

The Role of Communist Censorship in Altering
Romanian Identity. Case Study: Preserving the
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CASE STUDY: PRESERVING THE IMPOSED IDEOLOGY
BY CONTROLLING THE PAST**

DANIEL IONICĂ¹

Abstract

Censorship is one of the most important defense mechanisms of an ideology and the political system within a state. By controlling information sources the censors must ensure the optimal operation of the system they defend. Censorship as a social reality appeared along with the apparition of books, although institutionalized censorship occurred after the invention of printing, which gave rise to the need for such control. Depending on the type of society that created it, censorship can take various forms, from a minimal role in the case of some societies to a leading role in others. Some forms of censorship existed and still exist regardless of the ideological nature of the state we are referring to. In addition to the State's need to restrict a society's access to information, similar measures can come from other institutions such as social, religious or economic establishments. After the imposition of the Soviet political model in the countries of Eastern Europe, State imposed censorship marked tight control especially in the first decade of communist power. In the People's Republic of Romania, as in the other soviet satellite-states, censorship was performed with the intention of blocking certain ideas from the reader, ideas supposed undesirable by a government which feared that its venture to create the new man in a new type of society could be disturbed by disparate forms of dissidence. Censorship in Communist Romania wasn't only a mean to suppress ideas and retaining its hegemony, but also a way of modeling people into approved templates by the political authority.

***Keywords:** Communism, Romania, censorship, manipulation, propaganda.*

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“We can not let this activity to chance. Freedom, liberty, but everywhere there is some control over all publications. There is a ministry of information, worldwide, which gives authorization to suspend a newspaper which made a mistake or sues it. That doesn’t mean you’re never held accountable. There must be a state body vested with such powers.”² (NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU³)

Introduction

Censorship occurs when the political power, various pressure groups or individuals impose their own political or moral values on the public by suppressing words, images or ideas that they find unacceptable or irregular to the customary pattern.

Censorship is the restriction on what people can say, write, hear, read or see. It can affect both books, newspapers, magazines, movies, radio broadcasting, TV, speeches, music, sculpture, paintings, photographs and other arts.

Censorship can occur in various ways; thus it can be done before a certain work is made available to the public. For example, when a publisher refuses to publish a book, a film company rejects a script or a museum does not support an exhibition on the basis of existing internal rules regarding this matter. The act of censorship can also be performed after the work has already been published: a book may be withdrawn from bookstores, an album from music stores, a film could be shown edited down in the cinema or a play can be banned after a few showings.⁴

² All translations from Romanian into English are my own.

³ After the decision of dissolving the current censorship institution that was due later that year (11th of October 1977), Nicolae Ceaușescu calls for a new establishment responsible with information control and dissemination. Excerpt from the 13th of September 1977 transcript of the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party Meeting.

⁴ Examples in this types of scenarios are all so present both in authoritarian regimes in particular and democratic regimes in a lesser extent and are too numerous and diverse to be presented here, I recommend Nora Gilbert’s *Better Left Unsaid: Victorian Novels, Hays Code Films, and the Benefits of Censorship* (2013) and Mette Newth’s *The Long History of Censorship* (2010) which dwell further in

In some countries, criticism to the ruling power or the expression of association to a particular set of values is illegal. On the 10th of December 1948, the UN adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in which we find among the fundamental human rights the freedom of expression. Article 19 of that document states:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”⁵

Censorship suppresses human expression. Throughout recorded history, rulers and religious leaders have abused their powers to forbid speech, writing, and images they considered a threat to their authority or contrary to divine will⁶. Censorship also means manipulating the information people are allowed to receive, including creating official messages that are thrust upon the population. A third form of censorship is secrecy; all governments label some information secret and try to prevent its publication.

The relationship between censorship and the ideology it supports comes originates in ancient times, each society has had its culture, anathemas, or regulations that controlled communication, sexual expression, religious compliance, and even clothing. For example, in the Greek states, where democracy first appeared, censorship was known as a means of imposing the prevailing dogma. Indeed, Plato was the first thinker who formulated a justification for intellectual, religious, and artistic censorship. The ideal condition described in the *Republic*, official censors forbade mothers and nurses to tell stories considered bad or evil

the ever changing spectrum of censored material based on the immediate political, social, economic and religious needs that a society has.

⁵ The full text of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is available online on the U.N. official website at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a19> website accessed on the 15th of January 2015.

⁶ See Frank Caso, *Global Issues: Censorship*, (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), 10.

to the children they took care of⁷. Plato also proposed that inconsistent notions about the gods continue to be treated as crimes and should be established formal procedures to suppress heresy. Freedom of expression in ancient Rome was reserved for those in positions of authority. Poets such as Juvenal and Ovid were exiled, and the writings of various authors who instigated revolt were punished severely. Emperor Nero is known that after acquiring power deported his critics and burned their books.

Censorship is the suppression of freedom of expression and the forms of communication that can be considered dangerous, unacceptable or undesirable by most of the people and exercised by a government, media or other control mechanism (Wierzbicki 1996, 24).

According to Jonathon Green the operational issue is power – establishing and maintaining control includes limiting and denying information; barring debate and criticism; hedging – even thwarting – freedom of expression through constitutional exceptions; and empowering police and security agencies to impede individuals and media organizations from exercising these freedoms.⁸

In every country, the common link of censorship is the retention of power. Most obviously, this is played out on the national level for reasons that are as various as the types of government in the world. It may be because a dictator, such as Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union or Adolf Hitler in Germany (both of whom eliminated members of their own political parties), brooks no opposition or because a president seeks reelection or to strengthen the chances of his party in an upcoming election (Caso 2008, 11).

Censorship therefore is not a phenomenon specific to communist regimes. Romania had its fair share of censorship before the Soviet Army entered the country in 1944. The Church was responsible for censorship in the Romanian territories during the Middle Ages. Both in

⁷ To be consulted Plato, *The Republic*, XI. *The Guardian's Duties – Primary Education of the Guardians: Censorship of Literature for School Use*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 115.

⁸ See Jonathon Green and Nicholas Karolides, *Encyclopedia of Censorship*, (New York: Facts of File, 2005), 16.

Transylvania under Habsburg administration and in Wallachia and Moldavia, most written works were affected by measures designed to protect the religious faith. The censorship was reduced to a list of banned books which were deemed as blasphemous.⁹

The role of censorship will increase as more are more printing presses are established in the Romanian lands, the custom houses had the power to stop foreign newspapers from entering the country despite the fact that the subscribers were major landowners. During the Russian occupation after the 1832 war between the Ottoman Empire and the Czarist Empire, the censorship becomes official and better organized by replicating the Russian model in Wallachia and Moldavia. After the 1859 Union and the Independence War of 1877 the censorship will be used sporadically; secularism and the increased freedoms to writers, journalists and artists made for a rather fertile period for the Romanian intellectual elite. This epoch lasted roughly until 1938, having its ups and downs during wars, revolts etc.

The newly installed power between 1944 and 1945 with the indispensable help of the Red Army need a spokesperson through which to attract the masses given that Romanians always came across as anticommunists¹⁰ and Russophobes¹¹ At the same time, because this message was not to be "interrupted" or "jammed" by dissent opinions, the Communist Party did everything in his power, to suppress other establishments that did not serve the Party's interests by what they were writing, broadcasting or advertising.

⁹ One such list is the 1669 Index – *The false books which ought not to be kept and read by the Christian believers (Cărțile ceale mincinoase, pre care nu se cade a le ținea și a le citi drept credincioșii Hristiani).*

¹⁰ Romania was a fertile ground for far-right movements during the interwar era; fascist political parties such as the Iron Guard have always been appreciated by the masses through consistent electoral results. Political views that advocated communist ideals such as collectivization, internationalism and secularism failed to make an impression in a country comprised largely by conservative peasants that fought for centuries to own the lands they worked on.

¹¹ The Anti-Russian views date back to the 19th century conflicts between the Czarist and Ottoman Empires, the 1812 annexation of east Moldavia and the russification and deportations that took place against the ethnic Romanian population.

In a quintessential communist manner, depending on the various needs of the moment, or by the successions in the top hierarchy management, if any major official was to fall into disgrace, dismissed or worse, fled the country, the history was rewritten. Thus, for the whole process of remodeling of the past an entire collective of researchers, historians and writers were set in motion. For example the 1944 episode of communists coming to power by force, being imposed by the Soviets, was presented as a result of the will of the entire Romanian people, past events were reinterpreted to make use for the communist doctrine (Ficeac 1998, 3). The past was adapted both to motivate the actions of the immediate reality, and those of the future. To justify an action the media permanently invented internal and external enemies, conflicts and disasters (3).

No totalitarian system can assert about itself that it fully controls those under its authority if it can't control the way people speak, write and think. If this were not so, such a regime would have little chance to survive. Mihai Coman's opinion is that "monitoring all people and, through it, controlling acts of communication, is an ingredient in maintaining the power" (Coman 1999, 7). But censorship is not only a feature of an oppressive system. It is also common in countries with democratic regimes:

"Appeared on the social stage evolution at the same time with the State and exercising what is called, in a word, Power, censorship has seen, over time, multiple forms intensities, proving to be indispensable in the functioning of democratic societies, even in contemporary ones." (Mocanu 2001, 7)

Soviet censorship involved from the outset to create a dual action of political censorship: on the one hand, more or less legitimate censorship, including administrative and judicial prosecution of individuals and institutions neglecting limiting secret lists, on the other hand, using means of "*ideological coercion and cunning influence*" (Troncotă 2006, 21) of provocation and crimes against personality.

Censorship, in general, performs several functions, including what Bogdan Ficeac identifies as the most important: "creating new elites according to an ideological criterion established by the sovereign" (Ficeac 1999, 13). Subsumed under this function, another one is "smoothing the

route for propaganda message, apart from limiting the right to information and freedom of expression” (Petcu 2005, 15). Practices associated to censorship occur especially in times of economic crisis, times when the State feels legitimized to rationalize consumption, leading every time to unfair and preferential distributions of raw materials and technology, under the guise of balance, the obedient are always favored.

The main communist censorship institution in Romania was the General Directorate of Press and Printings (1949-1977) which was a copy of the Soviet counterpart of Glavlit¹². The GDPP had a very similar structure to Glavlit in regards of the manner in which censorship tasks were distributed among its departments and recruiting policy. Even before the establishment of the GDPP the steps taken by the censorship were almost identical to those of the USSR (complete media control, abolishing private publishers, book cleansing etc.). Also the General Directorate of Press and Printings was a rather successful copy of Glavlit proving in time to be very conservative, making little changes to its regulations, staff and approach to its purpose.

Institutionally speaking, in Romania, pending the apparition of the General Directorate of Press and Printings in the middle of 1949, censorship duties were dealt with by several temporary institutions:

1. Between August 1944 and August 1946 printings, import and distribution of publications, presenting theater performances, films, functioning TFF stations, Post, telegraph and telephone were regulated by the Allied Control Commission represented by the High Allied Soviet Command. The experienced auditors Glavlit were helped by staff from the Department of Culture that operated under the Ministry of Propaganda.
2. In august 1945, powers were delegated from the Soviet Command to the newly established Trade Union of Artists, Writers, Journalists established in Bucharest, tasks that were limited to condemnation of all forms of Western culture. The

¹² The General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press under the Council of Ministers of the USSR (Glavlit) was the official censorship and state secret protection establishment in the Soviet Union between 1922 and 1991.

Second Congress of USASZ (Trade Union of Writers Artists and Journalists/Uniunea Sindicatelor Scriitorilor Artiștilor și Ziariștilor) in October 1945 marks the start of “socialist realism” as a dogma in artistic and journalistic creations.

3. Between 1946 and 1948 all attributes were transferred to the Armistice Enforcement Service and the Defascisation Service, both under the supervision of the Ministry of Propaganda.
4. After adoption of the Constitution in April 1948 the Ministry of Propaganda is changed to the Ministry of Arts and Information, though its attributes remain largely the same.
5. Between June 1948 and May 1949 censorship functions are transferred to the newly established Department of Media, Literary Department and the Regional Directorate headed by Mihai Novikov, George Ivascu and Alexandru Stefanescu.

General Directorate of Press and Prints

“Culture is the arena in which political struggle occurs in order to obtain identity and legitimacy” (MIHAI DINU GHEORGHIU)

State dissemination of information did not make its appearance in Romania along with the Red Army entering the country, but, unlike its forms and manifestations known for centuries, the new censorship implemented by Soviet advisers not only handled the ideological “correction” of artistic creation but as well as (re)educating the human mind, handling all information acquired by an audience (in this case a whole nation) or issued by artists, scholars and journalists (See Cobobca 2017). The General Directorate of Press and Prints, the most representative body of communist censorship in Romania, a copy of the successful model of the Soviet Glavlit, took definite institutional form after decree 214 of May 1949¹³. Assuming the position of Director was Vasile Dumitrescu, an old Communist from the underground period of the Party. Dumitrescu

¹³ Parliament Decree no. 214/1949 published in Official Gazette No. 32 of 23.05.1949.

is shortly replaced by Iosif Ardeleanu, who held this position until almost the date of the dissolution of GDPP in 1977.

The General Directorate of Press and Prints was hierarchically subordinated to the Council of Ministers of the Popular Republic of Romania and ideologically to the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. Here they made laws regarding the information dissemination, deciding what and who should be banned; the orders being given for the whole country, here appropriate staff was educated and recruited in order to control various social and artistic fields.

According to the Grand National Assembly Decrees no. 214/1949, 218/1949, 291/1949 and Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 612/1949 local censors tasks were:

- Censorship of the press and printed materials occurring locality and controlling printing houses or any print shops;
- Controlling press and book distribution;
- Control of libraries belonging to public schools, universities, community centers etc.
- Censorship of press and printed output coming from abroad in local customs offices for foreign individuals or institutions, mass organizations and also giving permission to send abroad prints or works of art (paintings, prints, manuscripts, books).

The decree stipulated that the prints will be censored either directly in the typography or the seat of the local censorship. The censors also had the task to seek to establish a collaborative relationship with editors, printing houses and with other local printing establishments (Troncotă 2006, 39). They were obligated to set censorship schedules so as not to cause delays for the newspapers. Also, the censors had to fit their activity accordingly to the working hours of the other printing houses¹⁴.

In its first period, the General Directorate of Press and Prints consisted of six separate Departments, each with its role in the further development of censorship in Romania. Thus, it was composed from the Department for Secretariat and Official Bulletin, Department for

¹⁴ Council of Ministers Decision no. 612/1949.

Authorization and Records of Printed Media, Department for Printed Media in the Country, Department for Foreign Printed Media, Department for Book Authorization, and Department for Book Control.¹⁵

Initially the General Directorate of Press and Prints headquarters was situated on Brezoianu Street near the Cișmigiu Garden; the main sections of GDPP were to be moved to the *Casa Scântei* after it was opened in 1956. In early 1950 the GDPP numbered 111 employees in its six Departments and 27 people under "Personnel with special responsibility" nomenclature, although numerous documents issued subsequently signaled the insufficient number of employees.¹⁶

Taking account of the notes issued by the General Directorate of Press and Prints we notice that the censorship service and control in the province was the poorest in terms of qualified staff in the first two years of the institution's operation. The situation in early 1950 noted the lack of staff in some cities, which made it impossible to ensure the activity of the local censure. This was compensated by movements from Bucharest of censors initially. To fill vacant posts the County Party Organization was required to make proposals, which shall be confirmed by the Central Committee. In addition to provincial towns that had functional censorship departments despite the lack of qualified personnel, the archival material often notes the lack of lecturers especially in smaller towns, where censors often needed to travel from Bucharest or nearby urban centers.¹⁷

Throughout 1950 and the first half of 1951, in the reports issued by the General Directorate of Press and Prints we find several minutes (protocols) in which the provincial Departments responsible for censorship indicate shortcomings due to insufficient staff, shortages or lack of competent auditors. For example, in a note¹⁸ to the County Cultural Consilierat of Romanăți-Caracal, the General Directorate of Press and Prints requires urgent proposals for a post for a lecturer

¹⁵ Parliament Decree no. 291/1949 published in Official Gazette No. 32 of 23.05.1949.

¹⁶ Central Historical National Archives of Romania (C.H.N.A.), Committee for Press and Prints, folder no.20/1950, p. 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ C.H.N.A., Committee for Press and Prints, folder no.57/1951, p. 47.

because the local policeman ordered throwing the banned books in the Olt River, disregarding protocol treatment included in regulations.

The Council of Ministers will gradually increase the powers of the GDPP, assigning it new tasks. Controlling radio programs, materials exhibited in museums, exhibitions, films and production studios in the country were to be subjected to strict control by a better institutionalized GDPP.¹⁹ Even so-called *clean texts* were reconsidered and controlled again, and this occurred especially with the prints arrived from abroad, which were divided into four categories:

“Prohibited (those who were considered to be anti-communist);
Secret (mostly scientific publications and of technical nature);
Documentation (which didn’t fell within the categories above);
Free-of-access (any publications coming from the Soviet Union and its satellites).”²⁰

Decision no. 267 of 23rd of February 1954 on the establishment and organization of tasks and Print Media Directorate-General decided that *“The Directorate General of Press and Prints exerts state control and state secret protection, and in terms of the political content of all propagand material, agitation and any printed materials to be disseminated to the public.”*²¹

Censorship mechanisms in the General Directorate of Press and Prints

Each material that was proposed to appear in the pages of any publication was thoroughly verified. Apart from the fact that information was brought supplemented with an obvious propagandistic touch, the Soviet teachings had to make their presence felt in every detail. The text must not contain any mistake, the sensitive areas being managers’ names and the quotations attributed to them. Those who urged for ideological excesses were even Party leaders. Through a series of articles and stimulating studies the young journalist is initiated in the

¹⁹ C.H.N.A., Committee for Press and Prints, folder no. 42/1951, p. 19.

²⁰ Council of Ministers Decision no. 340/1952.

²¹ Council of Ministers Decision no. 267/1954.

fight against any deviation from the principle of dialectical materialism. In order to increase efficiency of the censorship apparatus, on a propagandistic background, education is controlled and the training of future builders of socialism. Party School A.A. Zhdanov, and after it Ștefan Gheorghiu University were the educational institutions responsible for assuring the necessary personnel for a proper development of the new system. The only approved for management positions are journalists who worked in newsrooms or other illegality during the previous communist structures. Thus, any possible form of intellectual opposition in the Romanian press was nearly impossible.

Through people with specific tasks and institutions there is a strict control of everything that is published, the only authors having the regime's acceptance are those who have the right of signature. As a result, a manuscript is submitted firstly to its author's censorship, meaning self-censorship, assessing the possibility of publishing his work according to the priorities set by the Party's theme (Frunză 2003, 73). In the publishing process the manuscript is read and ideological checked by the editor, modifying or removing ideas or artwork that may give rise to misinterpretations or misunderstandings. In evaluating a manuscript it was often resort to external co-reviewers to verify its ideology, the publishing editor such escaping full responsibility for possible problems in publishing a manuscript.²²

Socialist realism was the only theme that could be used as a method of creation during Romania in the 50's. Only the Soviet idea was seen as *official* and that *which stood at the basis of all that is good, just and fair in this world* (Soulet 1998, 57). In the Party's outlook such must the society of tomorrow be, with the main actor being the new man. During these years of massive Sovietization, the communist education system used resources of the most diverse in forming a healthy socialist consciousness. For example, until 1949, in Romania 1175 Soviet books were printed in a circulation that reached a total of 13,319,000, in 1952 only the works of Lenin and Stalin alone reached a circulation of 7.5

²² Viorel Nistor, "Aspecte ale cenzurii comuniste în proza românească postbelică", în *Studia Ephemerides*, nr.1/2009.

million copies.²³ All of this while the national literature was capitalized selectively, evaluated on ideological principles and often overlooked to other communist countries creations, without having any quality other than that of being Marxist Leninist (Petcu 1999, 171).

The Party's directives followed so-called democratic, legal means. However, laws were proposed, voted and then promulgated by the same decisional bodies that had the sole purpose of protecting the socialist gains. After each decision was adopted, a report issued by the General Directorate of Press and Prints occurred in which various elements of the reaction were fought successively. This report generates a new legal ruling that tried to fit the new offense.

Meanwhile, the situation became even more complex in the province. The Department of District and Regional Press ensured censorship of all publications that appeared in the territory. Controlling and coordinating regional prints, the Department drew up regular studies and analysis of provincial press deficiency.²⁴

Over the years, the service grew larger, due primarily to Party alertness. If its efficiency was rather disappointing in 1950, when its work was reduced to that of proof reading the publications to come, in early 1951, the Department got new meanings and functions. *During February-April 1951 1683 newspapers were read after their emergence. On this occasion 1517 political mistakes were notified and patterned.*²⁵

Since 1951, provincial censorship work has improved. Through a maximum efficiency, the Regional Department was able to identify and control arising problems. GD directives ordered scrupulosity in studying newspapers and gradual specialization on problematic foreign policy issues.

For each provincial newspaper a report was issued which targeted its tangents with Soviet ideological and doctrinal preparations. In the same time self-critical comments were made on ideological gaps in training. Even grades regarding mistakes are reported. They had a "Secret" stamp and convincingly illustrated the faults occurring in local newspapers.

²³ C.H.N.A., Committee for Press and Prints, folder no.11/1952, p.75.

²⁴ C.H.N.A., Committee for Press and Prints, folder no. 19/1950, p.28.

²⁵ C.H.N.A., Committee for Press and Prints, folder no. 5/1951, p.14.

The same arrangement was incurred by radio amplification plants and wire broadcasting stations. A Government Decision circular²⁶ from 1951 provided a maximum conspiracy control over what materials would get the "Fit for Distribution" stamp. The Service is strict, for the dissemination of information one had to get a series of approvals, conditional on the Party line.

Another section of censorship was the Department for Book Authorization. It gave imprimatur to non-periodicals; authorized the import and export of books, controlled Romanian-Soviet annals, propaganda bulletins etc.

In 1951 further measures were taken to strengthen the documents on the control of the editorial decision. From the scope of censorship not even technical work are excluded; whether they were not combative enough or not mentioned the name of any Soviet scientist, any text could be transformed, rewritten. Finally, censorship leaned over materials carefully targeted by the propaganda: textbooks. The main criticism that emerges from the frequent criticisms of the censors is that they did not reflect and not gave a higher priority to Soviet science (Frunză 2003, 81).

The libraries became the next big challenge. The measures to be taken were defined as *needed for improving the libraries in the People's Republic Romania* (81). The objectives to be achieved were mainly the gradual customization and then the acquiring the classics of Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet authors and agreed contemporary authors. The Book Board in People's Republic of Romania along with the Committee for Cultural Establishments were responsible for launching a new purge of existing funds and to exercise permanent control of approved books.

In this context, of disdain for the capitalist world, also register the decisions for purification aimed at changing or assigning different names to cities, train stations, institutions, organizations, enterprises and so on, bearing names of some enemies of the people.

Self-evident here was the fact that in 1952 a new Constitution was adopted. Its main provisions relate to more rights and freedoms of the

²⁶ Council of Ministers Decision no. 461/1951.

working class. Freedom of conscience and opinion, freedom of speech and the press are recognized as linked *with the interests of laborers and to strengthen the system of people's democracy*.²⁷ Thus, these freedoms were granted only to those who served the political, social, economic and cultural aspects of the official ideology.

The Council of Ministers of the Romanian People's Republic will enhance GDPP's powers, assigning it new tasks. Control over radio programs, materials exhibited in museums, exhibitions and film production studios in the country were also to be subjected to a stricter and better institutionalized control.²⁸ Even so-called clean texts were re-censored and re-controlled, and this occurs especially with prints arrived from abroad, which was divided into four major categories:

1. Prohibited (those who were anticommunist)
2. Secret (especially technical-scientific publications)
3. Documentation (that which does not fit into the above categories),
4. Free-running (any Soviet publication or coming from the other countries of people's democracy).

Publication import was strictly restricted. Materials and documents bearing the seal of prohibition had a very special import regime, manipulation and study. Control over working with such materials was strictly maintained outside the Interior Ministry. However, outside ministries, approved access to these materials is given to other institutions as well like: Scântea, AGERPRES, the Radio Committee, and the Romanian Institute for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, the Academy of People's Republic of Romania, the State Planning Commission and Central Direction of Statistics.²⁹

Along with the institutionalization of censorship methods, in social culture there were many voices that recommended moving towards social realism. It is also the case of the Artists Union Plenary in May 1952,

²⁷ 1952 Constitution People's Republic of Romania, ch. VII, art. 84-85.

²⁸ Council of Ministers Decision no. 340 from 15th of March 1952, C.H.N.A., Committee for Press and Prints, folder no.14/1952, f. 32.

²⁹ Council of Ministers Decision no. 345 din 1952 C.H.N.A., Committee for Press and Prints, folder no.14/1952, f. 34.

which aimed to tackle new ideological grounds in fine arts as well as their reflection in Romanian popular democracy. Decaying currents are doomed. The truth of life shall not be deformed, but *enhanced* with the new Marxist-Leninist aesthetics. Deviation from these directives, entering a formalistic structure of the artwork, equated to the artist's prohibition in creating in those times.

Social wise, there are attempts in trying to *improve visual agitation quality*. The Commission for Control and Monitoring over Visual Propaganda acted mainly during activities and public demonstrations, meetings of business, congresses³⁰. Control reflects mainly on portraits, posters, placards, slogans, paintings, drawings, etc. Drastic measures were taken to change them, because over time they would wear out or become obsolete, and to be replaced with new, well located ones in key areas of meetings. The Commission had to pay particular attention to dressing, roads, slogans, stations, and entrances to the city. Excesses were to be avoided, but inventory and storage of these materials were usually well organized.

Writers were clearly forbidden to portray in a somewhat favorable light the times and society before August 1944. Of these things one could only write with hatred and "*proletarian anger*," any attempt to humanize any representative of the fascist bourgeoisie was doomed to failure³¹.

For example, in 1953, after only a few months since its publication, George Călinescu's novel *Bietul Ioanide* is taken off the shelves after the author is accused of being pro-legionary³². *Bietul Ioanide* was written between 1947 and 1949 and published in 1953 following a large and heated controversy, and banned for being an "obvious example of

³⁰ Council of Ministers Decision no. 839 din 27 mai 1952 C.H.N.A., Committee for Press and Prints, folder no.14/1952, f. 38.

³¹ See Ionuț Costea, Istvan Kiraly, Doru Radoslav, *Fond "S" special. Contribuții la istoria fondurilor secrete de bibliotecă din România* (București: Editura Dacia, 1995), p. 157.

³² The Legionnaire Movement was a far-right political party in the Kingdom of Romania in 1927-1941 that promoted nationalistic, anti-Semitic, Orthodox and anti-communist views whose ideology was supported by a number of Romanian intellectuals and artists such as Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica, Nechifor Crainic, Mircea Vulcănescu, Nae Ionescu, Petre Țuțea, Lucian Blaga, Ion Barbu, Radu Gyr, Mihail Manoilescu, George Uscătescu, Octavian Goga or Sextil Pușcariu.

bourgeois objectivism that degenerates into nationalism and fascism, bringing praise to legionarism, giving this fascist movement a halo of heroism. In the same time this novel slanders our democratic, procommunist movement in our country".³³

In order for a book to be published, the author had to accept the new interpretation of the literary act, or the artistic act in the generic sense, whose role was to contribute to the formation of the new man, to his education in the spirit of new truths, in other words to be an extension of the propaganda service.

Among the attributions that the GDPP had, through its Art Departament, came the control of cinemas, theaters and showrooms. In an archive note³⁴, it was reported that a number of cinemas in Bucharest had political names (e.g. heroes of the working class, important historical dates, etc.), often making inappropriate associations with the titles of the scheduled films.

Thus, in the newspaper programs, "Cultural Capital of the Capital", the posters of Bucharest Cinematography or even on the cinema panels one could read such advertisements:

Cinema "Vasile Roaită" – "The King's Buffon";
"Constantin David" – "The Cockroach";
"Tudor Vladimirescu" – "The Dog from the Swamp";
"16th February" – "Cobra Action";
"Grivița" – "Dangerous Moment";
"Alexandru Sahia" – "The Man with Two Faces";
"23rd of August" – "An Adventure in the Caribbean Sea";
"Olga Bancic" – "Peasants in Troubled Waters";
"Alexandru Sahia and I. C. Frimu" – "The Crooks";
"Palace Hall of the People's Republic of Romania" – "No passing".

Sometimes, interventions were made, with the programming of films that had the misfortune of being associating in a *political misguided fashion* with the names of cinemas to be removed.³⁵ However, the

³³ C.H.N.A., Agitation and Propaganda Section, folder no. 18/1954, p. 152.

³⁴ C.H.N.A., Committee for Press and Prints, folder no. 4/1951 f. 102.

³⁵ *Ibid.* f. 103.

problem could not be solved on the long run; because there were always going to be films whose titles could give rise to interpretations in association with most of the cinema's names in Bucharest. GDPP considered that *it would be necessary for the law forums to study the possibility of changing the names of some cinemas.*³⁶

The poetry was commissioned to inspire, through its message, the high creed of the party, had to have an agitator style and rhetoric to it, with an accessible message that could reach "the working people" without making concessions to the imperialist, formal and cosmopolitan or decadent art of the bourgeois. The main themes were pro-soviet or anti-imperialist linked to the "new life of cities and villages", the "new man" and his victories, the party and its blessings. This bright present, in contrast to the dark past, the civilizing Communist hero, the glorious victories on the large construction sites, the collectivization of agriculture are great realities, worthy of poetic inspiration. The consecrated formula is that of the narrative poems, written in an "understandable" limb, in which they were often imitate known poetic structures such as the folk ballad, or the classical verses of Eminescu, Alecsandri or George Coșbuc (Negrici 2010, 16).

During this period the communists have tried to test out and develop laws regarding state secret. After a lengthy review of the legal framework, in 1952 a draft-law was submitted which instructions are most strict about data and extend the responsibility on everything could be linked with the armed forces. Instructions to military censors were clearly defined and military production printers and publishers of this type become classified. Implementation and dissemination of military prints came under the same protection (Tanislav 1996, 152).

If at first only technical data were concerned, secrecy mania will extend to social life, and in some cases, even the life of the Party. Articles should not reveal numbers, different problems, raw materials, being only a megaphone advertising socialist emulation. Mostly workers achievements, leading companies were presented, etc. without disclosing secrets regarding the production plan. Leading exponent of the application of these restrictions was the official newspaper of the Communist Party communist, *Scântea* daily.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The main guide in institutionalized censorship in Romania was the experience of the Soviet model, everything that was of interest should be done as in the Soviet press. It went up to the point that companies received indicative numbers, and as the index contained larger numbers the drastic the secrecy became. Moreover, localities that had such an undertaking, not only were not even mentioned in an article, but there were instances when they were simply erased from the map. *Social space is then sealed and is perfectly supported by this highly restrictive legal framework, the possibility of leakage or even some allusions become almost impossible.*³⁷

What was declared as secret, after some preliminary cataloging, was immediately transferred to the special fund. It was kept in separate rooms, real redoubts with good security measures in place and with limited access (Costea & all. 1995, 160). Paradoxically, even those decisions that institutionalized state censorship by applying laws of secrecy were themselves classified. The circle was closed; the masses had no other option than imposed compliance.

After Stalin's death in March 1953, and the subsequently disclosure of the Bolshevik dictator crimes and his cult by the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU was among the most outstanding political events for the direction taken by the local communist censorship. These events made the Stalinist works, once praised by the Bucharest propaganda, also enter the Index, on the list of works that shouldn't be accessible to the public. The works that were banned or removed from the circuit at the time belonged to various domains and included many books and pamphlets written by Soviet authors between 1945 and 1956, or publications by former local leaders of political parties and foreign communist governments.

As the communist regime strengthened its positions it also extended the prohibition towards all the publications that came in opposition to the Marxist dogma. The "ideological tone" is given by the regime's ideological leader Leonte Răutu³⁸ in an influential article

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Leonte Răutu was the chief ideologist of the Romanian Communist Party between 1948 and 1965, and rector of the Ștefan Gheorghiu Academy between 1965 and 1981, he played an important part in defining the official dogmas even as they changed from Stalinism to anti-revisionism to National Communism.

entitled “*Against the Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism and Objectivity in Social Sciences*” (Răutu 1949, 36). For a long time this article and the references it contained were among the most important reference materials for literary politruks, as a “guide” to literary criticism:

“Armed with the Marxist-Leninist theory and with the experience of the people of science and culture in the Soviet Union, we are to lead a cruel war against the bourgeois cosmopolitanism and objectivism, a cruel war against the Western imperialist culture, a cruel war against any influences of the bourgeois ideology in our ranks.” (45)

Răutu in his article goes further by stating: “Cosmopolitanism is one of the most dangerous manifestations of capitalist influence in people’s consciousness” (51) linking it to an irrational fear and hatred the Western world has upon the Russian and Soviet culture: “It should be noted that the cosmopolitan spirit in science is closely linked to a fierce hatred against the Soviet Union, against Soviet culture, against Russian culture and the Russian people culture” (62).

Marin Nițescu considers that “This inadequate and police-like language resulted in heinous anti-cultural facts, the consequences of which can never be fully known and valued.” (Nițescu 1995, 71).

Cosmopolitanism was regarded as everything that was borrowed from the Western culture, dangerous and artificial; in reverse to all the loans from the “Soviet culture” which were not seen as cosmopolitanism. The Soviet experience was the main model of the Romanian communists, and the “Soviet culture” was considered to be the most advanced because it was based on Marxist-Leninist. Also culturally liaising with the West was seen as a hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union. The other term was *bourgeois objectivism* and it was defined as the decadence of bourgeois culture, and its false method of knowing reality, even the science coming from the West was biased. “The bourgeois science only served the interests of the exploiting classes while the science of proletarian communist served the interests of all people.”³⁹

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Conclusions

The main purpose of the communist system was turning society into an army of docile followers (Foucault 2005, 177) who would not question the correctness of the regime. For this plan to succeed, people had to be convinced, their minds must be emptied and then filled with the images provided by the only available political system, the communist one. The most effective device was propaganda through the media, mainly radio and television media, as they were the most popular channels of public information. Offering as little information as possible, mostly out of context, few media outlets, all of them in the service of the communist regime, managed to turn their victims into mass obedient.

The General Directorate of Press and Prints in communist Romania since its inception in 1949 until its abolition in 1977 was the hegemonic institution in the dissemination of information is an indispensable tool in the hands of Communist alongside propaganda.

We identify the main functions of GDPP in the period namely: contributing to the stability and legitimacy of the communist regime, paving the way for socialism, changing values, traditions and culture and replacing them with new ones, reeducation of human minds, "correcting" ideological creation artistic, helping from the background to build a new society.

Then we must note the most important function of censorship, namely that of creating a new elite, that was included in the template already established by the ideological leader (Ficeac 1998, 13). In the process of creating new elites, propaganda plays an important role, and therefore censorship also has the function of "smoothing propaganda message" (Petcu 1999, 17). Piotr Wierybicki perfectly summarizes the relationship between censorship and propaganda: "Censorship deals with what people must know and propaganda, what people should know."⁴⁰

Censorship became more efficient and brutal over time by improving its staff; lecturers were sent to various specializations such as foreign policy, culture, agricultural and industrial problems. Also, extensive bimonthly communications were made in the service, by domain, taking into account whatever specific new problems arose.

⁴⁰ Piotr Wierybicki *apud* Bogdan Ficeac, 1999, 14.

Communist censorship mechanisms in Romania have relied on a legal basis which allowed them to function effectively, however leaving room, in the general description of "hazardous works", many interpretations that gave rise to censors abuses. The most important legal acts adopted in this study are Parliament Decree nr.214/1949 published in Official Gazette No. 32 of 23.05.1949, Parliament Decree nr.218/1949, published in No. 32 of 23.05.1949 Official Parliament Decree nr.291/1949 published in the Official Gazette on 02.07.1949, the Council of Ministers Decision no. 612/1949, Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 461/1951, Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 343/1952, Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 340/1952, Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 267/1954.

The long-term influence of censorship and self-censorship and blocking Romanian society's access to tradition has resulted not only in eliminating undesirable ideas or passages from texts published but in time became more harmful and its effects prolonged in a barbaric remodeling of conscience. Bogdan Ficeac rightfully presents communist censorship as "*an entire system based on recreating reality and perversion of conscience*" (Ficeac 1999, 18). What communist censorship has done in Romania is not only a social life phenomenon, which can be analyzed and classified like any other, but also a national tragedy.

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8. 1952 Constitution of People's Republic of Romania

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