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TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT

***THE PARADIGM OF WITCHCRAFT IN A COMMUNIST CONTEXT.
SHAPING A SUBCULTURE BETWEEN ILLEGALITY AND TOLERANCE***

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The doctoral thesis *The Paradigm of Witchcraft in a Communist Context* explores the phenomenon of witchcraft during the communist regime in Romania, analyzing how magical practices survived and coexisted with the official ideology of scientific atheism. The phenomenon of witchcraft during the communist regime in Romania is a fascinating topic, given the tension between the regime's official ideology – scientific atheism – and the persistence of magical practices among the population. During this period, the communist regime tried to build a modern society, based on science and rationality, in which traditional beliefs and practices considered "superstitious" were seen as an obstacle to progress. However, witchcraft not only survived, but managed to adapt and manifest itself in new contexts, sometimes even coexisting with the official structures of the regime. The communist regime in Romania, established after World War II and consolidated under the leadership of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and later Nicolae Ceaușescu, promoted atheism as part of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Religion, in general, was marginalized, and the church was under strict control. In this context, witchcraft was labeled as a retrograde practice, incompatible with the ideals of a modern and scientific society. However, these magical practices were deeply rooted in Romanian popular culture, and passed down from generation to generation. They represented both a form of cultural resistance and a practical solution for individuals seeking answers and solutions to everyday difficulties, especially in a repressive political and economically precarious context.

The aim of the research is to understand the role of witchcraft in communist society, the impact on local communities and the response of the authorities. Although officially discouraged, witchcraft continued to be practiced covertly, especially in rural areas, where traditions had a strong influence. In cities, the phenomenon has adapted, sometimes integrating elements of modern discourse. Witchcraft practices, such as reading books, incantations, fortune telling, and protection rituals, remained popular among people who felt the need for emotional support or control in an unsafe environment.

In some cases, these practices have attracted the attention and tacit collaboration of local officials. There are testimonies of Communist Party leaders turning to witches to solve personal problems, which demonstrates a separation between official discourse and individual behavior.

In terms of methods, the study uses an interdisciplinary approach, combining the analysis of archival documents, witness accounts and contemporary bibliography. The structure of the research is divided into three levels. The first consisted of direct interviews, which involved fieldwork. The second level concerned clerical attitude, which led us to study in the archives of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj. The third level of research was that of the courts of law from which we were able to deduce the position of the authorities in relation to this phenomenon. From the point of view of secular legislation, we would consider the penal code before and after its change in 1968 (witchcraft falls under the penal code, being considered a crime by deception). Regarding the position of the administrative authorities against the magical phenomenon, we conducted research in the Archives of the Turda Court, the Archive of the Dej Court and the Cluj Tribunal Archive. The propaganda of the authorities, the intervention of the Securitate and the militia in detecting and observing the practitioners, their recruitment and collaboration with the Securitate is the primary hypothesis from which our research started, and for this we have extended our research area in the CNSAS Archives and the National Archives of Cluj - fund 13, the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, the Propaganda and Agitation Section 1921-1976 and fund 209, Cluj Militia Inspectorate 1942-1975, inv.1171 - Ministry of Internal Affairs. General Directorate of the Militia. In the archives of the CNSAS I studied the file of the priest E.M. whose case I first identified in the files of the Diocesan Consistory in the archive of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj and which for me became one of the two case studies presented in the paper. We also obtained additional information by accessing the Supervised Romania fund on the CNSAS website, where declassified information from the communist period is made available to the public. The structure of the documentary material (the position of the church and the position of the authorities) also determined the structure of the work, the religious and secular plane, or in other words the way in which magic was received in everyday social realities.

The research has very slight extensions of historiographical time, with reference to some articles and memoirs from the interwar period, otherwise we remain on the 1950-1989 time axis. As far as the research area is concerned, I have limited myself to the Transylvanian area, from where I have

gathered the oral information from the villages of Meseșeni de Sus and Meseșenii de Jos, from Sălaj County, the village of Luncoi, Hălmagiu, Băraști, the town of Brad in Hunedoara, and the town of Cugir. I used semi-structured interviews as well as free dialogues such as life stories. In approaching this information from the historical interviews personal aspects must be taken into account the avatars of the long-term memory of the interlocutors as well as the fictionalized dimension of memory through which we understand *the ways in which each person rewrites his personal history in the act of storytelling*¹. Our experience was strictly narrative, the statements of the interlocutors were mostly self-referential, but we also collected referential ones that can have different fictional degrees. Despite the fact that the subject of magic has been treated by many researchers and is still of interest, the angle from which it has been researched this time is absolutely new.

The research showed that witchcraft continued to be practiced, despite pressure from the communist authorities, being perceived as both an act of cultural resistance and a source of spiritual support. Witches had to reinvent themselves in order to survive in this hostile context. They began to use language that did not contradict the regime's ideology or provide an acceptable justification for their activities. For example, some witches presented their practices as "natural remedies," avoiding explicit associations with the supernatural.

At the same time, witchcraft continued to be a space of individual freedom and symbolic resistance against the regime. In a society where state control was ubiquitous, these practices offered a spiritual and cultural alternative that escaped the control of the authorities. Witchcraft practices had a dual role: on the one hand, they satisfied the spiritual needs of the population, and on the other hand, they functioned as a mechanism of community solidarity. In a regime that discouraged trust between individuals and encouraged denunciation, these rituals created bonds of trust between participants, giving them a sense of belonging. Throughout our research we have found magic in almost every aspect of life. We have analyzed it over forty years as much as the archives have allowed us. The interviews revealed the coexistence of these two planes of the real and the magical in the minds of individuals. The theory can be supported that secularization created that diffuse Christianity sensitive to the intrusion of parallel religions, but from our research we have observed how the vitality of magic has not been diminished by any political or religious aspect. It

¹ Bogdan Neagotă, *Fictionalization and Mythification in Oral Prose*, Ileana Benga (coord.) *Rustic magic. Magical Imagery and Practices in Popular Cultures*, Orma, vol. 4 2005, p. 82-89

remained constantly lived in the forty years studied, and the reasons for resorting to magic arose from the same troubles, illness or unhappiness. Despite the scientific atheist propaganda with which the communist regime intoxicated society, its failure probably underscores the limits of an ideological system that focused exclusively on the material dimension of existence. Magic, whether seen as an expression of traditional beliefs or as a symbol of the human spirit, represents something that cannot be completely defeated because it transcends the boundaries of rationality and ideology. Traditional practices (incantations, talismans, rituals) have been reinterpreted to fit the political and ideological context. The communist authorities considered witchcraft as a vestige of "backwardness" and a threat to social modernization. Sometimes, wizards were arrested or subjected to investigations. However, witchcraft was also a form of cultural resistance, preserving traditions and collective identity.

The thesis demonstrates that witchcraft in communism was more than an occult practice, representing a subtle form of opposition to the totalitarian regime and a way of maintaining cultural identity. The survival of witchcraft during the communist regime reflects the resilience of popular culture in the face of a repressive ideology. The adaptability of these practices, as well as their paradoxical coexistence with the official ideology, underlines the complexity of the interactions between the state and society. Witchcraft not only survived, but became a symbol of the continuity of traditions in an era marked by radical changes and attempts at cultural uniformity.

The work explores how witchcraft survived and adapted in the communist regime when spiritual and religious practices were often marginalized or forbidden. The intersection between culture, popular belief and official ideology is analyzed. During communism, the regime promoted atheism and rationalism, discouraging religious practices and superstitions. However, witchcraft continued to play a role in the life of rural and urban communities, often being practiced clandestinely. Sorcerers and folk healers operated discreetly, often under the guise of "traditional therapies" or "natural remedies".

Witchcraft responded to a variety of needs – from personal problems (love, health) to attempts to navigate the socio-economic difficulties imposed by the regime.

Despite ideological pressures, witchcraft has remained a living phenomenon, demonstrating the ability of popular culture to adapt and survive. The communist regime, in its attempt to eradicate such practices, paradoxically contributed to their maintenance, since people clung to beliefs as a form of psychological and social stability.

