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Book Review

The Bloody Flag: Postcommunist Nationalism in Eastern Europe — Spotlight on Romania by Juliana Geran Pilon. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1992, xi+89 pp. Paperback.

The Bloody Flag is a concise and lucid introduction to the twofold nature and role of resurgent nationalism in postcommunist Romania. Instead of 'postcommunism' we should rather speak of 'neocommunism' since Romania is still ruled by members of the old regime, as Robert Conquest points out in his foreword. This ruling mafia is the only one in Eastern Europe which has not been removed by democratic revolution, but which has worked hard 'to give the opposite impression – even deceiving many in the West, for whom the realities need to be firmly deployed' (foreword, p. xi). The negative aspects of nationalism include the cultivation of aggressive intolerance on behalf of 'self-defensive' group paranoia. The positive aspects of nationalism are also presented. As a reaction to Romania's experience under communism, especially during Ceauşescu's dictatorship, Romanian national identity, argues Pilon, was a unifying force associated with the national revival in the process of building an equitable liberal society.

Pilon's study begins with a succinct analysis of the philosophical roots of nationalism, which she illustrates historically. She looks at three areas: cultural aspects of a nation's experience; political aspects of national identity; and metaphysical definitions of ethnicity. In relation to these three areas Pilon goes on to invoke the legacy of Freud, who suggested that 'the aggressive chauvinistic, xenophobic, and racist brand of nationalism is a primitive stage of development – a precivilised stage' (p. 30). This is an area where her insights could be fruitfully developed. Let me suggest that, at the ethnic level, the appearance of unconscious fantasies on the part of the oppressed who defensively project guilt is by no means an occasional phenomenon which follows wars or revolutions: such fantasies are politically, economically and judicially institutionalised. The criminal does what the honourable citizen unconsciously desires to do. For instance, those responsible for Ceauçescu's hurried trial and execution benefited from general feelings of public revulsion against him. We seem to be likely to defend ourselves against 'unconscious' guilt by denying that the individual, group or nation we hate are satisfying anything but greed and arrogance while asserting our own altruistic motivation. In this context I would agree with Pilon that 'metaphysics ... precedes and sometimes promotes genocide' (p. 24)

Nevertheless, psychoanalytical studies of the causes of war are inadequate in one respect: they have failed to show how wars are to be prevented. In particular, they have failed to find an antidote to the secularisation of governmental practices and institutions, which involves atheistic competition and seems always to lead to war. Moreover, not only Judaism and Christianity but also political philosophies which tend to replace religions – especially Marxism, with its appendix 'internationalism' –

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mystify guilt and the righteousness of elites, closely associating these with an omnipotent fantasy of reparation at planetary level.

The position of Juliana Geran Pilon strikes this reviewer as being very much at arms' length. Can anyone living in America really understand the complexity, indeed the depth, of the issues involved in the whole syndrome of nationalism in the European political tradition? Nevertheless there are many positive features in *The Bloody Flag*. Pilon's study is not developed from a pedantic 'scientific' position; her analysis is firmly located in a specific European context. She refers to Rousseau's myth of primal innocence, which puts the blame for man's wickedness on the social environment in which he is nurtured. She then argues that the postcommunist trauma illustrates the malign process whereby, simply switching ideologies, politicians try 'to unify the public mind, achieving the same result as under communism' (p. 37). Developments in Yugoslavia provide a sinister example of this process. Romanian political leaders too have closely followed this pattern in their Macchiavellian attempts to justify their hold on power in the 'new regime' by antidemocratic methods.

However, Juliana Geron Pilon's analysis is less impressive when it comes to demonstrating the interplay of religious policy and nationalities policy. In particular, she does not attempt to relate Christian morality to traditional royal authority in Romania. One might point out that the Iliescu government simply ignored the fact that Romania has traditionally been a monarchy before promulgating the new Romanian Constitution which defines Romania as a republic. This is one example of the lack of legitimacy in the current constitutional framework. In this context, Pilon's analysis of the relationship between communitarianism and liberalism in present-day Romania is not accurate. She sees a link between healthy aspects of nationalism and the current attempt to reimplement the classical liberal model in Romania. In fact, it was this experimental 'liberalism' which produced the 'republican' evils of communism and neocommunism in Romania. Despite what the neocommunist 'artists' of the current Romanian Constitution may think, one should stress that both liberal citizenship and true communitarianism arise out of national identity, which is the basis of culture and spirituality in Eastern Europe; and that in Romania national identity has always been linked to the principle of constitutional monarchy.

It is interesting to note, incidentally, that monarchy was the guarantor of minority rights in Romania. This fact is perhaps what motivates sentiment for a constitutional monarchy in modern Romania. In a democracy only the individual has rights, and all individuals, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, social status and so on, have exactly the same rights. Security and stability can be achieved in Europe through full recognition of the rights of members of minority groups as equal citizens.

The Bloody Flag is an extremely useful book despite its brevity, which means that a number of important European issues remain untouched. This is understandable given the complexity and the extent of the subject. One should take into account that in the communist period the dominance of the state in Eastern Europe overshadowed the existence of market, nation and religion – indeed, it appeared often to extinguish them. Now the state is weakened, however, and market, religion and nation are burgeoning. In the West too the 'postwar consensus' granted the state a pivotal position. Here too the arrangement went into crisis and state power receded somewhat as market forces were given greater rein. Yet this 'achievement' is now itself under threat, so antifederalists in the United Kingdom argue, from the 'Bonapartist', confederation of the EU. The phenomenon of the shifting balance between the key social institutions in a medium-sized country like Romania should therefore be related to

the general transition to liberal democracy in Europe as a whole. Pilon's study is extremely valuable not only for preparing the ground for the answers, but also for asking constructive questions relevant to the building of a viable liberalism in Romania and Europe. *The Bloody Flag* is important reading for anyone interested in the national identity and the political, economic and religious regeneration of Romania after the 1989 'Stolen Revolution'.

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