

## ***Cătălin Mamali's Presentation on Manifestoes and Political Genealogies – Historical Experiments Rooted in the Manifesto of Communist Party and Civil Disobedience***

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**Sursa:** Revista Inovația Socială nr. 2/2009 (iulie-decembrie) pp. 104-106

**URL stabil:** <http://www.inovatiасociala.ro/index.php/jurnal/article/view/50>

**Publicată de:** Institutul de Cercetare a Calității Vieții

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## ***Catalin Mamali's presentation on Manifestoes and political genealogies - Historical experiments rooted in the Manifesto of Communist Party and the Civil Disobedience***

Alexandra GHEONDEA

### **Rezumat:**

*Institutul pentru Cercetarea Calității Vieții a găzduit de curând prezentarea dl. Cătălin Mamali despre Manifeste și genealogii politice. Experimente istorice înrădăcinate în Manifestul Partidului Comunist și în Civil Disobedience. Acest articol este o evaluare critică a acestei prezentări.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** Cătălin Mamali, manifeste politice

### **Abstract:**

*The Research Institute for the Quality of Life has recently hosted Catalin Mamali's presentation on Manifestoes and political genealogies. Historical experiments rooted in the Manifesto of Communist Party and the Civil Disobedience. This paper is a critical assessment of this presentation.*

**Keywords:** Cătălin Mamali, political manifestoes

The Research Institute for the Quality of Life has recently hosted Cătălin Mamali's presentation on *Manifestoes and political genealogies. Historical experiments rooted in the Manifesto of Communist Party and the Civil Disobedience*, based on previous texts from 2006 (Mamali, 2006) and 1991. Cătălin Mamali, Ph.D., is specialized in motivation and interpersonal behaviour and teaches at Loras University, Iowa. His works combine concepts from psychology and history in an effort to capture the interdisciplinary nature of motivational and interpersonal behaviour.

In his presentation on *Manifestoes and political genealogies*, Cătălin Mamali tries to answer a question of great importance to current post-communist societies: 'Why do communist mentalities and structure have such strong inertia?'. In answering this question, he analyzes 'action-oriented texts that aim to achieve macro-social changes through violent means and promote organized collective action' and argues that these texts will yield exclusivist cultural currents (or 'cultural genealogies') and thus create long-term effects on people's mentalities.

For Mamali, imagination and especially sociological imagination (Mills, 1959 cited in Mamali, 2006) comes with great responsibility, as suggested by Murakami in 'Kafka on the shore' (cited in Mamali, 2006). Thus, imagination materializes in action oriented texts that burden their author with the responsibility of their effects. The ideology of such texts is disseminated by 'cultural transmission' and so it creates and at the same time it is supported by a 'cultural genealogy'. The mechanism by which a genealogy is transmitted or passed on is called 'meme' (Dawkins, 1976/1989 cited in Mamali, 2006), a 'self-replicating element of culture, passed on by imitation' (Dawkins, 1976/1989:

120, cited in Mamali, 2006). As a particular case of this, the political genealogy is for Mamali a form of cultural genealogy which may emerge from several units of origin. Consequently, political manifestoes may be among these origins.

In this conceptual framework the causes for the communist mentality inertia are studied by considering manifestoes as independent variables in a 'natural social experiment', that is an experiment on the real world. On these grounds, two manifestoes – Marx and Engels' Manifesto of the Communist Party (MCP) and Thoreau's Civil Disobedience (CD) – are confronted against each other based on the following criteria: the level of agency (organized group or individual) and the type of means chosen to impose change (violent or peaceful). Each manifesto's impact is evaluated by theoretical estimates of the number of affiliates (high rank party members and prominent political figures for the MCP and common people and prominent political figures for the CV). Consequently, Mamali suggests that the MCP was more effective because it promoted violent means of imposing change and because agency was situated at organizational level rather than at individual level.

Despite the complexity of the chosen topic and the most interesting question it tries to answer the presentation raised some questions in connection with the means used to evaluate the proposed explanation. Cultural and political genealogies are an abstract concept and the simple presence of a cultural and political genealogy in the society is difficult to assess. Secondly, measuring the impact of a political document only by theoretical approximations of the number of members or affiliates is an arguable methodology.

On the other hand, some of the assumptions meant to support the explanation model may be questioned. For example, it is assumed that manifestoes are effective means of social change if they promote violent means. I would argue that manifestoes need not promote violent means in order to be imposed by using them because there is at least one example of a paper that could be considered a manifesto, which promoted non-violent means but was imposed, several times in history by violent means: the Bible (Munro, 1916).

Secondly, in order to consider the manifesto as an independent variable, it is assumed that none of its component ideas were present before the manifesto was released. But we know that most of the ideas were already being disseminated in different forms before the actual publication of the MCP or of the CD. Concerning the MCP, some examples would be: F. Engels, *Principles of Communism*, in Marx and Engels, 1976, cited in Jones, 2002; Moses Hess, *Kommunistisches Bekenntniss in Fragen und Antworten*, in W. Monke (ed.), *Moses Hess, Philosophische und Sozialistische Schriften 1837-1850*, 1980, cited in Jones, 2002. In CD's case, Levin (2005) shows there were many sources that pointed out Thoreau's Emersonian origin in his philosophical ideas.

Taking all these issues into consideration, the presentation was a daring and insightful approach into possible means of social change. The explanation provided for the continuity of the communist values is almost a critical realist one by attributing the success to structure – party vs. non-structured -- and agency – group vs. individual. Still the focus of the explanation provided for the impact of the Communist Manifesto and of the Civil Disobedience was on the means employed to promote change, bringing the discussion into rather machiavellic grounds.

*The paper on which Catalin Mamali's presentation was based is available upon request from the editors or the author himself.*

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