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-abstract-

The typology of the cult of personality during the
dictatorship of Nicolae Ceauşescu

1965 – 1989

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Key words: *communism, the cult of personality, the cult of the leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Stalinist source, the Maoist influence, nationalist elements, representation in the press, Elena Ceaușescu*

In the last 24 years, the ideological and sociological debates regarding the political and historical role of the former Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu, held an important role in the Romanian political speeches. The basic problems in the election campaigns have been determined by the relation to the Ceaușescu phenomenon.

In the 1990's the public space in Romania was invaded by modern visions (mythologies). This expansion of the modern visions was influenced and supported by the existence of a chaotic society and political class, by the expansion of a „western” lifestyle, as well as the development and release of multiple communication channels.

When the economic crisis started, in 2009, the phenomenon appeared again in the public space, revolving mainly around a humane communism, including the image of Nicolae Ceaușescu as a protective leader, a good Romanian.

Where did this cult of personality arise from, what sort of cult is it, what elements is it based on? This doctoral thesis attempts to find the answers to these problems.

Research methodology was based on several research methods, apart from the traditional, analytical, descriptive approach, there was also the approach in discourse, anthropological and iconological way. The research was divided into two segments: the first one refers to the setting in the frame of time of these political historical events, which influenced the evolution of the personality cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu and the second segment focused on the representation of the leader Ceaușescu in Communist press in Hungarian. The processing of the materials from the newspaper *Előre* was done with the aid of the method of analysis of attributes and enunciations and – a small part – with the aid of the quantitative analysis method.

After own research we highlighted three different tendencies in the personality cult of the Romanian leader: the first stage of cult (period 1965-1971) is highlighted by the conceptions of Stalinism (modernity, revolutionism, internationalism), the second part (1971-1974) was created by Maoist methods and ideas. (militarism, uniformization of society, total controlling of private sphere, paying homage to and glorification of the leader, etc.) In the third part (period 1974-1989) the cult of the leader Nicolae Ceaușescu became a local and nationalist phenomenon.

After the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (19th March 1965) the election of the new heir was a controversial moment: following disputes between the nationalist group (Ilie Verdeț, Paul Niculescu-Mizil, Manea Mănescu, Alexandru Drăghici, Chivu Stoica, Apostol, Maurer) and the Moscovit group (Emil Bodnărași, Dumitru Coliu, Leonte Răutu, Leontin Sălăjan) and after the internal fight in the nationalist group between Gheorghe Apostol and Nicolae Ceaușescu, the latter became the general secretary of the party. The first years of Ceausescu age were stable from the economic point of view, with tendencies of modernization and with a moderate politics towards the other Socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Paying homage to Ceaușescu had *a light form* – by the model of A. Korbonski a form of *primus inter pares* – compared to the personality cult of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, but the conceptions based on which this homage was formed were Stalinist. The events which determined the evolution and tendency of the cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu in this stage, were:

1. 1968 rehabilitation of Pătrășcanu. Following this act the image of the *just, peace loving and humanistic* leader was generated;
2. his attitude to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, in 1968. In this period the image of the leader as a *true and independent* statesman emerged. The Bucharest demonstration was a climax in the political career of the Romanian leader, received the sympathy, symbolic support of Romanians, becoming the image of freedom, of the statesman, who has the courage and character to confront the common enemy, URSS.
3. the visit of de Gaulle and Nixon. It was then that was conceived the identification of Ceaușescu as an *open leader, fighter for peace*. The invitation of the Conservative French leader and of the American president in a Communist state was a non-conventional gesture, which had a positive and significant effect on the image of Ceaușescu: there appeared in a

striking way the nationalist elements in the leader's cult and stood out the image of the politician with a global importance.

In 1970 two event took place, which had an effect on the evolution of the cult: it is about the floods all throughout the country and the visit of Ceaușescu in United States of America.

Following the attitude of the leader in the moments of disaster – travels to devastated regions, personal meetings with ordinary people, etc. – the image of the *protective leader, of true statesman* (already gained after the condemnation of Soviet invasion) became more profound.

The visit of Ceaușescu in United States of America took place in the period 13-27th October 1970, at the invitation of Richard Nixon, at the Jubilee session dedicated to the reaching of 25 years from the creation of UN. On this occasion, Ceaușescu delivered a speech, where he spoke about coexistence, national independence and about the importance of national states and their sovereignty. After this, a striking political gesture happened, which formed the image and the cult of the Romanian leader: he reproached to UN representatives their repulsive attitude towards the founding state, the People's Republic of China. The gesture of Ceaușescu was well thought, with a clear purpose, which was the purpose of becoming mediator between America and the People's Republic of China.

The visit of Ceaușescu couple in Asian countries resulted in a radical change in the evolution of the personality cult of the Romanian leader. The light form cultivated in the first part of Ceausescu age gained a deepened, rigid contour – the role of the party diminished, the glorification and homage of the general secretary received a unique character.

In Asian countries the Romanian leader was overwhelmed by the Chinese economic results and the efficiency of propaganda of parties in the People's Republic of China, North Korea etc., (North Vietnam and Mongolia) in the ideological and cultural formation of the people. After the visits to the Asian countries, followed by the theses in July, the cultural revolution of Maoist type started in Romania, which repressed any cultural autonomy, art, literature, science became a simple instrument of Ceausescu's propaganda. The economic progress in the 1970s slowed down, and the intense propaganda activity was extended in

each part of society, was continually spread and unchanged by the culture policy and the Communist educational policy.

Following the election of Nicolae Ceaușescu in the position of president of the country in 1974, the cult of the leader became *primus*. Following this act began the creation of the local model of personality cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu.

The third stage of the cult is marked by nepotism. After the flee of Ion Mihai Pacepa, the rotation of cadres accelerated, the dictator's family monopolized the power. The entrance of Elena Ceaușescu in the Permanent Office of the Executive Political Committee had an effect on the development of the personality cult, becoming an important *complementary subject* in paying homage to the Romanian leader. In 1979, the anniversary of Elena Ceaușescu was commemorated in a pompous way, she was paid homage as the image of ideal woman and mother, becoming the unique symbol of companionship.

The manifestations, the typical national festivities – such as *Cenaclul Flacăra* (*Literary Circle*), *Cântarea Românie* (*Song to Romania*), *Daciada*, etc. – had a significant role in the formation of the image of the presidential couple. *Cenaclul Flacăra*, defined as an artistic and cultural trend, launched in 1973 by the poet Adrian Păunescu, was actually a manifestation in the honour of personality cult, with a powerful nationalist tendency, which influenced the evolution of the nationalist elements in the representation of the Romanian leader.

The national festival *Cântarea României* of background was also a national cultural manifesto, but the patriotic shows, the semi-archaic symbols used in events focused on the glorification and homage to Ceaușescu kin. The key words in the formation of shows presented in *Cântarea României* were patriotism, socialist ethics, development, notions used by the nationalist rhetoric of Ceausescu.

Another event which had an important role in the formation of cult was the sports competition *Daciada*, launched in 1977.

Typical Communist manifestations such as 1th May, 23rd August – as national holiday of liberation from the Fascist yoke – received a nationalist meaning and the celebration of union of principalities under the coordination of Mihai Viteazul implemented the archaic elements in the personality cult. Following these events the typical nationalist

forms outlined in the representation of the leader such as the dignified heir, the patriot and the combination Ceaușescu-Romania.

Snow plough – an event full of archaic elements – actually had as purpose the presentation and demonstration of varieties and riches of popular culture, in each stage was focused on the justification of the nationalist politics of Ceaușescu. The ritual cultivated in the event Snow Plough, re-evaluated the traditional relationship between the child and the parent in a public way, the leader (together with Elena) taking the role of parents, role which centralized in the hypostasis of *pater universalis*.

Following these national events, the leader received a strong support based on patriotic feelings, on historical myths, support which the economic problems, appeared at the end of regime, (and, as we will see, neither the fall of dictatorship nor the consolidation of democracy in Romania) could not fully dissolve.

By own research, the analysis, interpretation, division into categories and systematization of attributes appeared in Communist press in Hungarian – *Előre* – around the abovementioned events, the representation of the leader is based on the following topos:

1. *Flawless statesman*. Ceaușescu is presented as sole *leader*, who embodies the ideology, absolute values, goals, ideas of the nation, his person guarantees political perfection.
2. *Good Communist*. In the years of illegality Nicolae Ceaușescu did not have an important role in Communist activities, this flaw was hushed up by the creation of the image of young Communist, Nicu, who could be the outstanding "forerunner" of the general secretary. This image was based on a writing of Eugen Jebeleanu published in 1936, in the magazine *Cuvântul Liber*, an article about young Nicolae, convicted to six months of detention for Communist activity.
3. *Pater universalis*. The scheme of pater leader obliging, far-sighted and wise was a basic component of personality cult. In Totalitarian systems the power had a unilateral relationship with the crowd, the leader legitimized and justified this subordinate connection. *Pater* – father of all children of the country – who entered the intimate sphere of families, received a more important role than the biological father, him (by the suggestions of intense propaganda) having a closer relationship with the children, than the

parents. The image of *pater universalis* of Nicolae Ceaușescu relied on stories with elements characteristic of fairy tale, cultivated with mass manifestations designed for children.

4. *Scientist, ideologist*. In the first stage of Ceausescu age the propaganda machine worked in the formation of these topos, the speeches of the Romanian leader were published in the books printed by Editura Politică/Political Publishing House. The climax in the formation of these topoi was the awarding of the academic title in 1985.

5. *All-side developed person*. The representation was the extension of the topos *scientist*, who had an overall vision not only in ideological, scientific problems, but also in economic and social problems. The topos appeared following the Maoist influence, after the theses of July.

6. Nationalist topos – *dignified heir, patriot, combination Ceaușescu-Romania* – appeared after the election of Nicolae Ceaușescu in the position of president. In the 1980s, after the speech of the Romanian leader delivered in Mangalia, the nationalist elements became the foundation in the cult of the Romanian dictator. In the years of *Golden Age* full with serious economic problems, the use and cultivation of mythic, archaic, nationalist symbols in the personality cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu assured mass support.

7. *the great architect*. The architect, the constructor, the builder, the creator – notions which have transcendental meaning (but also dogmatic), on which can be founded a symbolic connection, a connection which guarantees the legitimacy of the regime and at the same time the transformation of the state by the conceptions of the dictator, is a way of preserving the signature of the founder. The topos of Ceaușescu, as *great architect* began in the first stage of Ceausescu Age, culminating in the 1980s with the construction of the channel (1984, Danube-Black Sea Channel) and Casa Poporului (People's House).

8. *Fighter for peace*. It was based on the role of the leader in global politics, appeared in the 1970s – following his attitude in 1968, when Ceaușescu received a positive global political appreciation –, in *Golden Age* years, after the worsening of the internal policy situation and economic problems, this positive appreciation disappeared. After the visit of president George Bush (1983), the emphasis of the important role of the Romanian leader in global politics deepened and in the last years of the regime (following perestroika) maximized.

The Romanian propaganda machine started around the anniversary of the dictator. Gradually, the family holiday subscribed the role, importance and measure of party events. 26th January in the history of Romanian communism became a memorable date, being commemorated in more and more pompous and exuberant way, lasting for several days in the country. In 1985 the anniversary of the leader in the newspaper *Előre* lasted for 5 days, on 25th January the name/title of the dictator appeared for fifty-three times, on 26th January it appeared for one hundred thirty-three times, on 27th January it appeared for one hundred thirty-six times, (on 28th January the newspaper did not appear), on 29th January for one hundred and thirty-seven times, on 30th January for seventy-eight times, all in all the name/title of the dictator appeared for five hundred thirty-seven times (537).

The image of Elena Ceaușescu was conceived by the image of the ideal Communist woman, after the 1980s the representation of Elena received a nationalist substratum. The representation of Elena Elenei in Communist press, in Hungarian, is as follows:

1. *Revolutionary and companion*. She appeared as companion of Nicolae Ceaușescu in the fight for the triumph of Communist revolution, as equal partner in revolutionary fight during illegality.
2. *Party leader*. After the election of Elena Ceaușescu in the Permanent Office in 1977, the personality cult of Elena, her homage as politician intensified.
3. *Scientist and fighter for peace*. The role of Elena in scientific life was connected with her role in the fight for global peace. Just like Nicolae Ceaușescu, she was decorated several times, received many scientific titles.
4. *Mater universalis*. The topos *mater universalis* was complementary to the topos of Nicolae Ceaușescu, as *pater universalis*. She had the same role, just as the dictator.

The cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu and Elena Ceaușescu had an important effect, a turning point role in the life of several generations, the result was assured by its permanence and extension in each part of society. But, apart from that, the success of the personality cult was also secured by the support of popular masses, the acceptance of these topoi suggested by propaganda, which can be found even today in contemporary mentalities.

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