IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE. A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS ON THE IDEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE TRANSITION IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The following theoretical essay has two main objectives: the discussion of the theoretical and methodological importance of the concept of ideology for explaining social change and, the presentation of a brief analysis regarding the ideological processes of the political and social transition in Romania after the collapse of the Ceausescu regime as a practical study in using the ideological analysis in social theory.*

Keywords: ideology, social change, transition, ideological continuums, social cleavages.

The role of ideology in social explanation

The two main paradigms of social explanation

In science, explanation requires the formulation of hypotheses, the operationalization and measurement of concepts which represents objective phenomena that are independent from subjective interpretations and hence the measurement can be repeated and the results compared accordingly (Chelcea, 2004). In sociology, this paradigm was first implemented through the epistemological framework proposed by Emile Durkheim. The French sociologist considered social phenomena as "things" or "social facts" which are independent from subjective interpretations (Durkheim, 2002). Accordingly, social explanations will require the formulation of hypotheses with social facts and which will be tested through measurement and statistical analysis. In accordance with Durkheim's view, the individual or "collective" conscience (ideology) will not play any part in the sociological explanation being completely determined by the constraints imposed

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by the social facts, playing the role of "post-factum" rationalizations with little or no value for understanding social change (Zamfir, 1998).

Durkheim's methodological monism is limited by the structural complexity of society and social change. The German economist M. Weber considered that social phenomena has to be analyzed in their specific historical and sociological context (Weber, 2001). In Weber's epistemological framework, the durkheimian concept of the "social fact" is replaced by the concept of the "ideal type" which represents an abstract representation of social phenomena which are difficult to define precisely because they differ subtly depending on the social context in which they are analyzed. The ideal type permits the social scientist to measure and compare social phenomena with sufficient accuracy but in the same time requires the consideration of the influence of specific cultural elements for the theoretical model. The main difference between Weber's and Durkheim's position resides in the emphasis put by Weber on the interpretation of the significance of social action rather than on the manifestation as it is in Durkheim's paradigm.

The ideological nature of social concepts

Durkheim's monist view on sociology triumphed over Weber's more culturalist approach and thus the concept of ideology was largely ignored for the purpose of explaining social change. Ideology is measured and used in various hypotheses and theoretical frameworks but it isn't considered as a driving force behind social change, it is considered more, respecting the durkheimian point of view, as a rationalization with little value in revealing the "true" forces behind social change.

One of the most important epistemological problems in sociology resides in the nature of the social concepts, a problem that seemed solved by Durkheim's theory on social facts. Despite Durkheim's theoretical efforts we have to recognize that many sociological concepts are ideological in their nature or are heavily influenced by ideology.

I propose a brief analysis in this regard about one of the most studied concepts in social science: poverty. The measurement of poverty have a long standing tradition and is based on the establishment of a poverty line which can be done in several ways but there are basically two main versions of the poverty line: the "absolute" and the "relative" poverty line (Ravallion, 1992).

We have to determine if the measurement of the "poverty line" refers to a subjective (ideological) or an objective phenomenon. Can be considered poverty as an objective reality, independent from any subjective interpretations? If we analyze the different methods of determining the poverty line we observe that, in every situation, it is dependent, more or less, on the subjective position of a social group or it is the result of the negotiations between different social groups. Poverty cannot be defined simply as a difference between the welfare of different social groups. Consequently, defining the poverty line as a percent of the income or consumption median has little to do with the core significance of the concept. Poverty is not a politically neutral concept, of quantitative differences in welfare, but it engages socially and politically different groups which are trying, through

negotiations, to diminish the causes and consequences of poverty through social policies. So, poverty is mainly a political concept which is defined through a process of social and political negotiations between two main groups: the beneficiaries of social welfare policies and those who will finance them. In accord with the weberian paradigm, poverty must be considered in a specific cultural and political context to define it properly.

There are formulas in establishing the poverty line such as the "basic needs basket", which is considered as a somewhat "objective" method to determine the poverty line but this is just one of the many administrative formulas in determining the poverty line prone to the same influences of various political interests, sometimes sustained by biased academic analyses. Even the concept of absolute poverty, which is based on the idea that the individual has the right to the basic means for survival, is ideological in its nature as we know groups in history that considered poverty as a mean to determine the "natural" selection in society (Beaudoin, 2007).

I used this example regarding the concept of poverty to put an emphasis on the ideological nature of the concept and to underline that is impossible to study poverty without taking in consideration the ideological process which determines both the definition of the concept and the reality which we refer through the concept. Instead of saying that we measure poverty we should say that we measure the ideological concept of poverty which is the result of a particular ideological process.

What is ideology?

A brief historical review

The concept of ideology had a convoluted evolution in the last two centuries, beginning its career at the end of the XVIII century as a term depicting a "science of sciences", an idea proposed by a French philosopher under the name of Destutt de Tracy. Ideology was meant by its proponents to be the proper method of thinking (scientifically) which every science would have been subjected to (Head, 1985). In the midst of a conflict with the ideologues of the "L 'Academy of Moral and Political Sciences" which was a part of the "Institut de France", a crowning achievement of French enlightenment, Napoleon changed the meaning of the concept considering ideology as a form of metaphysics that distorts reality in favor of certain political interests (Barth, 1976).

The Napoleonian interpretation will remain dominant in the XIX century and was ultimately established by the German economist K. Marx who was a prominent critic of the Hegelian idealism which considered that human thought, in the form of "geist", is a determining factor of social change and ultimately of history (Stillman, 1987). Marx considered Hegel's dialectic as fundamentally flawed and he proposed instead a materialist dialectic where social change is determined by the evolution in technology and the subsequent economic relations (Wood, 2004). Marx established a negative interpretation of ideology as a concept opposed to

scientific explanation. Ideology was according to Marx a form of manipulation which served the interest of the capitalist class (McLellan, 1995). Accordingly, jurisprudence, politics, art or philosophy became mostly ideological forms of expressing the interests of various social classes. While Marx didn't considered the position of the proletariat as ideological, Lenin will use the term with the same interpretation for all social classes. The difference between ideologies resides, in Lenin's view, in the morality of the end goal expressed by the ideology (Pannekoek, 1975).

Marx's legacy will define the use of ideology as the opposite of the scientific method in social science and, because many viewed ideology as a merely manipulative technique at mass level, the concept wasn't considered as an explanatory variable for social change. This negative theoretical viewpoint on ideology was clearly exaggerated, as the concept was widely used in academic and political discourses often explaining social and political decisions.

There was another approach in social theory towards the concept of ideology which considered ideology as a phenomenon that can be operationalized and therefore used as an explanatory variable. Gramsci, a Marxist thinker, had a more analytic approach towards the concept, considering that the elite has a major role in defining ideology which has a pedagogic role in society becoming a sort of ethos that defines the behavior of social groups (Gramsci, 2000). Gramsci's point of view is important because he underlines the social structure of the ideological continuum which comprises the "organic" ideological elite which has the role of organizing the collective thought of social groups preparing them for competing in the political arena.

This, I would say more positivistic approach towards the concept of ideology, was developed further in Karl Mannheim's theoretical framework called "sociology of knowledge" (Mannheim, 1954). Ideology played a functional role in Mannheim's theory and it was used both as an explanatory variable for social change and as a method of understanding the buildup of social knowledge and the way it determines social action. Mannheim critiques the positivist view on social science which separated the individual thought from the collective aspects of it and thus separating the thought process from social action. Mannheim considered that for understanding social action we must understand the thought process that created it which is particular to a social group and to a period in history. Mannheim will reject the idea that ideology, as social knowledge, is merely a rationalization of social action or, worse, an attempt to mass manipulation for political gains. Ideology is presented by Mannheim as a form of accumulated knowledge about different aspects of social life that consequently shapes the behavior of social groups. Mannheim differentiated between the concepts of "particular" and "total" ideology to differentiate the sociological interpretation of ideology from its psychological interpretations (Mannheim, 1954). I consider that Weber's paradigm is closer to Manheim's view on ideology which serves as an explanatory variable for social change.

Defining the concept

In my view, the concept of ideology meets all the criteria required by the definition of the social fact as it was stated by Durkheim. Thus, there is no reason why we shouldn't consider ideology as an objective reality that can be observed and used for explanation purposes in social theory.

Ideology was rarely considered for social analysis in its complexity but was rather measured through scales of value orientations. Moreover, the ideology scales were developed resorting to highly abstract value orientation scales, for example the left-right orientation scale (Knutsen, 1995), which is an approach that is closer to establishing ideal types about ideology than analyzing the concept in its concrete historical setting. This reductionist approach has some practical purposes, especially that of validating the instruments in various social settings which will enable the comparative analysis, but it's not precise enough to properly use ideology in midlevel social theories.

Methodologically we should differentiate between the ideological continuum which represents the complexity of the social structures of ideology and the ideological process which is a specific method of building social responses by groups towards various social cleavages. As a social phenomenon, the ideological continuum contains the aforementioned groups of value orientations and includes the ideological elite which is responsible for creating the ideological views which are responses to various social and political cleavages and organizes the ideological groups such as political parties or media institutions. The ideological continuum has a significant social stability and it differentiates itself from other ideological continuums in a concrete historical period.

Also, we should differentiate between ideology and ethos which, in a broad definition of the term, represents a generally excepted worldview in a society. Ideologies appeared and developed in politically competitive societies where multiple elites competed for power representing various social groups or classes. Ideology can be understood as a practical way to understand complex social problems which require social, or rather, political reaction from social groups.

The inherent partiality of the ideological "truth" made some thinkers to disregard the knowledge embedded in ideology. Ideology works in society somewhat similarly to Hegel's dialectic where the thesis and antithesis became a synthesis which is superior from the perspective of the knowledge embedded in it. For example, post-war capitalism can be viewed as a synthesis of 19th century capitalist ideology (the thesis) and socialism (the antithesis) which competed as the main ideologies in Western Europe and North America at the end of the 19th century and in the first part of the twentieth century. The "welfare" capitalism, which characterizes most of the OECD countries, can be interpreted, from an ideological point of view, as a compromise between the aforementioned ideologies, embedding ideas from both which resulted in a politically and economically superior synthesis.

Ideological knowledge cannot be opposed to scientific knowledge about society because in some situations there is simply no scientific truth about social situations. As a conclusion, returning briefly to the example about poverty, I would underline that we can negotiate a poverty line or arbitrarily establish one, but there is no scientifically objective, or "optimum" poverty line. Thus, many social concepts require ideological analysis, as a complementary method, to develop a more complex theoretical model which is more accurate in revealing the true forces behind social change.

The ideological continuums of the Romanian transition

In the last 25 years Romania went through profound economic, political and social transformations, in a period known as the "transition" which was full of ideological activity which generated, in a historically short amount of time, many ideological structures which has impacted social change. I will refer in this chapter to the first 10 years of the transition which lasted from 1990 to 2000 and which contained the first democratic power change in Romania's postwar history.

The concept of social transition

The concept of social transition refers to the transformational process of the functional subsystems of society such as the economic or the political subsystem. The transition period logically requires a starting state and an end state which have to differ substantially from each other. The starting state is easier to define because it coincides with the end of the Ceausescu regime in 1989, when Romania was a society governed by an authoritarian communist regime with a strongly centralized economy which didn't permitted any significant private initiative in the economy (Roper, 2000). The political system was extremely oppressive and didn't allowed the development of political oppositions in society or inside the ruling communist party, a situation that contrasted with that of Hungary where the political transition was forced by an opposition from within the ruling Socialist Workers Party (Bozóki, 2002; Hoensch & Traynor, 1996).

The end state of the transition was prefigured many times during the transition period (Pasti, 1995), underlining the ideological nature of the process. At the beginning of the 90's there was the concept of the "original democracy" which was an attempt to integrate the undemocratic behavior of the newly instated power in Romania with the democratic principles that were the building blocks of the new constitutional order that was established in 1991 and amended in 2003 (Cioroianu, 2009).

Theoretically the Romanian transition is a transition from a communist regime towards a democratic and capitalist regime. But there is an even wider theoretical framework, developed by S. Lipset, which models the transition from an authoritarian regime towards a democratic one (Lipset, 1963). The main relation in Lipset's transition theory is between economic development and democratization but some of the intermediary variables from his model are influenced by ideological processes. The main difference between Lipset's model and the

Romanian transition was that unlike the gradual economic development of an economy which had some continuity in Lipset's model, Romania had to implement a completely new economic paradigm which augmented the ideological nature of the process.

There were some fixed objectives of the Romanian transition such as the desire to join the Euro-Atlantic structures like the European Union or NATO which seemed to transcend the ideological divides of the period (Pasti & Cusin, 1997). The political and economic objectives of transition on the other hand, even if at the broadest level there was a general agreement in adopting a democratic political regime and a capitalist economy (Sandu, 1999), seemed to significantly divide ideologically the political landscape of the Romanian transition.

The ideological continuums of the transition

As I mentioned before, an ideological continuum represents a social structure which is created around politically significant social cleavages. We can define the ideological continuum as a structure of social action, which influences various compatible value orientations groups through the ideological content which is generated in relation to the most important social cleavages of the historical period.

For establishing the main ideological continuums of the Romanian transition we need first to define the main cleavages which characterized the period in discussion and the elites that formulated the ideological views of the continuums. Social cleavages are functional requirements which the social system creates through social change (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). For example migration creates a cleavage around the problem of integration in society of the migrant groups. The existent social structure, which comprises social groups that have different value orientations and interests, will generate a different positioning of groups relative to the newly generated social cleavages. This process will generate ideology either by embedding the new cleavages into existing ideological structures either by creating new ones. In any ideological process a central role is played by the elites which are capable of theoretically analyze the cleavages and formulate responses that can be transposed into social actions (which by the way represents the essence of the concept of ideology). We have to differentiate between organic elites that are very close to the value orientation groups and social classes that they represent and ideologically "fictive" elites which exploits for their own particular benefit the social energies of the ideological continuum.

The political elites and ideological continuums of the transition

We can differentiate between two political elites which formulated the ideological responses to the cleavages that emerged during the transition. These elites organized the main ideological continuums of the transition through various political parties which connected to them the various value orientation groups of the transition (Voicu & Voicu, 2007).

First, we had the political and administrative elite of the former Romanian Communist Party which grouped bureaucrats of second and third rank and a few

high officials of the former regime such as Ion Iliescu who will become Romania's president in 1990. This elite contained two branches:

• The organic elite, which was represented by older bureaucrats who were less involved in the economic affairs of the former regime (like Iliescu) and who were devoted toward the leftist achievements of the regime such as equality, widespread social-benefits, full employment etc.

• The "fictive" elite, which contained the "young wolves" people that controlled the economic activity of the communist regime and who were aware that the great stake of the transition period will be represented by the transfer of the state owned companies in private hands.

The party bureaucrats of the communist regime organized themselves, around Ion Iliescu the prominent figure of the revolution, in the first political structure after the collapse of the communist regime: the Provisory Council of National Unity which latter transformed itself in a leftist party the National Salvation Front (NSF). These two branches of former party bureaucrats went together in the first 2 years of the transition but afterwards they separated as the reformist branch was ousted from power by the conservative leftist elite who controlled power early on in the transition (Roper, 2000). The NSF became the NDSF (D for democratic) which became an anti-reformist, nationalist party which tried to preserve the privileges of the party bureaucrats while stopping the evaluation of the responsibilities for the abuses committed during the communist period. Around Ion Iliescu and the NDSF will emerge the first ideological continuum of the transition which is partly a structural and ideological continuation of the "nationalist-communist" ideology of the Ceausescu regime (Alexandrescu & Stoica, 2005) which won the elections hold in 1992 (Roper, 2003).

Secondly, in the first months of the transition, emerged an alternative elite to the former party bureaucrats which was formed by the members of the parties that governed Romania in the interwar period, such as the National Liberal Party or the National Peasant Party, and representatives of the newly formed civil society. Divided in many parties this elite will unite in 1996 under the political alliance called the Democratic Convention (DC) which won the presidential and parliamentary elections that year assuring the first change of the elite at the highest political level (Roper, 2003). This was a highly divided elite politically throughout the period which resulted in a volatile political construction (the DC) that couldn't implement the structural reforms needed for the economic transition. The DC lacked the ideological cohesion of the leftist counterpart but was more in line with the strategic goals assumed by all the political elite of joining the EU and NATO.

The main cleavages of the transition

The aforementioned ideological continuums formed around the most important cleavages which emerged during the transition. All of the cleavages that I will present below were abundantly confirmed by statistical data (Voicu & Voicu, 2007).

The communist "inheritance"

The main question after the revolution in December 1989 was about who should rule Romania. If we analyze the political aspects of the aforementioned problem we observe that there were two aspects that stood out: the capacity to govern and the issue of legitimacy. This was the focus of the general elections from 1990 and created one of the major cleavages of the transition which regarded the evaluation of the consequences of the communist regime and the people who were responsible for the abuses and economical mistakes of the regime.

One of the first ideological answers formulated to this cleavage was the "Proclamation from Timisoara" which was presented on the 11th of May 1990. At the famous 8 point it was stated that Romania needs a lustration law which prohibits the former communist political elite and the members of the infamous political police called the "Securitate" to accede in governmental positions or other public offices (Dorin, 2006). This was a common requirement from the forces that opposed the communist establishment in many former Communist countries such as East Germany or Poland (Maier, 1999; Singer, 2005).

Regarding this cleavage the differences between the two ideological continuums of the transition were clear: the nationalist leftist continuum tried to avoid the harsh and global condemnation of the communist period and favored the condemnation of a few communist leaders that were negatively involved during the revolution. The reformist continuum was divided on this issue with the historical parties demanding a "Nuremberg trial" style of condemnation of the communist regime and the implementation of the point 8 of the "Proclamation from Timisoara" while the newly formed parties were more concerned with the economical aspect of the transition and didn't favored a strong political stance on the condemnation of the communist regime.

The privatization of the state owned economy

As I stated above the transition process had two main directions: the political instauration of a democratic regime and the transformation of the centralized economy into a capitalist, market economy. The latter goal could be achieved through a massive privatization program which created a huge divide in the Romanian society. On the one part were the "young wolves", people with relations within the former Securitate or with the economic establishment of the communist regime who wanted to control and to be the main beneficiaries of the privatization process. On the other part were the mass of the working people who were used to stable employment and feared any change in their economic status (Dinu, Socol & Niculescu, 2005).

There were two major ideological standpoints regarding the problem of privatization which differed accordingly with the classic left-right ideological scale. The leftist view considered that the privatization has to be made in a longer time, minimizing the social costs. This view favored the involvement of the workers in the privatization process which concretized in the MEBO privatization method

and in the creation of a mass privatization state fund which distributed towards the Romanian citizens 30% of the shares owned by the fund (Earle & Telegdy, 1998). The rightist view considered that a swift reform and privatization would be more beneficial to the economy and direct investment by foreign investors who would bring know-how alongside capital which would be a better solution than privatizing the state owned enterprises with the involvement of the workers. This type of radical reform was more successful in some former communist countries such as Poland and ultimately proved to be the right choice compared to other privatization strategies (Rondinelli, 1994).

Another economic ideological divide was about the restitution of the properties that were confiscated by the communist regime where the rightist view favored the "restitutio in integrum" principle while the leftist ideology was more concerned with the welfare of the current beneficiaries of those properties (workers, tenants) (Anghelache, 2001).

The ethnic problem

In the 1980's the Ceausescu regime was confronted with an economic crisis which was generated by the economic polices implemented by the regime in the prior decades. The living standards plummeted, various shortages were common making the everyday life of the Romanians very difficult (Tismaneanu, Dobrincu & Vasile, 2007). The regime needed an ideological change to broaden the emphasis from the economic aspects of the communist ideology such as equality and full employment. The choice was to reignite the ethnic conflict between Romanians and the Hungarian minority through nationalist propaganda and hostile actions towards the Hungarian minority. Taken in account this major shift in the regime's ideology it was labeled later as "national-communism" by analysts. Nationalism wasn't a new ideological orientation of the Ceausescu regime, it started with the position of Ceausescu regarding the reprisals by the Warsaw treaty armed forces of the Czechoslovakian revolt in 1968 and it was used to lessen Romania's dependency from the USSR and to permit ultimately the development of an oppressive personal dictatorship of Ceausescu (Deletant, 1995).

After 1989 the newly instated regime used the nationalist ideology to gain the political sympathy of the nationalist parts of the roman society which was used effectively in the first couple of years of the transition. This cleavage weakened in time mostly because of the integration process in the European Union.

Conclusion

Certain sociological processes cannot be properly understood without an ideological analysis which, from a methodological point of view, is complementary with the durkheimian statistical analysis on latent variables. Complex macro-social processes, such as the above analyzed political and economic transition, are influenced by many latent variables and extra-societal (international) conditionings but I consider that it would be an epistemological blunder to not take in account

for explanation the influences of the ideological continuums which through elites organizes social action.

Regarding the influence on social change of the ideological continuums during the transition, I would conclude that the delaying in implementing the political and economic reforms required to achieve a western style democracy and market economy is explainable by the early influence of the leftist-nationalist continuum which was a structural continuation of the communist bureaucracy.

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