

MIHAI MURARIU, *Totality, Charisma, Authority: The Origins and Transformations of Totalist Movements* (Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2017)

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A noteworthy illustration of the heuristic potential of interdisciplinarity in social sciences, the first book of Mihai Murariu (followed by a thematically related second one – *Radical Peripheries: Heterodoxy, Modernity, and Totality in Japan and Romania*, 2019) comes across as an ambitious endeavour, bringing together various fields of interest recurring in the author’s academic work, such as political and religious ideologies, utopian thought, radical extremist phenomena and the nature of modernity. Based on a doctoral dissertation defended in 2016 at the University of Münster, the book is a systematic analysis of *totalism* defined as an overarching system of thought, a dynamic, revolutionary and reconstructive worldview “claiming a monopoly on ideological truth” (p. 13) throughout human history. The analytical focus rests on the thorough examination of *totality*, opening a wide range of themes adjacent to or deriving from it, meticulously investigated and employed in an extensive case study of the Romanian Legion of the “Archangel Michael”. Within the operative framework of totalism, the book surveys “the archaeology of totality” by delving into utopian notions, eschatological scenarios, ideocratic orders, models of charismatic authority and temporal projections, religious and secular, cultural and psychological, all profoundly influential in the evolution of Western thought.

From the onset, a consistent historiographical segment provides a firm theoretical grounding, overviewing the convoluted course followed by the paradigmatic models of totalitarianism and political religion. Authors such as Gurian, Friedrich, Arendt, Aron, Talmon and Voegelin are approached in turn. Their epistemological assets and vulnerabilities are adequately highlighted, as the author compellingly traces the origins and permutations of totalism, conceptualized as an “all-encompassing belief system, marked by a clear division of the world, typically into categories associated with purity and truth” (p. 24). The idiosyncratic trajectory of totalist movements is mapped as a three-phase process, comprising *heterodoxy*, *hegemony* and *ideocracy*. Thus, Murariu charts a conceptual course beginning with the emergence of a totalist entity within a host society and culminating with the conquest of societal order, a development fueled by the articulation of a cohesive worldview, the pre-existence of a favourable cultural foundation and the transformative impact of the modern nexus. In this context, the Legion of the “Archangel Michael” becomes a representative case study, traced in its evolution from a “charismatic, totalist heterodoxy” to the “first genuinely popular mass-movement in modern Romanian politics” (p. 57).

The opening section of the analysis provides a theoretical exploration of totality by considering its “neurobiological imperative”, as per Wexler’s insights into the relationship between the human brain, ideological construction and the strive

towards social transformation. This broad segment unveils, within the intricate dynamics of totality and temporality, the essential function of religious monotheism, as well as the role of political utopianism, deemed as central to Western modernity, shifting totality from its religious framing to its secular hypostases. The notional significance of totalism is reinforced through a review of the rather scarce literature on the matter, describing the concept as constructed by the mutual impact of totality, truth and purity, whose historical symbioses have shaped either militantly extremist or apolitically quietist totalist movements, sharing a heterodox mindset. The ideocratic drive of totalism is further explored through the notion of *totalist ideocracy*, designating a polity where the transformation from heterodoxy to hegemony has been successfully fulfilled and ideology has become the ultimate source of legitimacy and order, channelled towards soteriological purposes (a theoretical direction referencing the theories of Roger Griffin in fascist studies). Useful nuances are highlighted in exploring the evolution of heterodox entities gaining hegemonic status and maturing into full-fledged ideocracies, not equivalent to totalitarianism, but prone to turning into it. The exposition continues with a heuristically valid typology of totalism, distinguishing between three ideal-types, namely *renovative*, *utopian* and *hybrid* systems, and evaluating their specific manifestations (hierarchical, collectivist, theocratic): renovative totalism focuses on the restoration of a past model (exemplified by certain strands of Islam), utopian totalism is a “future-centric” religious or political teleology (such as Bolshevism or Fascism), while the hybrid model merges the previous two, with renovative and utopian forces coexisting (as in the case of the Legion of the “Archangel Michael”).

The second analytical section approaches the intellectual origins of telos, temporality and totalism through an incursion into the far-reaching tradition of utopian thought. This synthesis of the protean dynamics of telos and temporality reconstructs several threads stemming from Christian apocalyptic thought, including the atemporal City of Man and City of God designed by Augustine, the Byzantine catechon, the theological eschaton of Joachim of Fiore with its trinitarian temporality, the charismatic and chiliastic societal vision of Plethon, the renovative order envisioned by the Hussites during the Reformation, the theocratic millenarian project of a New Jerusalem enforced by John of Leyden during the Münster Anabaptist Revolt and the purifying bonfires of Florence in the times of Savonarola. Following this continuous eschatological surge, a significant decline was brought on with the onset of modernity, essentially indicating the triumph of political utopianism. The historical telos is shown to have gained novel permutations in the age of revolutionary nationalism, epitomized by the utopian dynamic of the French Revolution, which sought a totalistic moral order grounded in absolute truth, purity and transcendence, as essentialized in the ideocratic polity of the Republic. Hence the modern emergence of the conflicting ideals of “organic nationalism” versus “universal social brotherhood,” as well as the structuring of new thought systems:

Comte's "hybrid of science and belief," Hegel's philosophy of the State as fulfilment of the human condition, and the encompassing historical materialism formulated by Marx, acknowledged by his followers as an *epistemarch*, the "bearer of the ultimate truth of history."

The third theoretical segment, addressing the transformation of totalism as it organically morphs from heterodoxy into ideocracy, begins with an examination of charisma, namely the nature and functions of charismatic authority and the typology of charismatic leadership, drawing from the theoretical input of Rudolf Sohm and Max Weber. On these sociological foundations, the charismatic prophet is defined as a revolutionary agent opposing established authority and relying on the continuation of stable traditional structures. A charismatic spectrum of functionality is drawn between stabilization and revolution, with ideal-typical charisma recognized as "the crucial drive in the emergence of totalist heterodoxies" (p. 175). Further on, the analysis tackles the function of charismatic authority in the development of totalist movements from heterodoxies towards hegemonic power, charisma forcefully emerging in the turmoil of exceptional social expectations, strained relationships between centre and periphery, the reinforcement of group unity and the refinement of the mechanics of exclusion. The core notion of purity comes to the forefront as an integral "pillar of totalism," dependent on the imperative instauration of a pure order, the sought destruction of impure components and the ideological fear of contagion. These notions are pieced together into the *forma mentis* of the self-defined ideocratic community, imposing an uncompromising demarcation between the totalist collective and the excluded Other, constructed as spiritually, politically, socially, morally or biologically impure, hence inferior and prone to elimination. As the focus shifts towards the concept of truth, this fundamental philosophical notion receives the same treatment in the dynamic of totalism from heterodoxy to hegemony, culminating into an ideocratic system. A perennial historical connection is identified between truth, territory and power, beginning as early as Antiquity, with particular attention devoted to the symbolic meanings of spatiality. The "cosmological representation of truth" (p. 206) is followed through time until the advent of modernity, the totalist monopoly evolving from premodern religious stances into the secular, yet equally absolutist hypostasis of the charismatic epistemarch. A thorough representation of the relationship between spatiality and ideological hegemony ensues, with particular focus on modern ideocratic polities, exploring three projections of space: as territorialization of power, as temporal embodiment of "recreated pasts and desired futures," and as concentration of identity symbols. The issue of "systemic apotheosis," namely the stage of ideocratic zenith, is then approached in structural terms, from the totalistic claim of absolute legitimacy to the imposition of complete dominion, from mass cohesion mechanisms to performative charismatic rituals, leading to the ideal of martial sacrifice and

allowing the full instatement of a mature ideocratic order, expressed institutionally and constitutionally.

Within the fourth part of the book, concerning the specificities of hybrid totalism, Murariu observantly approaches the Legion of the “Archangel Michael” through the established theoretical framework as a “rough balance” between renovative and utopian ideals. The examination draws heavily upon canonical sources of the movement, especially the foundational texts of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and Ion I. Moța, weaving together all previously discussed concepts into an extensively documented case study. After a brief historiographical excursus, the proper analysis emphasizes the significance of totality in the creation and development of Romanian fascism, a notion insufficiently researched so far. A proper contextualization focuses on the traditional models of authority in the Romanian context: the influence of the Byzantine model, interferences between secular and religious spheres, the pervasive influence of the Orthodox Church, intestine clashes for the thrones of the Principalities fuelling a climate of political disorder and the perpetual influence of regional powers (especially Ottoman rule), their concatenation moulding the image of the autocrat, as well as the representations of the outsider. The profound transformations brought on by *fin-de-siècle* modernity were viscerally felt throughout Romania in the interwar era, in a political community for which, as Murariu compellingly highlights, the “contractual state” lost significant ground to the “organic state” (p. 246). To that extent, the great cultural debate on national identity is broadly covered, paying attention to the ideological construction of foreignness, corelated with the depiction of severe decadence. An in-depth analysis of the worldview of Codreanu is then sketched, tracing his self-perception as the spiritual and political savior of the nation, growing from the status of a “minor figure in the nationalist landscape” to that of an “absolute leader of a totalist heterodoxy” (p. 253), deeply hostile to the existing system, in a typical antinomy opposing nationalist heterodoxy to the impure state. A valuable, albeit exotic analytical excursus from the standpoint of generic radicalism connects, in a wide geographical arc, the ideals of Romanian fascism to Imperial Japan, with compelling similitudes spotted between the two spaces in their specific strains of modernization and Westernization, their impactful nativist anti-establishment movements and the nomic crises surrounding the emergence of their respective totalist systems. Returning to the Legion of the “Archangel Michael”, the function of totalism in its making is noticed in various plains: the symbolic power of the Archangel, acknowledged as a figure of both transcendence and imminence; the motif of the imperative cleansing of Romanian society internalized as a fundamental mission; the consistent influence of Orthodox mysticism as a canopy for the totalist worldview; the notion of unjust persecution and necessary reactivity to it etc. These pieces of the totalist puzzle turned Codreanu, through the recognition of his peers, into a charismatic epistemarch, above and beyond ordinary men, providing definitive

solutions to a nomic crisis, stirring a nationalistic and religious fever and energetically embodying collective hopes.

Thus, the historical trajectory of the Legion of the “Archangel Michael” appears to be essentially dictated by its founding figure, as the movement viciously confronted the state, inaugurated a hitherto unprecedented reign of violence in Romanian politics and society and attempted to construct “an emerging ideocracy [that] rested on the death cults of its former leaders” (p. 288). Subsequently, the epitome of Romanian fascism is defined as a hybrid totalist type founded on three tenets: the theoretical perception of totality within the movement (as espoused in the work of Moța); the “renovative totalism” pursuing the bygone purity of an idealized past and denouncing a profoundly impure present of moral disorder and corruption; ultimately, the call for the resurrection of a purified, virtuous national community, a “final, exalted state” of communal transfiguration directed towards the creation of a new human type, the Romanian version of the fascist “New Man”. Following this line of argument to its conclusion, the Legion of the “Archangel Michael” is placed on the totalist spectrum, initially as a minor heterodoxy, later ascending to the status of the first mass movement in the history of Romania, “its first totalist, ideocratic experiment” (p. 306). This path successively undergoes several stages: the heterodox beginning in which the charismatic core was gradually built around Codreanu; the transition towards hegemony, implying the expansion of the Legion from a regional movement to mass following; the soteriological principles assimilated as building blocks for the novel nation; the renovative totality aiming at the establishment of an ideocracy grounded in a renewed Romanianism; the utopian totality striving for the anthropological revolution and the transfiguration of the purified nation; the totalist ideocracy briefly illustrated through the “emerging ideocratic experiment” of the National Legionary State; finally, the systemic apotheosis culminating in the death cults rising as pillars of the Legionary rule.

As the extensive analysis comes to its conclusion, the historical roles of totality are reiterated in hindsight, with the “archaeology of totalism” deemed all the more relevant in an increasingly polarized contemporary environment. To that extent, a cautionary example is evoked in the epilogue, dealing with the matter of totality and relativism: ISIS, a proximal and visible recent permutation of totalism. Current radical convulsions, the author suggests, insert totalism as an integral part of the structural project of modernity, as well as a fundamentally necessary paradigmatic shift meant to replace “models which are, for all practical purposes, no longer politically or historically relevant – such as Fascism, National Socialism, and Communism” (p. 317), a prediction as disturbingly dark as it is historically plausible.

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