

UNIVERSITATEA „BABEȘ-BOLYAI” CLUJ-NAPOCA

FACULTATEA DE ISTORIE ȘI FILOSOFIE

Școala Doctorală

„Studii de populație și Istoria Minorităților”

**Between ideology and propaganda: the
Romanian press in the '80s**

Ph. D Thesis Summary

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Cluj-Napoca, 2017

Summary

| | |
|--|-----|
| INTRODUCTION | 4 |
| 1. Propaganda as a means of concealing the reality | 22 |
| 1.1. Politics and propaganda: general theories | 22 |
| 1.2. Propaganda and the beginnings of the communist regime in România | 30 |
| 1.3. Directions of the propaganda during Ceaușescu's regime | 38 |
| 1.4. Propaganda's mechanism during the „Golden Age” | 49 |
| 2. The Romanian press during the '80s – the quantitative dimension | 61 |
| 3. From the limited liberalism to the dictatorship: the '65s -'70s versus the '80s -'89s reflected into the press | 72 |
| 4. „The external danger” during „Ceaușescu's Age” | 92 |
| 4.1. Representation of the alterity – „we” and „others” | 92 |
| 4.2. „Good” and „Bad”/East și West: imperialism, „agenturi străine” and spies în the '80s written press | 100 |
| 5. The critique of the capitalist society | 123 |
| 6. The peace and disarmament fight– universal wish or propaganda speech? | 139 |
| 7. The „multilaterally developed socialist society”- between truth and propaganda fiction | 151 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 8. Propaganda and family. The press and the the ideal situations of the family during communism | 171 |
| 9. The personality cult and propaganda: Ceaușescu – the „father” and the „son” of the Romanian people | 204 |
| 10. The „Cinema” Magazine – between culture and propaganda | 227 |
| 11. The foreign press about România during the '80s | 245 |
| 12. „Today în Timișoara, tomorrow in all the country” ! Propaganda in the press from dictatorship to democracy | 259 |
| 12.1. From censorship to free speech: being journalist before and after 1989. Memorialistic aspects | 269 |
| 13. Aspects of the propaganda in the local press from România during the '80. Study case: „Steaua Roșie” newspaper from Tîrgu-Mureș | 278 |
| CONCLUSIONS..... | 289 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 299 |
| ANEXES..... | 305 |

Keywords: communism, Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu, the press, propaganda, enemies of the people, the people comrades, the struggle for peace, a new man, the cult of personality, cinema, foreign media, the Genius of the Carpathians, etc.

The paper proposes a systematic study on the phenomenon of propaganda of the last decade of totalitarianism in the communist Romania during 1980-1989.

The various interpretations given to propaganda in different periods of history, the career recorded by the propaganda phenomenon in totalitarian regimes, as well as in democratic regimes, suggest the complexity of the proposed phenomenon for analysis. As a result, the research of propaganda, as reflected in the Romanian press from 1980-1989, the theme of this study, is a complex approach, both as a research methodology and as an interpretation.

In order to have a better illustration of the differences between propaganda and reality, we studied the Romanian press from 1980-1989, such as: „Scînteia”, „Scînteia Tineretului”, „România Liberă”, „Lumea”, „Femeia”, „International Week”, „Cinema”, „Red Sta”r, but also the Western press: „L'Unità”, „La Stampa” or „The New York Times”.

In order to emphasize the magnitude of the propaganda phenomenon of the communist regime, we decided to detail our research in several chapters, each subject or theme illustrating the propaganda mechanisms used in the written press.

The first chapter of our thesis aims to present some theories regarding the propaganda, but also the psychology of the masses or groups. Starting from Jacques Ellul's statement that „no individual should be allowed to recover, to gather, to remain untouched by the magic wand of propaganda. It is based on a slow and steady impregnation”¹ we notice that propaganda is far more than a manipulation of the human brain. It must act in accordance with the interests not only of the propagandists, but also the environment in which it will be applied.

One of the tools used by propaganda is the promise of a brighter future, given that, psychologically, the man is inclined to give credence to those who will provide the best vision about a great future ahead. Not only that it will make the man to act according to the interests of propaganda, but phrases like the "truth is on our side," will make people to be confident that following the steps imposed by the propaganda, soon will be in possession of the absolute truth.

¹ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda. The formation of men's attitudes*, Vintage Books, New York, 1973, p.17.

Another propaganda theorist, Edward Bernays, which studied the manipulation of ideas, considers „that our minds are molded, tastes are formed; our ideas are suggested, largely by men who we have never heard about.”², so propaganda has the ability even to influence the decisions that people take. Decisions often mean choosing between several options available to man, but even those can be proposed by the propaganda, giving the illusion that people have control over their choices. Control, therefore, is an illusion maintained by certain sociological and psychological mechanisms. On the other hand, Serge Moscovici³ and Gustave LeBon⁴ deal, among other things, with another feature of propaganda, that of being useful both on the individual and / or groups.

Alfred McClung Lee and Elizabeth Briant Lee⁵ proposed for a better study of propaganda, a set of indicators/techniques that reveal the secrets of propaganda. As a result we have: the „bandwagon”, the „glittering generality”, the „transfer”, the „labeling”, the „selective presentation of information”, the „testimony”, „plain folks”, which will be analyzed on our research among other propaganda’s mechanisms.

The chapter II presents the press from a quantitative perspective highlighting the changes that the communist regime has brought to the way the newspapers are working. We redirect our attention in the study on the most important publications of that time, presenting some aspects of the history of the publications, testimonies-interviews of those who participated in the formation of the party newspapers, former journalists' experiences, or editors. We also noted the juridical component of the press, the Press Law, whereby, in practice, Romanian publications were subjected to the regime, adding more and more accentuated the censorship in the last years of communism.

Chapter III considers to present through newspaper articles, how over several years those Romania knows an openness with the world, after 1968, and then, in the late '70s falls into a profound isolation. For this chapter, we studied the press during the years 1965-1980, making a comparison on how the propaganda changes its strategies in the next period of the years 1980-1989. Starting from the „Prague Spring”, Romania took advantage of the moment to gain reputation on the international stage and aimed to promote Nicolae Ceausescu as a Communist

² Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*, Routledge, U.K, 1928, p. 9.

³Serge Moscovici, *Psihologie socială sau mașina de fabricat zei*, Polirom, Iași, 1997.

⁴ Gustav Le Bon, *Psihologia mulțimilor*, Antet, București, 2012, (1895).

⁵ Alfred McClung Lee and Elizabeth Briant Lee, *Fine Art of Propaganda*, Harcourt, Brace and Company Inc., 1939.

leader with a human face. The newspapers of this period are characterized by a propaganda which supports the Czechoslovak actions, „the durability and the vitality friendship of the Romanians and Czech-Slovaks was reaffirmed during this last week, when in the Socialist Czech-Slovak Republic happened important event, in this times when Czechoslovak people felt, perhaps more urgently than in other circumstances, the need for international support”⁶, and the right of people to rule themselves, or the not intervention among internal affair policy.

We note that in the '65s -'75s articles, peace is not achieved because of the leader's genius, as suggest by the propaganda in the 80s, but through proper conduct and by an attitude that promotes cooperation and harmony between states. It also originates from official speeches that by choosing the road of socialism peoples have the greatest chance not only to develop, but also to advance in this policy of pacifism. The newspapers articles promote rather the path of socialism and the Party or Nicolae Ceausescu's image, presenting this as being the tools that people must use to advance on this pat, the personality cult being less relevant.

The fourth chapter of our thesis aims to present how the propaganda used the written press to highlight the differences between the communist and the capitalist society, and creating an image of a credible „external threat”. The „external danger”, which is always an imperialist, exploitative bourgeois, capitalist, etc., manifests even stronger, as is shown in the newspaper articles, because of the communist successes which represented the culmination of the „Ceausescu's Era” in Romania. Articles present, for example, the fast and high development of the cities, „In nine days as much as in time in a year”⁷, or information the impressive harvest in agriculture, „Double harvesting on all surfaces planned”⁸, all the successes having the same cause, namely the „Ceausescu's Era”, *the richest era from the sociologically and economically point of view.*

Romanian education, research, sports or the arts is also frequently seen in the communist newspapers as being overstated and even the cultural creations emphasis the superiority of the Romanian people due to its leader and of the years of prodigious government of the country: „We address from the heart [...] the warmest feelings of love and gratitude for everything you

⁶ *Solidaritate frățească* în „Lumea”, 25 iulie 1968, p. 6.

⁷ George – Radu Chirovici și Gheorghe Cîrstea, *În nouă zile cât într-un an întreg*, în „Scînteia”, 5 iulie 1985, p. 1 .

⁸ *Culturi duble pe toate suprafețele planificate*, în „Scînteia”, 5 iulie 1985, p. 1.

have done and do for the good of our people [...].”⁹ It took place, at the same time, a demonization of „the others” which, above all, it had the intention to make the reader to be convinced that money or libertinism is indeed the greatest harm possible. The foreign education system is described, like all capitalist systems, being pointless because the only thing it does is to manufacture unemployed people and, ultimately the poor people have no access to education or health services.

The Westerners lived, however, in the eyes of the Romanian propaganda, the effects of a capitalist economy, a rapacious and selfish system. „Scînteia” newspaper published fragments, sometimes out of context, from newspapers like „Times”, „Wall Street Journal, etc., which drew attention to the economic and social problems, and the Romanian titles¹⁰ suggested within an almost enthusiastic way the „horrors” of capitalist life.

This society described by the Romanian media which is about to self destruct is the theme of the fifth chapter of our thesis. Using articles from the foreign press, sometimes out of context, propaganda exposed the image the Western world, the capitalist world, a society hostile to man. There are highlighted problems such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness, the suffering of children who cannot afford to enroll in schools etc. However, the main idea was shaping the image of the countries where policies are made in favor of the rich, not to the population. Thus, an article stated: „The rich are becoming richer - the poor poorer. A conclusion is that the capitalist world realities bring them beyond the deceptive fascination of the shop windows [...].The Economic crisis, with all its implications like unemployment, recession, inflation, monetary crisis, does nothing to put out the blatant inequities in the social, economic, cultural department which characterized the capitalist order”¹¹. The description of this society must have been quite suitable for that the reader to conclude that despite the shortcomings, life in capitalist societies is the hardest, and secondly, not to cross their mind that emigration in capitalist states would be a good idea.

The sixth chapter deals with the theme of peace, a theme that becomes an obsession for the „Age of Ceausescu”. The theme of peace is found not only in the press but even in textbooks,

⁹ Agerpres, *Manifestări politico - educative și cultural – artistice consacrate împlinirii a 20 de ani de la la IX –lea Congres al partidului*, în „Scînteia”, 5 iulie 1985, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Realități dramatice ale societății bazate pe exploatare, inechitate și discriminări*, în „Scînteia”, 27 februarie 1988, p. 6.

¹¹ Mariana Săsărman, *Grupaj Realitățile vorbesc*, în „Scînteia”, 24 ianuarie 1980, p. 6.

speeches during certain events, parades dedicated especially to pacifism, etc. The fight for peace involves the whole population including women and children, scientists, actors etc. An example of a fighter for peace would not be other than Nicolae Ceausescu himself and the press exposed this wonderful example: „Animate by your marvelous example we express our pledge to act [...] for unswerving implementation of both domestic and foreign policy of the party and State defense of peace – the of all mankind.”¹²

We learn also that policies on disarmament and peace were not developed by groups of specialists, researchers, diplomats or politicians, but by the *cunning mind* of the leader Nicolae Ceausescu.

The seventh chapter aims to highlight how, through press articles, propaganda try to shape the new society, a „new man”. As a result, the „new man” appeared as a prototype of the Communist worker, a party activist, a mother or a working woman etc., whilst promoting a certain kind of thinking, behavior or attitudes towards the surrounding events.

One of the first steps in the establishment of the new society was obeying to the instructions coming from the precious Head of State, not because workers do not have the necessary knowledge, but because Ceausescu proved of having a vision with a deep humanitarian understanding. Devotion to the humanity cause was one of the personality traits which were promoted by propaganda as defining the new society. This commitment should be emulated by all members of society who participated, ultimately, to thrive of the communist society.

The eighth chapter complements the previous one and is focused on exposing the ideal family prototype, as propaganda promoted it. For this section we used in addition to mainstream media, magazine articles from a magazine called „Femeia”. We wanted to highlight how using print media, propaganda attempted to impose a particular vision about the role of women in the communist society.

Propaganda by press articles had created a dichotomy of the concept of woman, so we have, as a result, the communist women and the Western woman. For instance, Western woman was absorbed by herself, putting herself before the others. She was the woman without political concerns or patriotic concerned meanwhile the socialist woman was interested in the society development and had civic-political activities. The communist woman besides feminine

¹² Virgiliu Tătaru, *Pacea, voință supremă a întregului popor român*, în „Scînteia”, 2 iulie 1985, p. 3.

qualities, had to have a socio-political education, be aware of the events surrounding herself and „consider that advices and the exhortations of the Party General Secretary, Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu is a call to all the sons of this country, to the millions women of these regions, to ensure harmony, strength and youth of the nation, the love of family and children, the homeland responsibility for the future of the people.”¹³

The ninth chapter shows how the cult of personality was manifested even through newspaper articles which helped creating image of Nicolae Ceausescu. It can be seen in the press that the president's personality cult propaganda raised especially in the days before his re-election to the Head of the country or even on the occasion of unusual anniversaries or lesser importance ones. The fight against the imperialists, the fascists and other enemies of socialism were given special attention, being a time when the cult of personality received particular interest.

The so called spontaneity of the people on appreciation for Nicolae Ceausescu is highlighted in an excerpt as follows: „ People who always finds memorable, meaningful and inspired to voice his most precious beliefs, concentrated the idea of unity of entire nation around its leader, in three broad reverberation emotional words: the Party - Ceausescu - Romania.”¹⁴ Worshiping the leader by the masses of people has a dual purpose, firstly, outsourcing, for capitalists who considered the Ceausescu regime being a disastrous one and for the other socialist states, and secondly, internally, they wanted to promote the idea as which the leader is loved by most of the population.

The tenth chapter's subject is the „Cinema” magazine , propaganda bearing more and more present, many of the movies were debating social and political themes that praises Nicolae Ceausescu's achievements. The „new man” is created thought art too, including the cinema, with ideologically - political movies which are seen as having a strong educational role.

For example, the Party activist was in some way one of the faces of the „new man”, because first of all, the „ new man” will be an example of promoting communist principles. The „Cinema” magazine supported the propaganda, by the mission which has been established to it, namely that of highlighting the fact that progress of the communist society means the progress of

¹³ Silvia Netcu, *Înaltă îndatorire patriotică pentru asigurarea vigoriei și tinereții națiunii noastre*, în „Femeia”, 1984, nr.4, p. 2.

¹⁴ Alexandru Cebuc, *Ctitorind România prezentă, întemeind România viitoare* în Almanah *Săptămîna*, 1986, p. 15.

the cinema. However, it is often noted that everyone from scriptwriters, directors to actors, were tasked to spread through their cinematic message the progress of socialist societies.

The chapter eleven of my thesis aims to presents the foreign press and foreign media image regarding in Romania's society in the '80s. Foreign media gives us a picture of a society in collapse, despite all the attempts of the Romanian media and propaganda to portray a perfect and healthy Romania, it can be noticed the advanced stage of the disease. Indeed, it in the foreign press the real image of a sick and suffering country who has lost the charm of the past époque, when it was called the „Granary of Europe” and the capital was dubbed the „Paris of the East”.

A real land of natural wealth which, in the front of everyone turns, under the direction of a dictator, into a barren land and not only the economic system or agriculture were considered unproductive, but also were lacking the intellectual stimuli. An educational system that no long ago offered the efficiency, with which Romanians were known everywhere, turns into a system of indoctrination and a health system that boasts that offer free care for the people, but is poorly equipped and outdated. What was already part of the daily routine for the Romanians: the economy shortages, the censorship of culture etc., were among the topics most discussed and presented to the free society by the Western media.

The twelfth chapter focused on the last days of Ceausescu's regime in Romania and the first days of the free press. We had in view, in this chapter, not only the latest numbers of the central party newspapers, but also testimonies of those who were in the editorial offices of the publications when the communist regime fell. The memorial aspects give us an insight into how journalists reacted, the formation of new editors, and the attempt to recover the press under the auspices of communist dictatorship.

The last chapter, XIII, was developed as a case study of the local press, Mures, through the newspaper "Steaua Rosie". This case study, as well as the study of the local presses wishes to complement the image of the press from 1980-1989, offering a wider view of the publications in Romania. On the one hand, the study of the local press showed us that the publications in question had two main directions: information of national interest and of local interest, which was normal for those period standards. On the other hand, we consider important to recall that local information was given greater importance, larger spaces, while those of national interest were reduced to smaller spaces, often taken over from the central press. At the same time, we noticed a relaxation of the language, the texts being often devoid of consecrated communist

expressions, had a reader-oriented language, these being in the articles referring directly to Nicolae Ceausescu or P.C.R.

This paper addresses those who are interested in the history of communism, Romanian communism and can be seen also as an analysis, exercise or as a case study of the 80's Romanian press. Also it is not an exhaustive work and represents a data processing, radiography of the Romanian press, but it can be considered a starting point for future research regarding the mechanisms of propaganda during communism. It can also be considered a study for deepening the information related to the history of communism, useful both researchers and the general public.

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