been cases of torturers becoming tortured due to their structural inability to torture."⁶² Some guards failed under the circumstances and gave up. "I didn't like it. They wanted you to treat them ... it didn't suit me that, according to the rules, I had to beat them. When I had three years of service I no longer wanted to stay⁶³. It was worse for us than for them. You couldn't do anything, you were in, you had to obey the rules."⁶⁴

Taking into account these realities, eluding the beastly side of human being we can explain the rarity of good-natured guardians cases found in prisons and the multitude acts of savageness committed by them. "In the communist regime the good can be accomplished only by accident not directly, not directly and illegal, better said with no principles. (Between the idea of communism and good there is a discrepancy of principle n. a.)"⁶⁵ "I was protecting myself ... or I was loosing my job. They were suspicious with one other. They used to tell on each other and especially us. They caused us many problems."⁶⁶

The harshness of detention conditions increased by the guardians was a very well calculated act of superior forum which wished the social reintegration of these "pariah", but with one condition: to manifest their devotion towards the regime. "The detention conditions in which we lived up to 1964 were not human and the treatment of the guardians was, in certain periods, wild⁶⁷. The guardians were part of the re-education process⁶⁸. The detention conditions generally speaking were not the consequence of a challenge from the prisoners, but it was planned by someone from the top because of a political doctrine or of a reflex of the international tension."⁶⁹

Once exhausted the physical methods for the "exoneration" of political prisoners, the regime took into consideration the psychic involvements of detention

⁶² Cesereanu 1998, p. 12.

⁶³ Interview with Ioan Kis.

⁶⁴ Interview with T.I.A.

⁶⁵ Steinhardt 1990, p. 228.

⁶⁶ Interview with T.I.A.

⁶⁷ Interview with T.I.A.

⁶⁸ Interview with Aurel Popa. **Popa, Aurel** – arrested in 1948 for legionary activity, follows most of the communist concentrations system. He is a the victim of re-education in Pitesti and a high opponent of the re-education in Aiud. Released from jail in 1964, despite having graduated The University of Bucharest, Law School, has worked as a carpenter until retired. Nowadays he lives in Decea, Alba County.

⁶⁹ Diaconescu 1998, p. 67.

and the possibility of “re-educating the vicious elements” from prisons. “Re-education appears initially from some kind of Platonic penalty”; not the body must be punished, as it is anyway degraded, but the soul, the single tempting material and worthy of recuperation. Re-education assumed more stages: the assault on the victim’s identity, the forcing of guilt complex, the self betrayal of the victim; the founding of back-off point and the fear of being completely annihilated; the seemingly taming of harassment for making the victim give up; the constraint of the self-critic confession; the ordering of the victim’s guilt; the dishonor of the victim whom is proved to be not what one considered to be; the adaptation of the victim to his situation; the final confession; the renewal and the identification with the aggressor; the liberation of the re-educated victim⁷⁰.

This re-education was regarded by the prisoners as a moral death with profound consequences upon the human qualities. The fear of moral death was equal sometimes increased, with physical death. “Either it was named *brainwashing* or the *thinking reform* this assumed a form of «death» and then of «Resurrection» of the victim through confession. «The Resurrection» could not take place only after the confession stage and detailed analysis of the «sins». The life’s exam, which the victim was forced to take, was close to some kind of revision before «death», but after that the victim had the right to «come back to life». But, the truth is, that giving up his own ex self which the victim reconvered he was psychically really «dying».”⁷¹

In the Aiud prison, there were two periods of re-education; a first try failed in the spring of 1952 and the mammoth process from 1960-1964. The period between 1960-1964 is interesting because of the re-education process initiated as last elimination of noncommunist Romanian leaders. In this “crazy race” between re-educators and subjects, an important part was the personality of the victims and their capacity of resisting the periods of the re-educative process. “The victims’ personality is decisive: there were strong characters who accepted, although, a minimum of collaboration, as there were hypocrites and exhibitionists who repented during – a show-, even if this was false. There were, then, the stubborn ones, who refused re-education, but there were re-educated from the beginning, too.”⁷²

Re-education began through showing the prisoners the advantages of accepting the adhesion towards the system: normalization of detention conditions (acceptable food, elimination of the punishments, outdoor activities, the right of having contact with their families and so on), liberation, the integration in the society. For this, the entire penitentiary was involved in this activity. “We were claimed to wear ties, to be clean, to show them how well we are and show them

⁷⁰ Cesereanu 2001, p. 63, 142.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 58-59.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 180.

hygiene. We had to demonstrate themselves that under the regime there is culture, there is ... everything.”⁷³ In parallel with this humanization of the repressive system, an important part has “the clubs”, immense spaces where the present subjects were spoken about the *humanitarian* intentions of the regime in what they are concerned, they were permitted to read, they were asked to make themselves their self-criticism and declare their adhesion towards the regime. “Towards autumn, Major Olteț, was walking from one cell to another, inviting the prisoners to go in to *the reading room* for reading.”⁷⁴ The readings from these *reading rooms* were carefully chosen for creating a favorable impression of the communist society. “We were introduced in a large room, which was called «club». Colonel Crăciun (the coordinator of the re-education process) gave a speech from the tribune and told us about the «humanism» of the communist regime whose «obsession» was only the «good» of the political prisoners. After he finished his speech, he invited the prisoners to speak and «introspect themselves».”⁷⁵

The leaders of the meetings were carefully chosen from the security officers, teachers, representatives of the party, newsagents and delegates of Trade Unions. “There were officers that were dealing only with re-education. There were employees and civils. There was a very strict matter. There were also teacher-officers who were dealing with re-education. They were taking them to the club and they were told (...) I can not tell everything what was said there. The heads were taken (the important political prisoners n.n.) and at Section V (of the prison n. n.) there was described the whole history of their actions, all the documents. We were not allowed to enter there.”⁷⁶ The “invited” re-educators gave speeches in which the prisoners were shown that there is no use wasting their life in prison, when there was a party helping them. “There were often coming all kind of important representatives to see us from the party and the government, newsmen, delegates of the Union Traders etc., who generally did with us political explanatory work.”⁷⁷ “They were talking to the prisoners, who were starving and suffering, like this: the party and the government taking into account their care upon human being, thought of doing yourself a favor. For you to have fresh air, enjoy the Sun, have much more freedom, have better food.”⁷⁸ The re-education meetings were opened, normally, by the prison’s commander, colonel Crăciun. He launches a program giving a speech in which he shows the prisoners that he keeps the balance of their possible normal life in his hands. The

⁷³ Interview with T.I.A.

⁷⁴ Andreica 2000, p. 169.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 182.

⁷⁶ Interview with T.I.A.

⁷⁷ Diaconescu 1998, p. 64.

⁷⁸ Andreica 2000, p. 168.

acceptance of re-education meant normality, life: the refusal meant continuing of their life in detention as “it is written in the book” for sure the “book” dictated by the soviet Gulag. “The director Crăciun began to give a speech to us ... The subject was the popularization of great achievements of the communist regime. He told us about all the built fabrics, about all the made modernization, about highways, seaside, dwellings. After he spoke about all this, he said: here is Ion Moța’s will, left to your captain Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: «build this country, Codrene, make it be as beautiful as the Sun in the sky !», this was made by us, the communists not by you, the legionaries. These things are to be analyzed from no one here, but you. Now I want to know who agrees, and who disagrees with what I’ve said! Who agrees, shall stay where he is ! Who is against, step behind ! I draw your attention, from the beginning, that those who disagree with what I said will have a regime according to the rule, good food, proper clothing, silence etc. Those who agree will have all our good will. They will have books for reading. They will have fresh air. They will be taken out. They will receive letters and finally will be set free.”⁷⁹

This “enticement” of some people brutalized by inhuman conditions of detention denotes an extreme cynicism. Promises do not leave a shred of doubt: who is like us will survive, refusal equalizing death. “Bearing the new persuasions in mind you will be set free for sure.”⁸⁰ The adoption of “the new persuasions” was the sine qua non condition of liberation.

The administration of prison obtains an important trump through the participation of certain prisoners to this process as re-educators. “The priest Anania Valeriu rose from the crowd and climbed to the tribune. He took the newspaper from the commander’s hand and read the newspaper. (...) We all left. The priest Anania Valeriu remained at the tribune. He was taken out of the Zarka and many years after that we found out about himself that he is a lector to a re-education «club»⁸¹. A part gave up at the promises of re-education held by the re-educated theologian Valeriu Anania, with his oratorical talent.”⁸²

The prisoners were asked to give up their beliefs and ideals for which, actually, they suffered long periods of detention. The prisoners had to choose between “the easy way”, which assumed an immense abnegation of ideals in favor of conservation as human beings and “the hard way” which assumed an immense effort of will in the refusal of obtaining human life conditions. The reasons of choosing re-education (even insincere) are many but not difficult to understand and accept. “They were not reticent to re-education. They were waiting ... they knew they had to liberate themselves and their situation will

⁷⁹ Andreica 2000, p. 171, 172.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 185.

⁸² Marinescu 1996, p. 280

change⁸³. They were talking to escape, to get rid of.”⁸⁴ The naturally desire felt for freedom, even only physical, will determine the most of them to accept re-education. These, during the re-education sessions, were “persuaded” in what they said, in reality wanting to get rid of the prison’s hell. “Most of them were self criticising. Many were regretting ... I want to believe that they were sincere, but suffering so many years, there were probably great...great punishments only thinking of liberty⁸⁵. I could not resist this regime anymore. To hell with all these scoundrels. I am in their hands. I consider it as my duty to do all the best for rescuing me. I am decided to howl like wolves until I get rid of the gang⁸⁶. The administration considered that it recorded a success through the majority accepting the re-education “dozens passed aside, refusing «re-education», hundreds stayed still, accepting those said by the prison’s commander”⁸⁷. And one by one accomplished all the promises. So “those who were «better» (re-educated n. n.) were allowed to go home⁸⁸. Much more serious was the situation of those who refused re-education although many were not in a physical condition which permitted them to continue their detention “quite as it should be”. “I realized that not all of us, who refused re-education could resist till the end of the cruel regime of extermination of Zarka. Indeed, so it was.”⁸⁹ The moral force of those who refused re-education was undermined by the physical and psychic weakness caused by the prison’s regime. “There were cases when there was a strong refusal. They were left to Zarka ... the food was poorer ... the cold. There were some of them who gave up, but most of them resisted. The harsh regime was a form of forcing them to re-educate⁹⁰. If I did not accept anymore to participate to the club and re-education meetings, they would throw me to Zarka, where I stayed for one more year in extreme difficult conditions. And hunger, and cold, and ... misery. You were not tortured anymore, but there was no more food, you were kept in cold ... In summer you had to wear warm trousers and in autumn they took them from you and said that it has passed ... And you were given shorts for winter. And so I survived one year.”⁹¹

The capacity of resistance to the unfair conditions created by the administration was increased by the moral and material sustain (food, especially) given by those who accepted re-education and who were not condemned by anyone for what they did. “The colleagues, who could not resist, helped us as

⁸³ Interview with T.I.A.

⁸⁴ Interview with Ioan Kis.

⁸⁵ Interview with T.I.A.

⁸⁶ Andreica 2000, p. 183.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 173.

⁸⁸ Interview with Ioan Kis.

⁸⁹ Andreica 2000, p. 205.

⁹⁰ Interview with T.I.A.

⁹¹ Interview with Aurel Popa.

they could, to resist for them, too.”⁹² The delay of this moral resistance made it difficult for the prison’s administration which was close not to achieve “the plan”. There was a timed race and the administration of the prison won the second prize. “I noticed that they were in a hurry. Seeing the colonel’s face expression and his different gestures, we realized that he knows our liberation’s date. That’s why he insisted. He wanted to see us insulted before we were set free.”⁹³

To succeed defeating this moral resistance, the administration of the prison resorted to psychic stimuli. Those who refused are bombed every day on certainties; those re-educated leave for home. “We were taken out to see and persuade ourselves that they are set free”⁹⁴. Another “certainty” that was used to persuade the resistant ones was also the promise that they were left in prison. Because you are not adapted to the new social conditions created by the communist regime, you will remain in prison.”⁹⁵ The resistant opposition especially manifests during the re-education meetings where they refused to deny their past, not even formal, “that who asked has no value anyway, Sir ! Yes, but the testimony has value ! I didn’t want to say, that it was no truth. I say the truth. He is in comand (Horia Sima n. n.). He is your commander and now you say he is a country traitor? I didn’t even think about it !”⁹⁶ “Sir, I do not write this, even if I die here, in Aiud ! No man from Hunedoara ever wrote that we are guilty and we admit our guilt. No ! I did not do anythin g! No ... no ... we are not guilty. And they will set us free eventually !”⁹⁷ Finally the one which gives up is the prison’s administration. This appeals to the prisoners who refused re-education to formal doing of *mea culpa*, so that this can declare “the plan” achieved. “Sirs, I do not understand why you disagree? Let’s say it straight! Is there anyone who knows your soul? Can anyone check what you think? We are not interested in what you are thinking. We want you to say what we say but you can think what you want.”⁹⁸ The resistance of the prisoners up to the end was dictated exclusively by moral reasons. For these. Assuming his own morality the refusal of denying his own I, counted more than physical rescue. “This was the price of dignity. So I found out that there are things more important than life that deserves to risk it for defending your soul.”⁹⁹ This last major shot of political detention in the prisons of communist Romania ends with the general amnesty from 1964. “In April «a decree» was proclaimed. They were all set free. There remained ... I do not know exactly ... but not very many. They remained at Zarka,

⁹² Andreica 2000, p. 207.

□ *Ibidem*, p. 208.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 209.

⁹⁶ Interview with Aurel Popa.

⁹⁷ Interview with Ioan Lupu.

⁹⁸ Andreica 2000, p. 183.

⁹⁹ Interview with Simion Drăgoi. **Simion Drăgoi** – former political prisoner.

and they were transferred. There was no more political prisoner to Aiud.”¹⁰⁰

This chapter of re-education ended the destruction process of the Romanian elite even if this process took place under the sign of a relative relaxation. The way which re-education developed in Aiud prison, proves that the system wanted to end the punitive terror period, this thing being proved by the precipitation and the relative superficiality which they appealed to. On the other hand, the regime wanted to show that it needn't punitive force and its “great” accomplishments being an invincible argument. The re-education model from Aiud was experimented in U.R.S.S. and successfully applied on national scale in China. The echoes of this process were propagated in the entire communist world, in Romania reaching the top in the communist prison of Aiud between 1960-1964. The regime could not entirely destroy the opposition, inoculating incompatible guide marks with its moral formation of this and inducing them a behavior according with “the party's line”. The dimensions of this process, the great crowd of people subjected to re-education are very plastic expressed by a witness: But who wasn't in the prison of Aiud those years?

MARIUS CRISTEA, CRISTINA DRÂMBĂREANU

**PROCESUL DE REEDUCARE ÎN UNIVERSUL CONCENTRAȚIONAR COMUNIST.
METODA “AIUD”**

REZUMAT

În peisajul foarte complex al existenței regimurilor totalitare un aspect cu valoare statutară este procesul de reeducare. A reeduca în cadrul unor sisteme nedemocratice înseamnă a inocula forțat informații, credințe, atitudini conforme cu linia politică, socială, morală adoptată de partidul atotstăpânitor. Reeducarea persoanelor indezirabile este un proces complex în care nu lipsesc accentele de moralitate a momentului. Considerând credința în democrație “religio illicita”, regimul comunist a căutat să-i reeduce pe oponenți, provocând “amnezia”, în urma căreia sinele devine străin, deținutul este izolat, indiferent, simplu spectator inactiv în drama vieții și a istoriei. Într-o fază incipientă, totalitarismul a proclamat necesitatea epurării societății de elementele care, într-o fază anterioară, au constituit nucleul politic, social, moral, precum și de marginali (infractori, prostituate, șomeri etc.), declarându-i responsabili de dezastrul țării, deoarece partidele extremiste au succes doar în momente de profundă instabilitate socială, morală, economică sau de identitate. Sistemul reeducării în închisorile românești a cunoscut o varietate de fațete, printre care se remarcă: reeducarea de la închisoarea Pitești, un experiment de o atrocitate deosebită, bazat pe autocritică și adeziune sub presiunea torturii continue; reeducarea prin muncă, prezentă în coloniile de muncă existente pe întreg teritoriul țării, din Delta Dunării în Munții Apuseni, și reeducarea de tip chinezesc (prin persuasiune) la Aiud. Reeducarea din închisoarea Aiud se diferențiază de experimentul Pitești prin renunțarea la metodele torturii fizice în scopul reeducării și prin trecerea

¹⁰⁰ Interview with T.I.A.

la metode mai puțin brutale dar nu mai puțin cinice, în care procesul era mai îndelungat, mizându-se pe erodarea fizică și psihică a victimelor. Acest capitol al reeducării a încheiat procesul de distrugere a elitei românești, chiar dacă el s-a desfășurat sub semnul unei relative destinderi. Modul în care a decurs reeducarea din închisoarea Aiud dovedește că sistemul dorea încheierea perioadei de teroare, acest fapt fiind dovedit cu prisosință de graba și relativa superficialitate la care s-a apelat. Pe de altă parte, regimul dorea să arate că nu mai avea nevoie de utilizarea forței, realizările sale “mărețe” fiind un argument imbatabil. Modelul reeducării din Aiud a fost experimentat în U.R.S.S. și aplicat cu succes la scară națională în China. Ecourile acestui proces s-au propagat în toată lumea comunistă, în România atingând apogeul în închisoarea Aiud în perioada 1960-1964. Regimul nu a reușit să distrugă total opoziția, inoculându-i puncte de reper incompatibile cu formația morală a acestora și inducându-i un comportament conform cu “linia partidului”.

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