

## PRESTIGE MAKING TECHNIQUES. THE CASE OF ELENA CEAUȘESCU

Lavinia BETEA<sup>1</sup>, Vlad Ovidiu CIOACĂ<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor PhD, “Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad (Romania), E-mail: [lbetea@yahoo.com](mailto:lbetea@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup>PhD Student, University of Craiova, Doctoral School of Social Sciences and Humanities (Romania), E-mail: [cioacavladovidiu@gmail.com](mailto:cioacavladovidiu@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** *Romania illustrates the theme of famous women with Elena Ceaușescu, the wife of the former communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu<sup>1</sup>. Despite graduating the primary school with difficulty, she managed to be praised as a politician and renowned scientist. She was also the woman with the highest position in the official hierarchy of a communist state. Moreover, she remains the only woman representative sentenced to death and executed in national history. How was that possible? The socio-political context and the prestige manufacturing techniques through which the representation of a worldwide personality was built for Elena Ceaușescu will be further analyzed in this article.*

**Keywords:** ideology, propaganda, social representations, communism, famous women.

### 1. Final outcome

Let's start with the end. Until December 22, 1989, the day they left the seat of power besieged by protesters, the Ceaușescus had been the object of an unprecedented cult of personality.

Nicolae Ceaușescu held, mainly, the functions of general secretary of the single party, president of Romania, supreme commander of the armed forces and president of the Front of Socialist Unity and Democracy<sup>2</sup>. The following titles and positions were noted in his wife's CV: academician; member in the small center of power - Permanent Bureau of the Executive Political Committee (ExPC) of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (CC of the RCP); first Deputy Prime Minister of the Government; member of the country's legislative forum; president of the National Council for Science and Technology (NCST); president of the Scientific Council of the Central Institute of Chemistry (CEICHEM). However, above all she was the head of the party's executive committee. She was the COMRADE, as her husband himself called her, his direct correspondent. She was the second office for the dignitaries in the front line of power, complementary to the first office - her husband's office.

Following the rebel that broke out in December 1989, in the context of the economic crisis in the 80s and the changes in the “communist camp” caused by the reforms on the “perestroika” model, the Ceaușescus “fled” with a helicopter landed on the roof of the CC headquarters. In the next three days, Romania experienced the unique phenomenon of a “live revolution”, due to the manipulations applied, mainly through the only national television station. The citizens were “informed” that mysterious armies of “terrorists” were fighting on the side of “horrible dictators”, resulting in countless casualties. Disconnected from the information on the evolution of the political situation in the country, the Ceaușescus were captive in the military garrison in Târgoviște. The newly installed power instituted an Exceptional Military Court to judge them. On December 25, 1989, after a trial on the Stalinist

---

<sup>1</sup> Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918-1989), initial profession: shoemaker. Illegalist communist since 1936. He spent over 6 and a half years in prisons and camps for adhering to communism. Member of the leadership since 1945 and party leader (1965-1989). In 1969 he also took the position of head of state. Then, in 1974 he declared himself as President of Romania, created for this purpose.

<sup>2</sup> The Front of Democracy and Socialist Unity was the organization which included all the other citizens of Romania, starting the age of 4, through trade unions, religious unions, creation unions and other organizations under the leadership of the Communist Party.

model, both were sentenced to death and executed<sup>1</sup>. However, no evidence and witnesses were brought and the accusations were not proven even at a later stage.

In the collective memory, Elena Ceaușescu remained as a prototype of the imposture and the bad influence. Predominantly Orthodox, the Romanian community associates her to Eve - the author of the original sin through persuasion. A stereotype of consensus and the traditional expression “the man is the head (of the family) but the woman is the neck”.

## **2. Ideology, propaganda and social representations**

The astonishing biographies of the Ceaușescus were built on the channel marked by the „historical fracture” of the agreements between the Allies at the end of the Second World War. Romania entered the sphere of Soviet influence. The manipulations exercised by the Kremlin in imposing and operating the communist regime will be copied here, as well as in the other countries of central and south-eastern Europe, which will form part of the “communist camp”<sup>2</sup>. In essence, these are those inventoried by R. J. Lifton (1961) in his study of “thought reformation” for the purpose of a “totalitarian psychology”: 1. Control of mass communications; 2. The “mystical” manipulation (this mainly refers to the cult of the leader’s personality); 3. The requirement of “purity” of individuals; 4. The cult of confession of current and past thoughts (in correlation with the “requirement of purity” and achieved through party criticism and self-criticism); 5. Presenting communist ideology as a “sacred science”; 6. Language remodeling; 7. Putting faith in the party and the community above any personal interest (Lifton, 1961).

In terms of social thinking, the focus was on the axis of ideology - propaganda - social representation. Without aiming to insist on these complex relations, we will remember from the beginning that in a communist regime propaganda is the only public form of communication. Lenin was also the first propaganda theorist defining it as a means of: 1) forming a vision of the world; 2) creating an awareness of the individuality of the group and its integration in the society; 3) complementary action to other forms of communication and social intervention. The logic of the inference of the syllogism in which the conclusion is known before the premises thus becomes an operational rule in the formation of adequate representations of the concepts and theories of ideology (Moscovici, 1976: 263).

These were the mechanisms used to apply the processes of rewriting the history and falsifying the biography of the leaders that contextualize the case proposed for analysis. According to the Marxist-Leninist theory, the establishment of a communist regime is done by the victory of the proletarian revolution against the “exploiters”. Its leaders and “ferments” represent the distinct category of “professional revolutionaries” who induce “class consciousness” in workers. Since the Romanian realities - and not only - were totally different, we resorted to what Maurice Halbwachs (1935) calls the reconstruction of the “social frameworks” of memory. Through omissions and / or substitutions of personalities and events, distortions of meanings and resignations, August 23, 1944 - the date when the weapons were returned by Romanians against former allies in the Axis, will be celebrated as a national holiday<sup>3</sup>. This date was associated to the meanings of armed insurrection, then of “social revolution and national liberation, anti-fascist and anti-imperialist”. And the communist party,

---

<sup>1</sup> They were accused of organising armed actions against citizens and state power with 60,000 people being killed, destroying properties, trying to flee the country, owning more than a billion dollars abroad. In the legal terms of that time: genocide against the Romanian people, acts of diversion, undermining state power and the national economy. Based on Ceaușescu’s execution.

<sup>2</sup> Communist propaganda in the “cold war” referred to opponents with the antagonistic terms “communist camp” (of „peace-loving countries”) and “imperialist camp”.

<sup>3</sup> Starting with the summer of 1941 until August 1944, Romania participated in the war with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union. In the conditions of the counter-offensive of the Red Army and the landing of the Allied troops in Normandy, a political alliance was concluded in Bucharest for the return of weapons. Upon the request of the Allies, the representatives of the main parties in Romania also joined the communist party. On August 23, 1944, Ion Antonescu, the military dictator of the state, was arrested and an armistice with the USSR was declared in the name of the aforementioned alliance.

which at that time counted about 800 members (most of them in prison or in emigration) was considered its leader and organizer. In addition, it was resorted to successive falsifications of the biography of the communist leaders. Neither Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej<sup>1</sup>, the first communist leader of Romania, nor Nicolae Ceaușescu were, at least, in Bucharest at the time of the “revolution”. Both had the status of political prisoners during the war. And, for each of them, in the years when he had the power, propaganda created the representation of the main organizer and leader of the “revolution”.

### **3. Real biography and political meanings**

As far as Elena Ceaușescu is concerned, according to the autobiography written for the party in 1949 (which contained several syntax and spelling mistakes), she was born in Petrești (Dâmbovița), on January 7, 1919. She declared her parents - Nae and Alexandrina - farmers with a property of 4 hectares of land and a house (Central National Historical Archives, CC Fund of RCP - Cadre, file C / 1424, f. 3.). This fortune classified them in the middle category of the Romanian peasants from the interwar period. At the census in 1930, 74.95% of rural households owned less than 5 ha of land, 17, 10% had between 5 and 10 ha and only 5.5% had land between 10 and 20 ha (Scurtu and Buzatu, 1999: 58). However, according to communist ideology, a “healthy social origin” - an essential condition for political ascension - meant coming from the lower category. As a result, the signatory of the autobiography did not declare that her parents also owned a shop. Which, among other goods, sold a new product for the rural world - the penknife. This is why the people in the village called the girl „Lenuța, Penknife’s daughter”. She also hid the fact that her father was in the Liberal Party (Central National Historical Archives, Fund 53 - file P / 73, vol 1, f. 16).

According to the statements in the mentioned autobiography, the girl had attended and graduated from primary school between 1926-1930 (Central National Historical Archives, CC Fund of RCP - Cadre, file C / 1424, f. 3.). However, the documents from the archives of the local school disappeared for the promotion of the student Petrescu N. Elena<sup>2</sup>. After her death, two transcripts were published in the daily “România liberă”. It turned out that the “well-known scientist all over the world” repeated the fifth grade (Băcanu, 1989). The original documents had been lost. However, the information about this student repeating the grade differs depending on the time, place and source. Whether she repeated the grade or not, she managed to graduate primary school.

Until the age of 17 she lived in her native village. The few traces in the collective memory outline the shadow of a good girl<sup>3</sup>. She had learned, as he would later boast, to cook, to keep the house clean, to sew, to knit, to crochet<sup>4</sup> ...

At the beginning of 1936, she settled in Bucharest, after her elder brother, Gheorghe<sup>5</sup>. Through a contest of circumstances, he had joined the communist party, outlawed since 1924. His girlfriend, Rașela Rozenfeld, a textile worker (Central National Historical Archives, Fund 53 - file P / 73, vol 1, f. 16.), was also a communist follower. His younger sister joined their entourage and got a job as an apprentice in a small garment factory. In the workshops where she worked, she came in contact with the unions and then with the communist youth organization. She was going to claim claim in her autobiography, however, that she joined the

---

<sup>1</sup> Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1901- 1965), initial profession: electrician. Member of the Communist Party since 1931 and political prisoner (1933-1944). Leader of the Communist Party of Romania (1945-1954; 1955-1965).

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Ștefan Ghenu, former secretary at the school in Petrești (March 18, 2009, interviewer Lavinia Betea).

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Eugen Roșu, history teacher at the school in Petrești (March 18, 2009, interviewer Lavinia Betea).

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Violeta Năstăsescu, former English translator for Elena Ceaușescu (May 5, 2017, interviewer Lavinia Betea).

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mariana Dinulescu, niece of Elena Ceaușescu (April 10, 2015, interviewer Lavinia Betea).

party in 1937 with the political task of maintaining links between communist detainees and those in illegality.

The circumstances of meeting the militant Nicolae Ceaușescu remained unknown. What is certain is that in 1939 they were lovers. However, they got married only at the end of 1947 when they were expecting their first child and Ceaușescu had become one of the leaders of the Communist Party, now the only party in the country.

After the war, claiming a “revolutionary past”, Ceaușescu's concubine tried, for a short period of time, the profession of activist. As in this period of manipulations, strikes, demonstrations and confrontations with opponents, the new statute required quite special qualities (organizational spirit, charisma, the gift of oratory, influencing ability, etc.), she did not adapt. She had also tried to train at a party school but had dropped out (Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Cadre, file C/1424, f. 13). Later, in the summer of 1947, she gave up, for a time, a stable work commitment for the status of mother and wife. A completely different one from other women even in those difficult post-war years. His is because the family of a communist leader had a residence endowed with all the comforts of furniture and other utilities, holiday villas, work car, driver, guards, housekeeping staff, preferential supply. Everything through the institution called the Party Household.

Elena Ceaușescu got a new job again, in 1950, in the Foreign Relations section of the party leadership (Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Cadre, file C/1424, f. 9-10.). Thus, she started her career as a “cadre”<sup>1</sup>. However, she was in charge of recruiting and hiring drivers, maids and administrative staff from the publication “For lasting peace, for popular democracy”<sup>2</sup>. The magazine was the press “organ” of Cominform<sup>3</sup> and appeared in the languages of all Member States. A job more suitable for her lack of appetite for political tasks and mother with three children<sup>4</sup>.

Although there was no evidence of her acceptance in the small illegal party, she claimed the privileged status of illegalist<sup>5</sup> from the beginning of its legal organization the privileged status of illegalist. She claimed she had participated in strikes and coordinated the communist youth organization in one of the sectors of the capital city. Those recommended for references in this regard were as “discovered” as she was. In fact, since 1941, party militants who were in connection with her interrupted the connection on the grounds of her indiscipline in conspiracy (Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Cadre, file C/1424, f. 31.). However, the valid argument is a pale contribution to the “proletarian revolution”: visits with food and clothing packages to the camp in Tg. Jiu where her boyfriend and brother were imprisoned, in 1943-1944.

In the party's hagiography, two moments will become reference legends of her “revolutionary” past. The first is the title of “Queen of Labor” obtained by Elena Petrescu at a countryside celebration in August 1939. This was considered a flattering homage to her feminine qualities. However, the award was based on “voting” by postcards bought by “fiancé” Ceaușescu, supported by other comrades<sup>6</sup>. The other is the “organization” of an anti-fascist demonstration on May 1, 1939 by the utecists Nicolae Ceaușescu and Elena Petrescu. A false

---

<sup>1</sup> The “Cadre” sector would be today's correspondent of the human resources department. However, the selections, classifications and decisions of the cadres were made on the basis of a political grid. The statement “cadres decide everything”, which has become a slogan, belonged to Stalin.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Ștefan Andrei, former Minister of Foreign Affairs (August 30, 2011, interviewer Lavinia Betea).

<sup>3</sup> Cominform was a supranational organization (1947-1956) established with the intention to restore some of the Cominternist practices. Its headquarters were in Belgrade (1947-1948), then in Bucharest.

<sup>4</sup> Valentin, physicist (b.1948) Zoia, mathematician (1948 -2000), Nicu, physicist (1951-1996). Nicu Ceaușescu has been trained and introduced to political positions since 1971, being appreciated as his father's potential successor.

<sup>5</sup> After the communists came to power, membership in the party during its period of secrecy was rewarded with special pensions and the right to attend rest homes, polyclinics, special hospitals, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Ion Iliescu, son of a former illegalist, former president of Romania (September 20, 2009, interviewer Lavinia Betea).

imagery was operated by the party's historians: the portraits of the two were implanted among the heads of a crowd. In reality, the event was organized by the authorities of the time, following the fascist model and dedicated to King Carol II (Petcu, 1994: 93-95).

After a first assessment of the case, Elena Ceaușescu's claims as "illegal" were rejected (Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Cadre, file C/1424, f. 27.). In the autumn of 1960, the petitioner returned with the request for seniority in the party since 1939. Her husband was now the secretary with organizational problems in the CC, ie number 2 in the political hierarchy. Thus, new and false references and recommendations were made for his wife. And in a few years, she was going to appear in public with a communist past from 1937 (Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Cadre, file C/2175, f. 1-3.).

#### 4. Building the profile of technocratic expert

Elena Ceaușescu was a special case due to her political ascension, not on the direct line of activists, but as a technocrat who represents chemistry. In the sixth decade, communist programs gave priority to chemistry and physics as forces of progress which were meant to improve life quality.

It is not known how and when exactly, Ceaușescu's wife "passed" from Cominform magazine to an CEICHEM laboratory. In the official biography of the 80's she is presented as a chemical laboratory specialist from 1944 to 1957, when she was promoted to researcher (Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arivelor Securității, 2004: 138). The chemistry she had "embraced" had become "the most dynamic branch of contemporary science", as the party would praise her Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Cadre, file C/2175, f. 1-3.). From the four primary school classes, she moved directly to being a student through favorable circumstances created by the positive discrimination of young militants from the "exploited class" upon admission to higher education. But this was mainly thanks to her husband's position. Under the protection of Mihail Florescu<sup>1</sup>, the minister of chemistry, politically subordinated to Nicolae Ceaușescu, she made a career in the field. In 1957 she graduated from the Faculty of Industrial Chemistry of the Bucharest Polytechnic Institute, through non-attendance courses. This is how she was immediately promoted to the position of researcher.

According to the testimonies of the staff from the Ceaușescu residence, the student was having private lessons at home in order to pass the exams (Dobrescu, 2004: 88). She was especially cared for by Professor Solomon Ozias, the holder of the macromolecular chemistry course, with the doctorate in Leningrad and the head of the CEICHEM department where she worked. Along with him and five other authors, Elena Ceaușescu made her debut in the specialized press with the article *Polimerizarea stereospecifică a izoprenului cu trietilaluminii și tetracolorură de titan*, published in 1961 in "Revista de Chimie". The article has three pages and an exclusively Soviet bibliography (Solomon, Ceaușescu, Bittman, Hlevca, Florescu, Mihăilescu, Ciută, 1961). Until 1965, the "researcher" did not produce anything else.

This did not stop her from becoming director of CEICHEM in 1964 and enrolling in a doctorate. As for the management of the research institute, she did it, like many others at the time, on Lenin's recommendation - through organization and control. In the phase of the dictatorship of the proletariat and then of the construction of communism, these can be reduced to simple algorithms, accessible to any literate: evidence, registration, use of the four arithmetic operations, issuance of receipts. Thus, according to the famous remark of the "father of the proletarian revolution", even literate cooks are capable of leading the state.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mihail Florescu (Iacob Iacobi, 1912-2000), chemical engineer, communist since 1934, former volunteer in the Spanish Red Brigades and in the French resistance. Among the positions he held, the longest period was Minister of Chemistry (1952-1957; 1965; 1970-1980).

In 1965, after Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's death, Ceaușescu replaced him as party leader. At the end of the year, the director of CEICHEM became part of the national council that coordinated the scientific research, made up of 90 personalities.

In December 1967, Ceaușescu's wife submitted her doctorate in macromolecular chemistry with the thesis *Stereospecific polymerization of isoprene*. It was the only doctorate for which the regulations were repealed by state decree. According to the archive documents, on November 14, 1967, Elena Ceaușescu requested the Minister of Education to establish the commission to submit her thesis (Veress, 2012). It was not clear from the unusual request if she had followed any preparation program. The next day, apparently unrelated to his claim, the Council of State issued a decree repealing the previous regulations on admission, internship and doctoral education plan. This decree was valid only during the time required for the leader's wife to obtain the doctorate (Veress, 2012). Since the presentation of the doctorate was public, another manipulation was resorted to: when the potential auditors showed up on the day and time announced, they were notified that the event had already taken place earlier (Veress, 2012).

According to the opinions of chemistry specialists, the thesis signed by Elena Ceaușescu is the synthesis of some valuable research, coordinated at CEICHEM by Professor Ozias F. Solomon, with well-known researchers among the contributors (Veress, 2012).

### **5. Social prestige as a variable dependent on the psychocultural profile of the group**

The 20th century was also a time of feminism. Elena Ceaușescu was a contemporary of many celebrities from different fields who changed the representation of women's potential. She climbed to power at a time when the success of American politicians depended largely on the telegenics and performance of wives. The Romanian communist leader's wife was the guest of the former artists Jiang Qing, Isabel Peron and Imelda Marcos, metamorphosed into politicians by their husbands...

A reason for the resistance of the superiority of the communist regimes was the full equality of the woman with the man, established in the constitutions of the socialist countries. At the level of common observation, it could be concluded that a culmination of gender equality, through the performance and prestige of women, was the condition of women in communist regimes. Attracting women to the party has been a constant task of the political program. However, in no other country in the "communist camp", did women reach the peaks "conquered" by Ana Pauker<sup>1</sup> and Elena Ceaușescu in Romania. Were the Romanians different?

The correlation of the mechanisms to lead the social life with the psycho-cultural profile of the respective societies is a current topic in intercultural psychology (Beugelsdijk and Welzel, 2018). The approach opposes universalist theories which aimed to identify universal leadership schemes (Hermann and Milburn, 1977; Bartone, Eid, Johnsen, Laberg, and Snook, 2009), either as prototypical psychological traits of the leader, or as mechanisms to obtain and maintain valid transcontextual power. The model of cultural attributes proposed by the Dutch psychosociologist Geert Hofstede was highlighted in this sense (Hofstede, 2003). The starting point of his analysis are six dimensions which configure the cultural profile of a nation with two attributes each, defined from the perspective of a continuum between maximum and minimum, in an ideal-typical way: collectivism vs. individualism; femininity vs. masculinity; power concentration vs. power distribution; avoiding uncertainty vs. engaging in uncertainty; long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation (Shi-yong, 2004). In this paradigm, according to recent studies, the cultural profile of Romanians is strongly collectivist and relatively feminine,

---

<sup>1</sup> Ana Pauker (Ana Rabinsohn, 1893–1960), initial profession: primary school teacher. Illegalist communist and political prisoner (1936-1940). She lived in the USSR during the war. Member of the party leadership (1945-1952). Among the positions held: Minister of Foreign Affairs (1948-1952), Deputy Prime Minister (1949-1952). In 1952 she was investigated and expelled from the party leadership on charges of deviationism.

which reveals their orientation towards harmony and cooperation rather than ambition, competitiveness and appetite for personal assertiveness. As far as the division of power is concerned, Romanians accept more easily social inequity, the legitimate right of those who have the power to lead the many, consider that power must be centralized, aspects that correlate with the high values of the collectivist variable. We can notice an orientation towards avoiding uncertainty, which leads to a deeply conservative mentality. The change is seen with suspicion: Romanians opt for compliance with regulations, to the detriment of the regulatory conflict and its innovative potential, which could affect the predictability of social relations (Voicu and Voicu, 2007; David, 2015).

In accordance with this psycho-cultural profile, the prestige of the leader depends on his ability to support the reproduction of the social structure, to ensure predictability and concentration of power, to respond to the need for security and control. In the light of the mentioned model, such a leader would fail miserably in other societies articulated on democratic structures. However, this is appropriate not only for the psycho-cultural profile of Romanians, but for any “closed society”.

Regarding the communist regimes, the psychosocial profile of a separate group, designated by the Russian term *nomenklatura*, must also be taken into consideration. In essence, the scope of this concept includes the elites who impose and implement the party's ideology and program in all spheres of society. *Nomenklatura* and lower levels of communist political structures functioned on the basis of the “principle of democratic centralism”. This means that the decision taken by the higher hierarchical forum with a majority of votes becomes binding for everyone. The decision is, in fact, the privilege of the leader who ensures the functioning of some institutions and propaganda mechanisms, facade, meant to ensure the representation of a special democracy – “socialist democracy”. An essential feature of the *nomenklatura* is careerism (Voslenski, 1980: 28). In constant competition for promotion and retention in *nomenklatura*, its members will be willing to any initiative or commitment linked to the vision and aspirations of the leader. He will become the holder of absolute power; this will corrupt and degrade him completely with “the greatest and most constant force of erosion” (Acton, 2000: 232-233).

Thus, the inclusion of Elena Ceaușescu in the CC was made by the decision to promote women, corresponding to their weight and role in society, adopted in the summer of 1972. The decision was followed the proposals, established in advance in the small conclave of power and voted unanimously according to the “principle of democratic centralism”. Through these mechanisms, she and the other “proposals” were voted unanimously. Ceaușescu's wife entered the Romanian parliament (1975) in the same way she had entered the party.

#### **6. “World-renowned scientist”**

According to the communist ideology, science was defined as a force for production and treated as such in the party's program.

Well-advised and supported, Elena Ceaușescu first focused on scientific recognitions from abroad. This was possible through Ceaușescu's special positioning in the camps of the “cold war” and Romania's good relations with advanced capitalist countries and not only. The special position of the Romanian leader in the “six-day war” and especially the condemnation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by his teammates in the Warsaw Pact in 1968, made him appear in the opposing “front” as a “good communist”. This good reputation and profitable business with the hosts of the countries he had visited were also favorable the satisfaction of foolish pride.

According to the official list of scientific titles, the first distinction was awarded to Elena Ceaușescu in Paris in 1970 - honorary member of the International Society of Industrial Chemistry (Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Chancellery, file C/2175, f. 1, reverse). Then, American pragmatism appeared in its co-optation, in 1973, as an active member of the New York Academy of Sciences and a Member of Honour of the American Institute of

Chemists, Washington (Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Chancellery, file C/2175, f. 1, reverse)).

The hosts of Ceaușescu from abroad imitated the American practice of introducing in his wife's program some meetings with scientists and the gifts of recognitions and distinctions. In the same year 1973, while accompanying her husband on a regular visit to Latin America, Elena Ceaușescu became a Member of Honour of the College of Chemists and Chemical Engineers of Costa Rica (San Jose) and of no less than three institutions in Ecuador; The National University of Engineering in Lima awarded her the title of Professor of Honour; and she participated two ceremonies in Argentina for the award of the title of Doctor Honoris Causa (Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Chancellery, file C/2175, f. 1, reverse).

The woman, who had graduated only primary school in a normal regime, already had the most impressive record of international recognition in the history of Romanian science. Therefore, prior to her admission in the Romanian Academy, she appeared as consecrated in Paris and in both Americas as a "scientist". With regard to her inclusion in the country's first scientific forum, the decision was taken in the smallest center of power - the Permanent Presidency, consisting of 7 members - at the meeting on February 25, 1974. 5 direct tenures ("bulk") of members of the Academy (Elena Ceaușescu being one of them) and 26 promotions of corresponding members were decided at that moment (Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Chancellery, file 16/1974, f. 5.).

A first volume under the signature of the academic, entitled *Cercetări în domeniul sintezei și caracteristicilor compușilor macromoleculari – contribuții* appeared in 1974, under the auspices of the Academy Publishing House and CEICHEM. In the same year, the paper was translated into English. Translations and publications abroad followed (Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Chancellery, file 102/1987.).

The precious emissary and arranger of her recognitions abroad was General Ion Mihai Pacepa<sup>1</sup>, the deputy head of the Foreign Security Intelligence Direction (Pacepa, 1992). Also specialised in chemistry, until 1978 when he "defected" in the USA, Pacepa used to bring her suitcases full of specialised literature and documents, purchased by subordinates (Pelin, 1997: 116). From her office, these were going to be studied by the real researchers at CEICHEM.

Except for the visits to the Warsaw Pact countries, after being included in the party leadership, Elena Ceaușescu joined the official delegations, benefiting also from the special program of some ceremonies of awarding titles and scientific recognitions. Only in 1975 she received the titles of Member of Honour in the Society of Polymer Science in Japan and the Society of Chemistry in Mexico, as well as two titles of Doctor Honoris Causa (of the University of Tehran and the Women's University of the Philippines). The following year she added the titles of Corresponding Member of the Academy of Athens and Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Yucatao (Mexico). Her official trips in 1977 earned her the quality of Member of Honour of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences and an Associate Member of the Institute of Egypt. The icing on the cake were the titles awarded in 1978 in Great Britain: member (Fellow) of the Royal Institute of Chemistry in the United Kingdom and Professor of Honour of the Polytechnic of Central London. In the same year, the title of Member of Honour of the Illinois State Academy of Sciences was added to her fake laurel wreath (Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Chancellery, file 102/1987).

The prestige of the Romanian communist leader's wife was also supported by scientific publications from abroad. Nowadays, for example, in the ISI-web knowledge database, Elena Ceaușescu appears with 35 articles and over 90 citations (Haiduc, 2012). Through the efforts of Security officials and their connections abroad, Elena Ceaușescu appears as a personality in *The International Who's Who*, London, Europa Publications Limited for the years 1979-1980

---

<sup>1</sup> Ion Mihai Pacepa (1928 -?), initial profession: chemist. Deputy Head of Foreign Security Intelligence Direction (1966-1972), First Deputy Head of Foreign Security Intelligence Direction (1972-1978). In 1978, while on a mission in Federal Germany, he sought political asylum in the United States.

and 1980-1981; and in *Who's Who in Science in Europe*, Guernsey, Francis Hodgson (1978) (Popa, 2014).

In 1979, she was named the president of the National Council for Science and Technology for these “undeniable merits”.

### **7. Domination and prestige as complementary strategies for social ascension**

As an omnipresent feature of human groups, the hierarchical organization is represented by Maner and Case (2016) through a theoretical model which takes into account two determining variables in upward mobility: domination and prestige (Maner and Case, 2016: 129). The first factor of differentiating these ascension strategies relates to the way of accessing and maintaining a position of social influence: respect, in the case of prestige; fear, in the case of domination (Cheng, Tracy and Henrich, 2013). Thus, “people who adopt a strategy of domination in order to rise in social hierarchies tend to be highly calculated and view others as allies or enemies, categorizing them as those who could help them or, viceversa, block their efforts to obtain a superior social rank” (Maner and Case, 2016: 137). The position is not offered to them voluntarily, but confiscated by the leader, who uses the resources at his discretion and arbitrarily once he has access to them, in order to achieve the ultimate goal: maintaining power. From a psychological point of view, the propensity for domination correlates with particularly emphasised narcissistic personality marks, respectively low levels of pleasantness and cognitive and emotional empathy (Cheng, Tracy and Henrich, 2013).

In the case of Elena Ceaușescu, in 1973 she entered the Executive Committee, the body that decided the current tasks of the party between congresses through the mentioned party procedures. In 1976, through the same mechanisms, she took over the leadership of the staff committee of the CC which decided on the promotions and “dismissals” of senior political activists, economic managers, diplomats, dignitaries in education, culture and art. With the exception of her husband, she had become the most influential man in the party and, implicitly, in the country. From 1980, she had the position of first Deputy Prime Minister of the Government. She added new titles in the coming years, while also keeping the old ones.

She evolved in the center of power as a tougher and more inflexible authority than Ceaușescu himself. She used to interfere, without inhibitions, in any matter of party and state. Every time ministers or technocrats tried to inform about the real situation in one area or another, she would shut their mouths, supporting her husband to enforce his decisions.

On January 7, 1979, Elena Ceaușescu's first official anniversary was organized. She was 60 years old (not publicly declared) and after the last retouches on her seniority in the party, 40 years of “revolutionary activity”. The party's official, the daily “Scântea” paid homage to her for “revolutionary activity in the labor movement, for the assertion of Romanian science, for the special contribution to the implementation of the party's policy and the state of shaping the multilaterally developed socialist society” (Scântea, 07.01.1979). The birthday woman was offered the highest orders and decorations, and her record could only be surpassed from that moment on by that of her husband. In the ceremony dedicated to her, the high party and state dignitaries called her “a remarkable example of a communist militant for the freedom and independence of the homeland” and a “brilliant scientist” (Scântea, 07.01.1979).

During the party congress in the same year, the practice of sending common messages to Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu also began. The speakers on the stage and the “telegrams” of the various “working groups” thanked them for their “valuable guidance” and “mobilizing example”.

The power will now have, in Romania, the dual representation of a two-faced Janus.

Her birthday ceremony, as well as his, was going to be repeated and amplified year after year. She is “praised” in mirobolant metaphors (“mother of the country's children”, “woman among women”, “brilliant example of what a woman is and should be in our contemporary society”, etc.) ” (Scântea, 07.01.1979). Did this have the expected effect on the crowd? The successive rewriting and re-signification of history, the excessive public exposure of the

Ceaușescu - imagistic and discursive - enhanced the inoculation mechanisms (McGuire, 1964) and the propaganda techniques of prestige that gave Elena Ceaușescu the attributes of a world-renowned scientist and political personality.

In view of the dual model of prestige versus domination proposed by Maurer and Case (2016), in direct relation to the intensification of the forms and contents of propaganda aimed at increasing prestige, Ceaușescu resorted to all possible means of domination over direct subordinates and the people in whose name they claimed to act. They responded to potential threats through the forms listed in the table below:

**Table 1: Forms of manifestation of domination in the case of Elena Ceaușescu**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Domination</b>	<b>Forms of manifestation</b>
<b>Sabotage and ostracization</b>	Sabotage and ostracize the competent members of the group, who are perceived as a threat.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Eliminate from the decision-making group former illegalists and second-generation leaders with critical aspirations and political ambitions.</li> <li>2. In Romania, special measures have been applied to prevent any form of dissidence (regular verification of personal typewriters, prohibition of conversations with foreigners).</li> </ol>
<b>Information control</b>	Take over, store and use the information in the group to maintain and strengthen the social rank.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The daily report presented by the Minister of Interior to Elena Ceaușescu by the Minister of Interior;</li> <li>2. In the 1980s, at the request of the head of the CC Chancellery, all the documents addressed to Nicolae Ceaușescu were forwarded to Elena Ceaușescu before he could make decisions.</li> </ol>
<b>Vigilance and control</b>	Closely monitor group members as a way to reduce any threat to social status.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The members of the leadership inherited the practice introduced by Stalin to start work at a fixed hour, however they finished work based on the time when the leader left the headquarters.</li> <li>2. After Elena Ceaușescu took over the position of head of the staff section of the CC, the practice of randomly convening, in the evening, the members of the decision center in a specific location built in the nomenklatura district was introduced.</li> <li>3. It is also randomly specified if they can come accompanied by their spouses.</li> <li>4. They could only go to weekend and holiday residences with the group of other leaders and always based on the decision of the Ceaușescus.</li> <li>5. All of them, including Ceaușescus' children and their entourage, were under the supervision of special services.</li> </ol>
<b>Blocking networks between subordinates</b>	Use all necessary means to prevent the creation of alliances between subordinates.	Through the above mentioned measures, the possibilities of informal meetings in the absence of the Ceaușescus were avoided. Close members of their families were also discouraged from having relationships with each other or with other relatives.
<b>Role assignment</b>	Assign to subordinates roles that do not	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In accordance with the party activist's missions (organization, mobilization and control), the periodic "rotation" of the</li> </ol>

	correlate with their abilities, to prevent them from excelling.	<p>dignitaries was defining for the personnel policy introduced under the direction of Elena Ceaușescu</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. The excellence as experts in one field is cancelled by the Ceaușescus' claim to provide "valuable guidance" in all areas.</li> <li>3. Any conversation about political tasks in an informal setting was charged as an act of indiscipline and sanctioned as such.</li> </ol>
--	---	---

*Taken and adapted according to the criteria of the domination model proposed by Maner and Case, 2016.*

### **8. Locus of control – personal determination or destiny?**

Rotter's theory (1966) regarding the preeminence of the assignment by the individual of an external causality (destiny, circumstances) or internal (own merits and actions) in achieving the desired goals was a large audience one during the ascension of Elena Ceaușescu. As for her, she died convinced that she had succeeded in everything through effort, self-sacrifice and own skills. A few moments before her death, she made a stunning statement in front of the court: "I have worked and fought for the people since I was 14, this is how I sacrificed my life for the people".

The reality was completely different as it appears from the data, the causal relationships and the arguments presented above. Elena Ceaușescu's fate, if we are to use this term, lies in her husband's political evolution and personality. The quality of his wife favored her rise in the absence of skills that would have justified the prediction of performance in any field. The peculiarities of the marriage relationship, imprinted mainly by her personality, ambitions and narcissism brought her the power. In the opinion of those who knew him closely, Nicolae Ceaușescu was the man of only one woman (Andrei and Betea, 2011: 289). While his wife did not hold political functions, the nomenclature speculated on her spectacular potential due to the visible influence over her husband. If in a first stage we can speak exclusively of a love addiction from the husband, along the way it has become a much more complex addiction fueled by the "emission of power" and the evolution of the leader. In fact, after the rebelliousness in 1968, in order to avoid the intervention of foreign forces under the pretext of the help requested by a part of the party (as it happened in Czechoslovakia), the party leadership decided to display the representation of an articulated group, without cracks, around Ceaușescu. They also launched mechanisms by which he could not be removed from his position. In the context of this fear, he was going to become more and more anxious and suspicious in his relations with collaborators. His fear increased with age and deteriorating health. His wife thus became his most faithful collaborator and gradually censored the information brought to his attention in order to avoid annoying him.

The daily life in the 80's still remains in the collective memory of Romanians by remembering the cold, waiting in lines, the darkness, the fear of women to get pregnant, the increased state of disgust, suffocation and revolt. At the same time, however, the propaganda amplified the merits and praises brought to the party leaders. The Ceaușescus themselves supervised it with the declared objective to "develop the socialist awareness" for the people who lived in socialist Romania. The example of the "revolutionary devotion in the service of the people" of the two should have encouraged the masses to carry out impossible planning and export tasks in order to fully repay the external debt.

Thus, in order to create adequate social representations of what the Ceaușescus wanted, propaganda supported what Serge Moscovici called a state of imbalance of the crowd "subject and abused by the abundance of superlatives", discursive verbalism and he ellipsis of perceptual reality data (Moscovici, 1997: 45-46). In this sense, cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1954) reached the heights of a "mass schizophrenia, leading to the outcome of December 1989 (Iakovlev and Marcou, 1991: 129). The identification of the Ceaușescus with the "happy present" and "bright future" in the propaganda schemes thus had opposite effects to what was

expected, leading to the stereotype of associating change for the better with the physical elimination of the dictatorial couple.

In conclusion:

1. The re-signification of history and the falsification of the biography of the rulers are political manipulations widely used throughout human history. The ideological program and the means of propaganda available to the communist leaders were favourable for the allegory of the political career of Nicolae Ceaușescu's wife;
2. The personality and the evolution of the marriage relationship of the Ceaușescus in the context of Romania's foreign policy in the context of the "cold war" allowed the development of persuasion techniques meant to lead to the representation of Elena Ceaușescu as a "world-renowned scientist";
3. The "principle of democratic centralism" that regulated statutorily the internal life of the party in communist regimes allowed the Romanian leader to associate his wife with the power exercised in such a dominant way that in front of the court that sentenced them to death Elena Ceaușescu used the phrase "our people" (Marius Tucă Show, 1999).
4. Certain psycho-social peculiarities of the Romanian community and the careerism of the nomenklatura were in turn potentiating factors of the original communist leadership represented by the Ceaușescus. As a close relative confessed while seeing them killed by bullets: "The Ceaușescus would not have reached that criminal power without the support of other criminals..."<sup>1</sup>.

#### References:

1. Acton, L. (2000). *Despre libertate*, Iași: Institutului European.
2. Andrei, Șt. and Betea, L. (2011). *Stăpânul secretelor lui Ceaușescu. I se spunea Machiavelli*, Bucharest: Adevărul.
3. Băcanu, P. M. (1989). Academiciana repetentă. *România Liberă*, 31 decembrie 1989.
4. Bartone, P. T.; Eid, J.; Johnsen, B. H.; Laberg, J. C. and Snook, S. A. (2009). Big five personality factors, hardiness, and social judgment as predictors of leader performance. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*.
5. Beugelsdijk, S. and Welzel, C. (2018). Dimensions and dynamics of national culture: Synthesizing Hofstede with Inglehart. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 49(10), 1469-1505.
6. Central National Historical Archives, Fund 53 - file P / 73, vol 1, f. 16.
7. Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Cadre, file C / 1424.
8. Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Cadre, file C / 2175.
9. Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Chancellery, file C / 2175.
10. Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Chancellery, file 16 / 1974.
11. Central National Historical Archives, Fund CC of RCP – Chancellery, file 102 / 1987.
12. Cheng, J. T.; Tracy, J. L.; Henrich, J. (2010). Pride, personality, and the evolutionary foundations of human social status. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 31(5), pp. 334-347.
13. Cheng, J. T.; Tracy, J. L.; Henrich, J. (2013). Dominance promotes social rank via heightened fear, not by group contribution. *University of British Columbia*.
14. Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității. (2004). *Membrii CC al PCR 1945-1989, Dicționar*, coord. Florica Dobre, Bucharest: Enciclopedică.
15. Cosma, N. and Stănescu, I. (2002) „Adevăruri” demontate, Bucharest: Paco.
16. David, D. (2015). *Psihologia poporului român. Profilul psihologic al românilor într-o monografie cognitiv-experimentală*, Iași: Polirom.

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Violeta Năstăsescu.

17. Dobrescu, M. (2004). *La curtea lui Ceaușescu, Dezvăluirile Suzanei Andreiaș despre viața de familie a cuplului prezidențial*, Bucharest: Amalteea.
18. Festinger, L., Torrey, J. and Willerman, B. (1954). Self-Evaluation as a Function of Attraction to the Group. *Human Relations*, 7.
19. Hartman, L. (1999). A psychological analysis of leadership effectiveness. *Strategy & Leadership*.
20. Hermann, M. G.; Milburn, T. W. (1977). *A psychological examination of political leaders*. Free Press.
21. Hofstede, G. (2003). Cultural dimensions. *www.geert-hofstede.com, consulta, 13*.
22. Iakovlev, A. and Marcou, L. (1991). *Ce que nous voulons faire de l Union Sovietique*, Paris: Edition du Seuil.
23. Ionel H. (2012). N-ai cum să ștergi numele Elenei Ceaușescu din literatura științifică. *Adevărul de Weekend*, 21.04.2012.
24. Lifton, R. J. (1961). *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China*, New York: Norton.
25. Maner, J. K. and Case, C. R. (2016). Dominance and prestige: Dual strategies for navigating social hierarchies. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 54, pp. 129-180). Academic Press.
26. Marius Tucă Show. (1999). *Ultimele zile ale lui Ceaușescu, Emisiunea „Marius Tucă Show”; Invitați: generalul Victor Atanasie Stănculescu, Gelu Voican-Voiculescu, generalul Andrei Kemenici, generalul magistrat Constantin Lucescu, coloneii Viorel Domenico și Ionel Boeru, maiorul Constantin Paisie, analistul Ion Cristoiu*, Bucharest: Machiavelli.
27. McGuire, W. J. (1964). Inducing resistance to persuasion. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 191–229). New York: Academic Press.).
28. Moscovici, S. (1976). *La psychanalyse, son image et son public*, Paris: PUF.
29. Moscovici, S. (1997). *Psihologia socială sau Mașina de fabricat zei*, Iași: Polirom.
30. Otovescu, D. (2016). *Sociologi români de azi. Generații, instituții și personalități*. Bucharest: Academiei.
31. Pacepa, I. M. (1992). *Orizonturi roșii*, Bucharest: Venus.
32. Pelin M. (1997). *DIE 1945-1980. Din culisele spionajului românesc*. Bucharest: Editura Evenimentul Românesc.
33. Petcu, I. (1994). *Ceaușescu, un fanatic al puterii. Biografie*, Bucharest: Românul.
34. Popa, C. C. (2014). Interviu. Exclusiv: Elena Ceausescu- zeci de titluri si premii acordate de institutii-stiintifice importante ale lumii. *Jurnalul Național*, 24.05.2014.
35. Scânteia, 07.01.1979.
36. Scurtu, I. and Buzatu Gh. (1999). *Istoria românilor în secolul XX (1918-1948)*, Bucharest: Paideia.
37. Shi-yong, P. E. N. G. (2004). Hofstede's Cultural Value Theory and His Research Methods. *Journal of Pla University of Foreign Languages*, 1.
38. Solomon, O.; Ceaușescu, E.; Bittman S.; Hlevca, B.; Florescu, I.; Mihăilescu, E. and Ciută, I. (1961). Polimerizarea stereospecifică a izoprenului cu trietilaluminu și tetracolorură de titan. *Revista de Chimie*, 5/1961.
39. Veress, R. (2012). EXCLUSIV. Adevărul despre teza de doctorat a Elenei Ceaușescu. Dosarul INTEGRAL (PDF-FOTO-VIDEO). *Jurnalul Național*, 26.06.2012.
40. Voicu, B. and Voicu, M. (2007). *Valori ale românilor*, Iași: Institutul European.
41. Voslenski, M. (1980). *La nomenclatura, les privilégiés en URSS*, Paris: Edition Belfond.