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The summer of our dissension

Victoria Moțoc



I was 20 in June 1990. A wonderful age. I was pretty, young and full of hope. Universității Square had taught me a lesson of what freedom and lack of constraints really meant. It had taught me how to laugh, how to cry, how to sing and how to rejoice. How to live during days and nights next to familiar and more often unfamiliar people, a sublime exercise of freedom. Of a ‘we cannot take it anymore’.

Even if I am not a whiner, I also cried back then when Universității Square was closed and I came to terms with the fact that the results of the May 1990 elections represented the wish of a people, which know what it wanted and which deserved its leaders. The only things left in the Square were the tents belonging to some ‘opponents’ some of them bohemian, some homeless. People who simply didn’t want to ‘go home’ yet.

Still, during the night of 12th to 13th June, the police forced its way in the tents and in the flesh of some people whose only fault had been that of ‘having hanged around there’ a little longer. They weren’t aggressive. It’s just that they were ruining ‘Romania’s image in the world’. And for this, they had been arrested and savagely beaten. And during the next morning the Square was ‘clean’ (Even today I find myself astonished by that obsessive drive towards cleansing manifested by Iliescu’s regimes, even if, psychologically, I can explain it.)

Fevi, a colleague in the Philology section, a year elder than me, told me about the abominable acts which had taken place during the respective night and I decided to go and see with my own eyes. Universității Square was surrounded by policemen. One could hardly enter in the University.

I managed to get in making use of my student license and after endless rows with a braided officer. Inside, everybody was hustling and bustling. Marian Munteanu was at the Union of Students, trying to find out how many of our colleagues had been arrested the night before.

Other mates were writing a protest meant to be passed on to the newspapers. Other colleagues were peacefully sitting down in the library, diligently preparing for the exams as if Romania had been at least the USA and the things taking place in front of their eyes a grotesque street performance which, anyway, was none of their business.

Around noon, right in front of the policemen rows, there had appeared a furious crowd which started to step by step push the policemen to the back of the Square. Then, a real fighting with bats, fists, stones, bags and sticks had been unleashed. Even if exceeding the number of their opponents, the policemen had to withdraw and the buses they came with took fire. Then, some

youngsters with incendiary bottles showed up, together with more and more people. Rain started to fall down and Marian Munteanu opened the University balcony.

I know that his message back then had been one of non-violence, calm and tranquillity. I couldn't believe that everything that was taking place at the moment was real. I found it difficult then as I do now to exactly remember their words. The only thing vibrating in my mind was this: this is a revolution! And I wanted to be part of it. I stayed with my friends at the University till late in the evening. We had no radio or TV. We had no idea of what was going on in the rest of Bucharest or in the country. We stayed at the University, helped to put out the fire on a burning bus, heard the people screaming down the streets and saw the helicopters watching over Bucharest.

During the night I went to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and I saw the first victims. They were people with broken heads, torn clothes, while the streets were full of pools of blood. One could sense a smell of smoke and tear-gas everywhere. Flames were coming out of the windows from the ground floor of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. And I was afraid. I decided to stay in the university till the next day. I had no idea that I was going to get home a lot later.

During the night we could hear gunshots. Towards three in the morning we heard people hooting and the noise made by the crowd running down Brătianu Boulevard.

At four in the morning the policemen surrounded the University and the Faculty of Architecture for a second time. It was quite. It was quite again.



The Working Class Goes Straight to Heaven

At four thirty almost five in the morning I was sitting together with Mihai, smoking a cigarette and watching outside the window towards the Square. All of a sudden, the policemen spread around the University and around the Faculty of Architecture started to withdraw and there had appeared trucks loaded with miners. I courageously watched outside the window.

A young man, probably heading to work, got out of the underground station. It was five in the morning. They jumped on him. The bats were going up and down. The miners resembled a crowd during a rugby game. When leaving, the young guy, disfigured and breathless, had his shirt completely covered in blood. I felt sick. One of the miners dragged the man's inert body and stuffed his head in a garbage bin.

Mihai grabbed my hand and said: 'Let's hide'. I started to run chaotically down the stairs inside the Faculty of Geology. We entered a lecture room. It was I, Mihai, a girl and another boy. The boys managed to break the lateral side of the lecture room and we practically submerged under the floor. We placed the wooden bits back and we waited. What for? I cannot tell. The only thing I remember is that it was dark and we were shivering and covered in dust. All our senses had been annihilated. We knew we were alive only because we were able to hear. I could hear the miners yelling, swearing and those beaten up screaming in pain, a voice pipe asking for an ambulance for Marian Munteanu.

They came to check the lecture room three times and I could feel their steps above my head thrice.

The third time, they hit the spot. They told us to get out. Two hulks grabbed me by the hands. First, I could feel the punch in the face (in the spirit of the good Romanian macho tradition), then the slapping when I tried to say something. Then the kicking down the stairs

from the second to the first floor. On the first floor, a stocky guy, with his hair cut according to the norms, grabbed my hair and started to shout: 'She's high, she's high!'

The truth is that my eyes were wide-awake. Then they started to kick me with their bats. It was on that occasion that I could discover that it is only the first one that causes pain, then your back goes numb and it is more or less bearable. Once on the ground floor, a bespectacled gentleman, probably a Professor in the Faculty of Geology, in a suicidal act of courage, threw himself in front of the miners who were dragging us, pretending that we were his students. A truncheon immediately hit his face, breaking his glasses. Blood was oozing down his cheeks among crocks.

And they threw us down the Square, in that space of death, where dozens of miners, true gladiators of the darkness, were making use of their bats and chains. They entrusted me to the crowd as if I had been a medieval witch. In order to be lynched. They gathered around me, ripped my clothes off, cut my trousers with a hatchet. And this, till two students in a police school lifted me up and made me run beyond the policemen rows who were imperturbably watching the miner-patriotic display.

I wasn't off the hook yet. I was expected by the workers and by the FSN¹-fan pensioners. They pulled my hair, poured milk on my head and they even broke a glass on my head and a miserable old man was squeaking: 'Let me hit her too, let me hit her too!' Afterwards, they placed us against a wall, while waiting for a car.

It was the first time when I was finally breathing that morning. I slowly licked the blood on my lip. I had the acute feeling that I was in one of Sergiu Nicolaescu's movies. While waiting for the car I heard a voice coming from behind. I could see out of the corner of my eyes that it was an old man dressed in a kaki raincoat. 'Why did you arrest these kids?,' he said. 'They are le-

¹ The National Salvation Front.

gionaries' the trooper who watching us quickly declared. 'Legionaries, you say', murmured the old man. 'Well, if the legionaries still existed...' he added going away. It was the first time when I could smile.

Then the patrolwaggon arrived. They took us randomly, students, passers-by, gypsies. They took us, I found this out only later, to a police station, in Măgurele. They left us in a hangar, men and women separately. They didn't give us water and we couldn't go to the toilet. They kept on threatening us that the miners were going to come. People also got beaten up, but I was spared.

That was a nightmare which taught me many things. I found out that the gypsy (excuse me, the Rromani) nation would never perish. Even if thoroughly searched by various policemen, the Rromani ladies, to be politically correct, managed to find, God knows where, a few packages of Carpați which they shared with the fellows in need. I don't want to know where they had them hidden and I don't care. I just want to use this chance to thank them for their generosity. Even more savagely beaten than me, a nice gentleman

stood in front of me while I started to cry desperately and smiled at me till he finally got a smile back. There, at Măgurele, I found out that hope dies last.

On the 15th in the morning, some gentlemen, about whom we had been told that were prosecutors, arrived. They wrote down our statements, took our front and side photos and our fingerprints. Then, again we had to wait. On the 15th at noon, all of a sudden and without any explanation, I was washed, cleaned and they bandaged my wounds. I was told that they had arrested me by accident, and then I was transported in a black car to some alley in Grozăvești.

Then, I had to undergo a week of clandestine living in a house which belonged to some friends, Marcel and Barbel. I chain-smoked Bastos cigarettes, swearing myself to leave Romania for good. I went to Austria on 1st of July, determined never to come back. I came back on 20th July. Determined never to leave for good again. At the end of the day, this is also my country, not only theirs.

Translated by Raluca Vîjîiac