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Images of Paradise, Images of Utopia: The Search for Community

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Słowa kluczowe: obraz, imaginarium, utopia, raj, millenaryzm, rewolucja, wspólnota, wykluczenie

Abstract

The aim of this article is not only to discuss specific images of paradise and utopia, which appear in various forms in European imaginaries throughout history, but also to show the connections of these images with political discourses aiming at changing the status quo and constituting a perfect, harmonious, and non-antagonistic community. The creation of such a community—despite the universalist visions that the imaginarium of paradise and utopia implies—is often based on the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Mechanisms of this type are above all characteristic of maximalist political visions and ideas that seek to solve all human problems definitively and completely. Such aspirations are linked with revolutionary attempts to realize utopia or to build the kingdom of God on earth.

Introductory Remarks

The subject of paradise and utopia is very extensive. Therefore, reflection on it can take place in various interpretative perspectives (e.g., historical,

theological, biblical, literary critical, socio-political, or anthropological). In this text—due to the wide field of theoretical references and possible interpretations—reflection on the problems of paradise and utopia will be linked with the domains of images and imagination, along with the anthropological and sociopolitical fields. On a more general plane, a close relationship between them can be seen. On the one hand, the heterogeneous "family of images"(Mitchell, 1986, p. 9), as well as the imagination itself and its power, cannot be understood without an anthropological context. On the other hand, if we want to grasp the specificity of the human being and its "being-in-the-world"—also in the political world—we cannot ignore the order of imagination and the images it creates.

Stopping for a moment at twentieth-century anthropological approaches, it should be noted that they treat imagination not only as a condition of specific human activity (i.e., the production of images), but above all as the very condition of human consciousness and existence. Imagination is something that distinguishes human beings from other beings, as well as from the world of things (Jonas, 1962). As far as anthropological approaches are concerned, the phenomenological analyses of imagination proposed by J. P. Sartre are pioneering in this field. He conceived imagination as the transcendental condition of human consciousness. As he points out, "There could be no realizing consciousness without imaging consciousness, and vice versa. Thus imagination, far from appearing as an accidental characteristic of consciousness, is disclosed as an essential and transcendental condition of consciousness" (Sartre, 2004, p. 188). Another author who particularly strongly emphasizes the fusion of humankind with the world of images is Hans Belting:

> From the perspective of anthropology—as he writes—we are not the masters of our images, but rather in a sense at their mercy; they colonize our bodies (our brains), so that even if it seems that we are in charge of generating them, and even though society attempts unceasingly to control them, it is in fact the images that are in control. Images both affect and reflect the changing course of human history. They leave, for example, no doubt about how changeable human nature is. Societies discard images that they have invented themselves as soon as they no longer do their intended service. Instead of reinventing themselves, people reinvent the images they live with. (Belting, 2014, pp. 1–2)

According to Belting, images are always "images of humans." The deliberate ambiguity of this statement implies that, on the one hand, images are our products, and on the other hand, images reveal or show humans and their being in the world (Belting links the problem of the image with the subject of the body privileged by him). It can be said that various images of humans show us who—in both the individual and the socio-political dimension—we are, who we were, and who we want to be. It seems that on these levels relating to historical time and memory, our current social and political situations, as well as expectations, anticipations, and imaginations, one can situate social and political imaginaries of paradise and utopia.

These images of paradise and utopia, as well as the myths and symbols associated with them—forming the field of the socio-political imaginarium (Wunenburger, 2020; Taylor, 2004)—change their forms and incarnations throughout history; but as some scholars have shown, they are rooted in a certain fundamental matrix or archetypal sphere of the human being. As Mircea Eliade points out, human dreams of paradise—which the Romanian author calls longing for paradise—belong to archetypal intuitions born at the moment when humans realized their place in the cosmos (Eliade, 1978). Ernst Bloch captures the essence of human being in terms of creating utopian meanings and projects. Utopian dimensions manifest themselves in many hope-filled human imbalances—in our individual actions, in the field of music, architecture, medicine, and of course in the domain of political and social discourses. The main point of reference in Bloch's reflections on utopia is the category of "Not Yet," which has two dimensions, the "Not Yet Conscious" and the "Not Yet Become" (Bloch, 1986). "Concrete utopia is thus an essential constituent part of an essentially unfinished reality, and a category whose reference is human action in and on the world; it is both real, and Not Yet" (Levitas, 1989, p. 28). As Bloch points out, "the concrete imagination and the imagery of its mediated anticipations are fermenting in the process of the real itself and are depicted in the concrete forward dream; anticipating elements are a component of reality itself" (Bloch, 1986, p. 197).

The aim of this article is not only to present specific images of paradise and utopia, which appear in various forms in the domains of European imaginaries throughout history, but also to show the connections of these images with the domain of political discourses aiming at changing the status quo and constituting a perfect, harmonious, and non-antagonistic community. The creation of such a community—despite the universalist

visions that the imaginarium of paradise and utopia implies—is often based on the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Mechanisms of this type are characteristic above all of maximalist political visions and ideas that seek to solve all human problems definitively and completely. Such aspirations are linked with revolutionary attempts to realize utopia or to build the kingdom of God on earth.

The issues discussed in this article will concern historical examples. Of course, this raises the question of the need to create images of paradise and utopia in the contemporary world, which is not free from global challenges (e.g., climate crisis, migrations, the development of new technologies, the hegemony of global capitalism). Let us confine ourselves to just two observations, for the answer to this question would certainly require a separate consideration. First, as we have seen, some authors maintain that the need for utopia and the dream of building an earthly paradise has its anthropological basis. In other words, it is an impulse constantly present in human beings, which evokes taking specific actions in the social and political domain. Secondly, as Chiara Bottici writes, "[T]he state of societies being far from perfect guarantees that there will always be the possibility and the need for utopias" (Bottici, 2011, p. 1735).

At this point, it is necessary to mention the main philosophical and political inspirations in the light of which the issue of the (im)possibility of community will be addressed. The first source is an antagonistic perspective that exposes the motif of conflict and exclusion as the very conditions for the constitution of a community, a certain "us." In this perspective, the leading place is occupied by the thought of Carl Schmitt (Schmitt, 2007) and Helmuth Plessner (Plessner, 1994), as well as post-Marxist continuations of Schmittian optics (Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe). Laclau writes about the "impossibility of society" (Laclau, 1990, p. 89) as a harmonious and non-antagonistic community in the context of the antagonism underlying every social order and hegemonic attempt to establish a closed and non-antagonistic social whole. Such attempts, regardless of their political and ideological content, indicate the utopian will to establish society as a reconciled community. The will to establish "society-as-a-whole" is present in every particular political discourse that tends to universalize itself. It can be accomplished only through the hegemonic shaping of the social field. It consists in the exclusion of specific identities, forces, or social sectors that, for one reason or another, cannot enter the hegemonic social order (and

as excluded elements will threaten it). In other words, every community in its essence is always entangled in the antagonistic logic of "us" versus "them." Therefore, the desire for community is always doomed to failure.

Another source of inspiration is Roberto Esposito's interpretation of community as a necessary and, at the same time, impossible being. The awareness of this connection between the necessity and impossibility of community is, as Esposito observes, present in the philosophical tradition, at least since the time of Rousseau. Rousseau emphasizes that "the community is both impossible and necessary. Necessary and impossible" (Esposito, 2010, p. 53). Esposito identifies the antinomian relationship between the necessity and impossibility of community in relation to anthropological approaches showing the fragility and mortality of the human being (Kant, Heidegger), and also in relation to the political dimension. Therefore, when we try to establish, create, or realize a community, we always change it into its absolute opposite: the community of death and the death of the community.

In these considerations, a perspective is adopted whereby imagination is not peripheral to politics. Rather, it is politics that is peripheral to the imagination and the images it produces. This type of observation can be supported by many examples from political philosophy and political practice. Let us confine ourselves here to enumerating some twentieth-century authors who emphasize the role of imagination and various phenomena of imagery in political and social contexts: Georges Sorel (the myth of the general strike); Antonio Gramsci (common sense and the theory of hegemony); Ernst Bloch (the concept of utopia); Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (the symbolic universe); Benedict Anderson (imagined communities); Jean Baudrillard (the simulacrum); Jean-Jacques Wunenburger (the imaginarium of the political sphere); Charles Taylor (modern social imaginaries); Cornelius Castoriadis (the "magma" category); Bronisław Baczko (social images, ideas-images); William J. T. Mitchell (images defining our historical moment; images of a terrorist).

Journeys of Imagination

At the end of the fifteenth century, the inhabitants of the Old World faced a peculiar cognitive-theological problem. As Claude Lévi-Strauss put

it, "The Garden of Eden was found to be true, for instance; likewise the ancients' Golden Age, the Fountain of Youth, Atlantis, the Gardens of the Hesperides, the pastoral poems, and the Fortunate Islands. But the spectacle of a humanity both purer and happier than our own (in reality, of course, it was neither of these, but a secret remorse made it seem so) made the European skeptical of the existing notions of revelation, salvation, morality, and law" (Lévi-Strauss, 1964, p. 78). Columbus believed that he had discovered an earthly paradise, that garden of delights, as Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly, author of one of Columbus's favorite books, *De Imago Mundi*, used to say. The Fathers of the Church also described paradise so early, referring to the founding text of *Genesis*.

A special kind of connection between the real and imaginary worlds—and imagination in this union is the force constituting the ways of describing, perceiving, and experiencing past, present, or future events—occurs before Columbus's discoveries.

As Tzvetan Todorov writes:

> News reaches European writers through stories whose authors are either travelers themselves or chroniclers who stay on the spot and collect oral information. It must be stated, even if it seems paradoxical, that stories precede travel. Starting from the late Middle Ages, more or less fanciful stories have attracted the interest of readers and aroused curiosity. You can learn, for example, that an Irish monk, Saint Brendan, spent seven years to reach the earthly paradise, encountering all dangers and supernatural creatures on his way. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Marco Polo, after returning from China, published the work *Libro delle meravigle* (...), the title of which is the most justified, despite the fact that it describes supernatural phenomena. A little later, John Mandeville writes *Viaggio d'oltremare*, an intricate tangle of facts and fantastic ideas. He also describes Paradise on earth. In the same epoch, compilations, *Cosmographies* or *Immagine del mondo* (as the famous *Imago Mundi* of Cardinal Peter d'Ailly), collections of information about all the countries and peoples of the Earth, multiply. These works are therefore generally known and prepare the ground for the stories of new travelers, for whom they are a source of information. Columbus set out, carrying letters to the Great Khan, described by Marco Polo. Vasco da Gama does the same for Prester John, a legendary figure who lives, according to Mandeville, in India. (Todorov, 2001, p. 342)

In the Western imaginarium, from the twelfth century until the seventeenth century, the above-mentioned Prester John was identified with a Christian king, ruling "somewhere in Asia" (or in Ethiopia), near the earthly paradise. The imaginarium of the mythical land of King John is very rich and diverse—among other things, it is crossed by a river from the earthly paradise, which carries precious stones; and from above flows the water, which has its sources in the earthly paradise (whoever drinks this water three times on a fast basis will never get sick and will be fashionable throughout their life). The work on the political myth of Prester John's power was a response to the political and existential demand of the Latins settled in the East, who, after the First Crusade, felt the uncertainty of their situation and hoped that some powerful Christian ruler from Asia would be able to attack Islam from the East.

It should be emphasized that in the medieval imaginarium, a prominent place was occupied by islands—first of all, the Happy Islands (whose existence was attested to by the authority of Homer, Hesiod, Plutarch, and Horace) and the Island of St. Brendan. The motif of the happy island, on which utopian thought located earthly paradises, is reversed in revolutionary theatre—after the world victory of the revolution, the island inhabited by kings and the overthrown pope "can only become an image of the negative state of nature, of Hobbesian universal war" (Baszkiewicz, 1993, p. 23). On this island, the force of nature, in the form of the element of volcanic fire, is to complete the work of judgment on European despots (Maréchal, 2008).

The imaginarium of the Garden of Eden in the Renaissance era appears in the form of discourses about erotic paradises (an imaginary journey to the island of Cythera, where "nymphs worship Cupid"). First of all, utopian discourses appear in the form of accounts of travel in time and space showing imaginary communities and ways of their lives. Utopias merge with images of a mythical paradise and the Golden Age of humanity as an escape from an unjust social order (Delumeau, 1995). Utopias are attempts to regain what is lost or to create a new order in the more or less distant future (revolutionary and counter-revolutionary thought will also have to face the problem of time). As can be seen, in utopian imaginations there is not only the problem of space (the alleged place of the earthly Paradise), but also, or above all, the problem of past or future time. The images of paradise are not images of the present world. Worth emphasizing is that the

story of the Garden of Eden is then associated with a discourse expressing hopes for the universal emancipation of the human community—utopias show, as Jean Delumeau emphasizes, that "the fusion with the myth of the earthly paradise has formed in some the belief that the garden of Eden at the dawn of time was enjoyed not only by the first pair of parents, but also by the whole of humanity. So why not count on the golden age to return?" (Delumeau, 2020, p. 29) Here we touch on a key moment related to the images of paradise and utopia—even if they operate with a certain universal message, this universality will be universality with a flaw. In other words, it will not include all those particularisms (social groups, identities) which, for one reason or another, will not conform to the vision of universal happiness and harmony, and, moreover, the realization of this vision will often demand their physical elimination.

The Age of Enlightenment marks the end of the search for an earthly paradise. For Rousseau, paradise was identified with a state of nature in which the "primitive human race lived happily amid a bountiful nature" (Delumeau, 1995, p. 226). It was an image founded on the "nihilation" activity of consciousness. This could be rendered as follows: if society is a negation of the state of nature, then individual consciousness is a negation of society. At the same time, this negation of negation takes place in the field of subjective experience: the state of nature can be reproduced in individual experience, and especially through solitary contact with the natural world (which is why Rousseau delves into the forest of Saint-Germain). The image of nature as a "nihilation" of existing relations triggers at the same time the political and social search for new ways of development and harmonious integration of man with society (such as the transition from individual rebellion to collective utopia). Kant embarked on a journey "on the wings of imagination" (Kant, 2007, p. 163). It is a journey in which he used a Holy Bible as a map; and reason, based on experience, is the guiding thread in it. He placed the first humans "in the place secured against the attack of predators and richly provisioned by nature with all means of nourishment, thus in a garden, as it were, in a zone that is always temperate" (Kant, 2007, p. 164). Exodus from Paradise as humankind's first abode (as illustrated by reason) is nothing other than the passage from the uncouth of a purely animal being to humanity, from enslavement through instinct to the direction of reason. In other words, it is a transition "from the guardianship of nature into the condition of freedom" (Kant, 2007,

p. 168). It is, in fact, the path of progress that leads from evil/a fall to goodness and perfection. This is certainly not an easy path: human, abandoning the maternal bosom of nature, is pushed into a world where many worries, hardships, and evils await him in history. Paradise will be only a fruit of the imagination, a place where man can indulge in idleness and waste. Between human and the image of a paradise as a "place of pleasure" stands the disciplining reason, which forbids a return to the state of nature.

With the Enlightenment, evil leaves the pre-historical time, whose figurative-symbolic matrix is the story of Paradise and the fall of the first parents, and dwells in historical time. The civil order and history are at the same time the place where the power of reason is an opportunity to progress and to eliminate evil, backwardness, and barbarism. This, of course, involves various projects—more or less—radical projects for the reconstruction of the prevailing social, political, and cultural orders that generate historical evil. The Enlightenment inaugurates "the voluntaristic utopias of a just state" (Baczko, 2001, p. 153). As Bronisław Baczko writes, "A history that has been desacralized is projected with promises which, of course, it can never keep. As if by a paradoxical turn of events, the golden age of reason had revived nostalgia for the lost Paradise, and the Enlightenment was followed by its deep shadow" (Baczko, 2001, p. 154).

From Paradise to Social Utopias

Anthropological, political, and religious longings for paradise translated into utopian hopes for its recovery or restoration, or hopes of creating a new earthly paradise on earth. These were messianic discourses that emphasized the moment of "punishment and reparation in cosmic terms," (Kleszcz, 1997, p. 70) as well as a strong connection between sacred history and secular history within a certain historiosophical model. In the messianic imaginarium there is a strong desire to change the socio-political reality (the appearance of the messiah through whom earthly harms, injustice, oppression will be eliminated; the coming of the kingdom of God on earth). Such aspirations were associated with millenarian ideas, which, as can be seen from the example of Christian millenarianism, have undergone a gradual secularization in modern times, consisting in the elimination of supernatural and religious elements. Eric Voegelin describes this process as

the "immanentization of the eschaton," i.e., the incorporation of the process of salvation into the material and secular realm of history and human activity (Voegelin, 1952).

The eighteenth century brought with it two ideas derived from messianic views: the idea of progress and the idea of revolution. An excellent expression of the first is Condorcet's thought, which—and it is worth emphasizing on this occasion—in the historiosophical perspective also refers to the power of imagination and images. His vision of a rational, pluralistic community of "deliberating" citizens is not free from utopian images that drive the emancipatory work of human reason in history; images that give consolation and importance in the struggle against a world still full of superstitions, crimes, and injustices. This imaginary world, contemplated by the philosopher, is "Elysium created by reason and graced by the purest pleasures known to the love of mankind" (Condorcet, 1976, p. 281). In addition to Condorcet, a similar belief in the progress of humankind can also be seen in Kant or in the thought of Adam Smith and in the nineteenth century in Hegel, Lessing, Comte, George Sand, Owen, Fourier, Michelet, Marx, and others.

In turn, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution shattered the perspective of historical continuity (dividing the time into "before" and "after" the revolution) and evoked a sense of a new beginning and faith in the creative, emancipatory abilities of humans. Hannah Arendt applies this "pathos of novelty" especially to the French and American political and social revolutions (Arendt, 1965, pp. 26–28).

At the beginning of the French Revolution, there appears an image of the triumphant sun scattering the "Gothic system" cloud. The political imaginarium has a dualistic character; it is night and day, light and darkness, death and resurrection. It reflects the division of society into two antagonistic camps: people and the *ancien régime*. The images describe and identify the political enemy: the nobly born, then King Louis XVI, and then everyone who is not virtuous in the Jacobin sense. The image of the enemy is built up through the words "alarmist," "furious," "federalist," "anarchist," and "terrorist"—these words create the image of the enemy. "Words came in torrents, but even more important was their unique, magical quality" (...) Certain key words served as revolutionary incantations. Nation was perhaps the most universally sacred, but there were also "patrie, constitution, law, and more specific to the radicals, regeneration, virtue, and vigilance"

(Hunt, 2004, p. 31). The revolutionary imaginarium is *de facto* a millenarist imaginarium, in which the world becomes an arena of struggle for extremely antagonistic forces. And just as before the revolutionary regeneration was to be the work of the divine messiah or God Himself, who uses people as His instruments in the struggle against the forces of the Antichrist, so in the era of the French Revolution, the people themselves have an almost divine omnipotence and desire to create the kingdom of God on earth.

Romantic messianism will take over a series of revolutionary-Jacobin images, created in the collective imagination and fueled by poetry and literature. Historical rebellion (which is also a metaphysical rebellion) appreciates the Promethean myth of humanity's self-determination and in the romantic narrative meets images of the struggle of good and evil, Christ and Satan, or—last but not least—human beings with God. Romantic messianism often took the form of nationalistic messianism, which the biblical messianic scheme filled with "national" content, e.g., the ideas of Polish messianism, the people-messiah, the ideas of Poland which is the "Christ of nations" and which will initiate worldwide harmony, put an end to all injustice and suffering in history.

And as for the imaginarium of the proletarian revolution in the USSR, we have here images of the enemy (external and internal); striving to create a new human (or even a proletarian "human-robot" as Alexei Gastiev, the Bolshevik engineer and poet proclaimed in his biomechanical utopia); the use of images (both mental, internal, and external artifacts) in the service of propaganda and visual pedagogy; or quasi-religious images of a charismatic leader.

Critical Insights

The above, briefly outlined messianic discourses and visions concerning the recovery of paradise, the return to "original innocence," or the realization of the "kingdom of God on earth" can be viewed from critical perspectives, which is to say, "formal" (Wunenburger), "anthropological" (Cioran), and "anthropological-political" (Camus).

As for the former, according to Wunenburger, utopia itself—regardless of its historical emanations—is nothing more than a petrification and a limitation of the playing field of the imagination. As Andrei Simut argues:

> Wunenburger aspires to produce an all-encompassing theory that would provide not only the precise definition for every key concept such as “imaginaire,” “imagination,” “sacré,” “imaginaries du politique,” myth, symbol, utopia, but also their function, their relations towards one another. At a closer look, all these terms can be placed on a general map, around a triangle in the following way: on the top of the triangle is the concept of “imaginaire,” which also encompasses the inner part of the triangle; on the bottom side, on the left edge the concept of utopia and on the right edge the reason (Western Reason, political reason/“la raison politique”). The bottom side of the triangle stands for the crisis of imaginary and imagination, caused by the limitation imposed on the Western thought by utopia (since the Renaissance) and reason (since the Enlightenment). In the center of the triangle, at very core of imaginary are placed “la sacré,” the myth, the symbol, and the ritual. (Simut, 2012, p. 2)

As can be seen, that approach shows an abstract-philosophical understanding of utopia. Wunenburger “insists that to denounce the imposture of the totalitarian utopia is a false debate. Wunenburger places utopia on an abstract, general level, as an archetype and a construct in contrast with the imaginary” (Simut, 2012, p. 3). So his theory is a generalization of the utopia and transcending its visible and particular manifestations (historical, political, or literary ones). But what does Wunenburger’s statement about utopia as a limitation of imagination mean? Utopian discourses, argues Simut, like discourses appealing to the power of reason, seek to absorb the whole diverse field of “dream production.” The domain of freely created images is then petrified—it freezes in a certain rhetorical form (a trip to an island or a journey in time, an account of this journey highlighting the contrasts between the present world and the world of utopia), an ossified system of meanings and symbols, as well as a carefully planned scheme of organizing social existence (free time, everyday life, celebrations, etc.).

It is also worth mentioning the strictly organized architectural order. If we were to look at the plan of Plato’s colony (shown at the beginning of the sixteenth century in the drawing *Anonymous Destailleur*), Johann Valentin Andreae’s *Christianopolis*, the city of the Sun of Campanella, or utopian projects that were created on the eve of the French Revolution, the hegemony of geometry, order, “barracks” style of buildings can be weighed in. Everything is transparent, visible; there is also a division into center and periphery. There is no escaping the collective “Us.”

Jean Starobiński writes:

> Some of the pre-1789 writers who drew up principles for a perfect society complemented political doctrine with novels about government. They felt a need to add images to ideals, to plan an ideal city. Like all Utopian cities, theirs was based on the laws of a simple and rigid geometry. Its regular quadrangular or circular form made it divisible into either strictly equal juxtaposed parts or similarly symmetrical rings arranged round an omnipotent center: Equality in independence alternated with equality in dependence. It was as if the great ideas of equality by nature and equality before the law could be given immediate spatial expression by means of rule and compass. In a universe of signs, geometry was the language of reason. It made use of forms of every kind in their beginning, their principle, and applied them in a system of points, lines, and constant proportions. Any excess or irregularity appeared as an intrusion of evil: Advocates of Utopia avoid superfluity. (Starobinski, 1982, p. 69)

During the French Revolution the idea of harmonious and empty space prevails. "The Champ de Mars! This is the only monument that the Revolution has left. And the Revolution has for her monument—empty space. Her monument is sandy plain, flat as Arabia," writes Jules Michelet in his famous work *History of the French Revolution* (Michelet, 1847, p. 9). Revolutionary space is the space of new public celebrations: *Fête de la Fédération*; *Culte de la Raison*; *Culte de l'Être suprême*. The French, like the earlier Greeks, become a nation of spectators (following the French example, Lunacharsky also noted the importance of a revolutionary celebration).

Utopian imaginaria, as Wunenburger emphasizes, have an anticipatory character; they sell the present tense but also accurately, not to say in detail, concretize the images of shared space and time. In this sense, they are an imaginative limitation or scheme imposed on the open field of possible ways of anticipating the future. Wunenburger's criticism of utopia coincides to some extent with Cioran's view. First of all, Cioran notes that utopia deforms the true status of humans (and human imagination) and degrades them to a being that ignores the present and is focused on the utopian future: "Cioran underscores the mutation of man into a creature obsessed with history which is due to the utopian deplacement of happiness in the far future, depriving man of living in the present" (Simut, 2012, p. 4). This is also evident in the thought of Albert Camus introduced in *The Rebel*,

when Camus criticizes the revolutionary form of historical rebellion, which in the twentieth century ended in totalitarian enslavement.

Camus notes:

> Revolution without honor, calculated revolution which, in preferring an abstract concept of man to a man of flesh and blood, denies existence as many times as is necessary, puts resentment in the place of love. Immediately rebellion, forgetful of its generous origins, allows itself to be contaminated by resentment; it denies life, dashes toward destruction, and raises up the grimacing cohorts of petty rebels, embryo slaves all of them, who end by offering themselves for sale, today, in all the marketplaces of Europe, to no matter what form of servitude (…) The men of Europe, abandoned to the shadows, have turned their backs upon the fixed and radiant point of the present. They forget the present for the future, the fate of humanity for the delusion of power, the misery of the slums for the mirage of the eternal city, ordinary justice for an empty promised land. They despair of personal freedom and dream of a strange freedom of the species; reject solitary death and give the name of immortality to a vast collective agony. They no longer believe in the things that exist in the world and in living man; the secret of Europe is that it no longer loves life. Its blind men entertain the puerile belief that to love one single day of life amounts to justifying whole centuries of oppression. (Camus, 1974, pp. 304–305)

For Cioran, Wunnenburger, and Camus, utopia is a version of a controlled paradise.

"Fantasies of Salvation"

The title of this paragraph is taken from Vladimir Tismăneanu's book. By outlining the political, social, and cultural landscape of post-communist countries, the author highlighted motifs concerning political myths as imaginal and symbolic discourses redefining and integrating the shattered identity of the societies of the former Eastern Bloc. The imaginary of post-communist identities as national communities is created by a certain range of mythical or mythogenic elements.

> Thus, political mythologies revolve around such major themes as the Golden Age (innocence lost, glorious patriarchal beginnings, the fall

> into modernity); victimhood, martyrdom, treason and conspiracy; salvation and the advent of the millennium; charismatic saviors (who can be heroic individuals, allegedly predestined classes, or biologically defined races); and ultimate bliss in the form of revolutionary chiliasm, when leader, movement, nation, and mankind become one, whether in life or death. (Tismăneanu, 1998, p. 9)

In the post-communist world, we are dealing with various types of mythical messianic discourses, which both express longing for the "golden age" or "paradise lost" and have a compensatory character and show the possibilities for building national communities (strongly entangled in the ultra-political logic of inclusion and exclusion) in a fragmented reality after the collapse of "Leninist civilization" (Jowitt, 1992). Disillusionment with democratic pluralism and the free-market economy triggers a feeling of lost unity and community, which is being transposed messianically into a call to reclaim them, to revive utopias, to heroic mobilization, to reject liberal-democratic values "in the name of collective dreams of salvation" (Tismăneanu, 1992, p. 35). The idea of a return to the "golden age" is present especially in the myth of ethnic nationalism, which according to Tismăneanu turns out to be the strongest alternative to liberalism in Eastern Europe. In his opinion, the longing for lost certainties explains the growing nostalgia for the national and cultural values of the pre-communist period, as well as "the resurrection of the messianic myth of the Nation (the People as One), and the burning belief in its regenerative power" (Tismăneanu , 1992, p. 8).

It is also often noticeable that anti-liberal and anti-Western ideologies are distinguished by a characteristic syncretism—they combine the longing for social equality typical of communist society with an authoritarian or even fascist tradition. At the same time, they reject parliamentary government, democratic order, the rights of sexual minorities, and women's rights. They glorify images of the past, along with the cultural and social values of the communist and pre-communist periods, both customarily identified with the worldview of the left (social, not cultural) and the right (in terms of historical politics, morality, national axiology). Although Tismăneanu's descriptions of the post-communist world relate to the period immediately after the 1989–1991 revolution, they are still largely valid. This can be seen especially in the pictorial, symbolic, and mythical contexts accompanying the war in Ukraine, as well as in the political ideas of restoring the former glory and given borders of the USSR.

Post-communist forms of messianism seem to reflect a particular perception of reality. It is always about the optics of emphasizing dualities, contrasts, antagonisms, differences between “us” and “them.” The current reality is opposed to the non-existent world—what “is” always opposes what “should” be. According to Tismăneanu, the post-communist world is prone to a tantalizing combination of religious instinct and nationalistic self-identification. This results in all sorts of “pseudo-chiliastic” myths and images of national and moral regeneration. As he writes:

> I use the term “pseudo-chiliastic” because the salvation these myths promise is one based on exclusion and marginalization of the very category of otherness. It is not a universalistic call for the unity of mankind in the glory of redemption but rather a call to achieve self-esteem by destroying and stigmatizing those who are different. The purity of the race, allegedly tarnished by aliens, gays, or cosmopolitan vermin, are themes that emerge in the discourses of new political movements from Zagreb to Bucharest, from Budapest to Saint Petersburg. (Tismăneanu, 1992, p. 63)

The examples of the post-communist world clearly show that messianic ideas appear in moments of destabilization, disintegration, and socio-political crises. For example, according to Kenneth Jowitt, the period 1989–1991 was one of destabilization and the formation of new identities, which resembles the formless earth from *Genesis*:

> Jehovah’s response to a world “void and without form” was twofold: he created boundaries between and “named” the new entities. His task was greater, but ours is comparable—to respond to a world that will be increasingly unfamiliar, perplexing, and threatening; in which existing boundaries are attacked and changed; in which the challenge will be to establish new national/international boundaries and “name”—identify—the new entities. (Jowitt, 1992, p. 264)

In this perspective, it can be said that messianic ideas are a form of interpretation of the world. The world that exists is not the real world—the real world is the one yet to come. They make it possible to recognize the true meaning hidden under the layer of intricate and opaque political and social reality and show the ways of commitment to regain lost unity or the “golden age.” At the same time, as can be seen especially in the example of the former Yugoslavia, messianic ideas are associated with political

myths that constitute a call for ethnic cleansing. These myths—such as Serbian political myths—offer, among other things, images of a political messiah and a savior, as well as images of a "golden age" (Milošević & Stojadinović, 2012).

Conclusion: "Us" Versus "Them"

Images of paradise and utopia with a strong charge of emotions, feelings, hopes, and longings (which is certainly crucial when it comes to initiating and mobilizing political actions, protests, strikes, or revolutions) are inscribed in the imaginary of the community. This community appears in retrospective projections as a "paradise" or "golden age of humanity," in which human relationships were direct, harmonious, and lasting (or "in accordance with nature"). It can also manifest itself in the discourses of utopian anticipations. In each case, we are dealing with a kind of communion, synthesis, or fusion of all members of the community—the identity of each is founded on identification with the body of the community. Once again, one could refer to Laclau's position to express a kind of play between the particular and the universal. A particular vision (retrospective projection, utopian anticipation) aspires to become a universal model or model in the light of which the immanent identity of a given community should be formed. In this sense, the community is to be founded on the homogenization of all its components and the removal (exclusion, physical elimination) of all those elements which, in the light of one or another particular criterion elevated to the rank of absolute criteria (ethnicity, nationality, sex, religion), must be considered alien, hostile, heterogeneous (non-immanent). A community founded on the exclusion and annihilation of others is, as we have said, a "community of death" and a "death of community."

In the mythical kingdom of King John, only Christian virtue was to reign ("There are no poor people among us. We do not know what theft, flattery, greed and division are") (Delumeau, 2020, p. 21); but it was also supposed to be a Christian military power directed against Islam. The sixteenth-century Reformations discussed original sin. Luther and Calvin claimed that humans had completely lost the capacity for the slightest good deed if God substituted His own will for their will—though God did this only for the "chosen." Against this background, the question of earthly paradise was considered

"a memorial of our disobedience"; and the present was stigmatized. The content of the millenarian belief was that between the time in which we live, with its misfortunes and crimes, and eternity after the Last Judgment, the kingdom of Christ will reign with the resurrected "righteous" (these elects, as claimed in the first centuries of Christianity, are martyrs persecuted for their faith). The revolutionary continuators of the ideas of Joachim of Fiore (the apocalyptic imaginarium and the reign of "children" when the period of the history of the Spirit begins), who will resort to violence, clearly identify the enemies of the Christian-communist community and also describe what revenge on the enemies of Christ will look like. Particularly significant here is the figure of Thomas Müntzer, "the first plebeian revolutionary" (as Engels called him), who proclaimed that the atheist has no right to life if there is an obstacle for "pious people." Jacob Taubes points out:

> Joachim's theology of history is taken to its conclusion by Thomas Müntzer's theology of revolution. Müntzer and the Anabaptists want to bring about the *ecclesia spiritualis* on earth. Inevitably, the problem of violence arises in Müntzer's work, and his theology justifies the use of force in a good cause. The theology of revolution is the theology of violence. (Taubes, 2009, p. 86)

As Bernard Rothmann, one of the spiritual fathers of the "New Zion" in 1530s Münster used to say: "We 'chosen ones', allies of the Lord, 'we must work with Him and attack the ungodly on the day indicated by the Lord'" (Delumeau, 2020, p. 92). One of the acts of millenarian violence was the "Calabrian conspiracy" initiated by Campanella to establish a communist theocracy. During the civil war in seventeenth-century England, there is also talk of the "reign of the saints" who did not surrender to the Beast. The colonization of the Americas was an opportunity to create earthly paradises and utopias. In the eyes of the Franciscan missionaries, the multitudes of Indians in South America were to be the best part of the Christian world because of their natural predispositions, although some proclaimed the need to Christianize them through "moderate coercion" (communities gathering natives, under the leadership of the Franciscans and the power of viceroys, were called "utopias"). Indian communities were to be an earthly paradise but also a visible punishment for sin-stricken Spain. Among other things, "theological nationalism" is developing in North America, in which the gulf between the paradisiacal New World and the

Old Continent is to be highlighted: "In the whole world there is no country more free from fornication [than our country] and more distant from the degrading vices born of impiety" (Delumeau, 2020, p. 123). American patriotic millennialism identified the enemy with England and foreshadowed the coming of a New Eden in the United States. As for the revolutionary ideas of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, here the enemy was primarily class and/or a national enemy. Classic examples of the realization of the utopia of universal brotherhood, equality, and freedom are provided by the Jacobin dictatorship. The enemy is identified in this case either with the internal enemy (all those who do not meet the strict criteria of revolutionary virtue) or with the external enemy (the slogan "homeland in danger"). In the USSR, the mythical happiness and prosperity of a classless society was to be established, of course, after the elimination of all real or imagined enemies. In Nazi Germany, paradise appeared as the reign of blue-eyed and fair-haired *Übermensch*. As we have seen, even the times after the collapse of "Leninist civilization" were not free from mytho-political narratives about the golden age and the new messiah, which were based on the logic of inclusion and exclusion.

As you can see, ideas about a different, better world are created in a specific social, political, or cultural context; or—to be more precise—they arise in the field of current social, political, or religious antagonisms, as well as intersecting discourses fighting for hegemony (according to Laclau's approach). For this reason, utopian images, like the imaginings of Paradisiacal reality, emphasize both current conflicts and hopes of overcoming them. Of course, a utopian vision pushed by a given social group or political force may be a dystopian vision for another, just as paradise may turn out to be "hell" or a nightmare for others.

As Zygmunt Bauman writes:

> [U]topia is an integral element of the critical attitude, which always materializes in a group-specific form, representing a group experience and invariably partisan yearnings. A vision utopian to one group may well be dystopian to another (…) Utopias, therefore, help to lay bare and make conspicuous the major divisions of interest within a society. They contribute to the crystallization of major socio-political forces, thereby converting differences of status into differences of action. (Bauman , 1976, p. 15)

Thus, it is clear that the imaginarium of utopia and paradise is entangled in the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion mentioned at the beginning of the text, which inevitably accompanies conflicts and struggles in socio-political life. The particular ideas of certain socio-political groups and forces offer a model of a different, better world (the golden age, the kingdom of God on earth); but in the end, the supposed universality of this model will always be paid for by the exclusion, stigmatization, or physical annihilation of all those who do not conform to this model. The homogenizing tendency present in the utopian and paradisiacal imaginarium, therefore, consists in collective eudaimonism, uniformity, exclusion of difference, and the possibility of change. The images of paradise, as well as of utopias, show that these are not realities accessible to everyone, but only to those who are like "us."

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