

## CELEBRATING THE "UNITY DREAM" IN THE COMMUNIST PRESS DURING CEAUSESCU'S REGIME - BETWEEN HISTORY AND PERSONALITY CULT (1980-1989)

Corina Hațegan

Scientific Researcher, "Gh. Șincai" Institute of Research for Social Sciences and Humanities,  
Târgu Mureș

*Abstract: The present study aims to bring into attention the ways in which an important historical event, such as „the making of Great Romania” was celebrated during the '80 in Ceausescu's Romania. It is known the fact that communist propaganda used each and every festive moment to support the communist ideology, and least but not last, to strengthen the leader's personality cult. In this regard, we are going to take a look over some of the most important publications from those times: Scînteia, România Liberă, România Literară, Flacăra, Era Socialistă, Cutezători, Luminița, and Șoimii patriei.*

*Keywords: communism, Nicolae Ceausescu, Romania, Great Union, written press, propaganda.*

An article published in the most important newspaper of the communist regime, *Scînteia*, highlighted the fact that the Communist activists were, in fact, the greatest defenders of the national unity. The journalistic commentary opens with the slogan of the Socialist Party of 1919, according to which "Today's united Romania must be tomorrow's socialist Romania," emphasizing their importance in organizing society after 1918<sup>1</sup>. In other words, the involvement of the Socialist Party at that time in the social movements was used as a legitimate value for the Communists' presence to leadership. An appeal is made to the infinite patriotism that they showed during the interwar period, to the revolutionary actions, to the political platform oriented towards the working class etc., these being continued, of course, through the person of Nicolae Ceausescu.

The article such as the above one does not make a discordant note; the publications of those times abounded by such examples and journalistic comments that under the umbrella of the historical events celebration<sup>2</sup>, promoted the personality cult, the communist regime policies and, most importantly, the adherence to Nicolae Ceausescu and to the Communist Party's ideology<sup>3</sup>. Thus, propaganda legitimized, in this ways, at least some of the political and social actions, while enhancing the nationalist discourse, the sense of the leader's predestination, and the materialization of the national union desideratum.

In the context of a growing pressure from both the inside and the outside world, the Communist propaganda insists, over the years 1980-1989, on the deeds of the ancestors' bravery

---

<sup>1</sup> "Comuniștii-apărătorii cei mai dârji ai unității naționale", *Scînteia*, 1 December, 1985, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> In this article we are going focus on the historical event known in the national history as "The Great Union", representing the process of unification of some territories occupied by Romanian population in 1918, under the name Romania. Therefore in the text we are going to use the following words: *Great Union, 1918's Union* etc. referring to this historical event.

<sup>3</sup> More examples (journal articles) regarding this theme: "Glasul poporului cheamă neîncetat: unire și iar unire", "Rodul luptei eroice, înflăcărare a maselor", "Unitatea poporului în jurul partidului, al tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu - mărturie a unui prezent de demnitate și certitudini" etc., *op.cit.*

and abnegation, but also on historical events of great importance. After all, history, and historiography, would be used by propaganda to support and legitimize a series of political actions.

As a result of the historical or political events, the ideas like freedom, unity, independence, emerged on the occasion of the 1918's Great Union represented an excellent base for the propaganda discourses in the last years of the communist regime in Romania. From another point of view, supporting the political discourse on arguments of a historical nature or to justify political decision was used, in particular, to raise the Romanians' ideological level.

From studies so far, it resulted that propaganda used the myth of the *national unity* as well as others, reinterpreting them into a propagandistic key, so as to fall in with the ideological imperatives. As a result, the reinterpretation directions were multiple; some had the role of conferring Nicolae Ceausescu a status of great leader and implicitly to support the cult of personality, while other directions were oriented towards strengthening the national-communism ideology, promoting civic attitudes, patriotism, sacrifice, revolutionary spirit, etc.).<sup>4</sup> No less important was the objective to maintain a general state of popular mobilization by often reminding citizens the battles of their ancestors.

At the same time, the tributes to historical events, during the Ceausescu's regime last years should also be seen from a perspective of propaganda's strategies, even if ultimately we are talking about bringing homages to events that happened in the past. Strictly speaking, many historical events' tributes were made by the book, accordingly to propaganda's strategies, and had the ultimate goal to strengthen the cult of Nicolae Ceausescu's personality, positioning him not only as an illustrious leader but also on a favourable position in the national history.

In order to accomplish this study, we used newspapers and magazines from 1980-1989 such as *Scînteia*, *România Liberă*, *România Literară*, *Flacăra*, *Era Socialistă*, *Cutezătorii*, *Luminița*, and *Șoimii patriei*.

The year 1983 presents the Communist regime in celebration on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of Great Romania, in other words, 65 years from the fulfilment of the unity dream, as the press of that moment presented the situation. For example, *Romania Libera* newspaper dedicated the entire first page to the commemoration of the 1918's Great Union, as well as large spaces throughout the whole newspaper. One of the articles, entitled *An Epochal Act*, highlights the difficulties that the Romanians have experienced in fulfilling their dream of unity. Although, we can remark, even from the beginning of the article, that the journalistic text focuses on the way in which Nicolae Ceausescu saw the historical moment, but also on the fact that the leader is a continuator of the national unification project started in 1918. The picture next to the article strengthens the idea of continuity, portraying Nicolae Ceausescu shaking hands with the *generation that made the Union*.

The reader also finds out that the country's President is a profound analyst of the historical events given that "[...] comrade Nicolae Ceausescu has often referred to the events of six decades ago, analysing them thoroughly with great power of discernment and an exemplary of justness"<sup>5</sup>. The leader association with the ideal of unity and the underlining of the connection between him and the historical events is explicitly marked by numerous photographs. For example, the Nicolae Ceausescu's portrait appears on the front page of a newspaper, alongside an article describing his thoughts regarding the pass of 65 year from the Union<sup>6</sup>. Despite the fact that the edition of the newspaper is dedicated to the celebration of a 65 years old historical event, the presence of the personality cult is remarked through the numerous photographs which mirrors Nicolae Ceausescu in different ways. Another daily newspaper published a photo of an artistic work, having as its main character the country's leader, Nicolae Ceausescu and in the second plan, some of the most important figures of national history are clearly visible<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> See more in Manuela Marin, *Nicolae Ceausescu. Omul si cultul*, Cetatea de Scaun, Targoviste, 2016, pp.372-393.

<sup>5</sup> Ion Pavelescu, "Un act epocal", *România Liberă*, 1 December 1983, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *România Liberă*, 2 December 1983, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> "Inscripții pe drapel", art work by Eugen Popa, *Scînteia*, 1 December 1985, p. 3.

Of course, the historical legacy, the ancestors' victories, or the struggles against the external forces remain most appreciated themes for the articles, the unity and the union desideratum being, in fact, promoted as moral values of a good communist. Last but not least, resuming the leader's social-political thinking, in another article, the journalist commented that the Great Union of 1918 actually opened the way for progress and civilization, a work to be accomplished only after 23 August 1944. It also brings to the readers' attention the fact that the Romanian Communist Party is the one who fully understood the people's aspirations, this being the reason why Romanians feel the need to support the Party and Nicolae Ceausescu<sup>8</sup>.

In other words, propaganda exploits the theme of attachment to the communist values, to the Communist Party, and to Nicolae Ceausescu, through arguments of a historical nature. In order to reinforce this idea of continuity, unity and attachment, the press provides for publication poems whose lyrics are representative for the cult of personality: „De-aceea casa noastră-i una: Țara!/Păstrată-n demnitate și Unire/Unire-n steme: Patrie - Partid/Poporul o durează înainte/Spre comuniste țări ce se deschid/Cu-nfiul României Președinte”<sup>9</sup> or "Da, Ceaușescu este eroul națiunii/în care o istorie s-a adunat prin veac/El vrea o lume-a păcii în care cresc copiii-n deplină libertate și tutunurile tac”<sup>10</sup>.

The already obsessive theme of the Romanian people's unity, especially with the emphasis on unity (attachment) around the Party, is resumed in a giant article describing the festive gathering occasioned by the 65th anniversary of the 1918's Union, exposing in fact, Nicolae Ceausescu's speech to the event in question. The press also goes into details about the tribute parades and performances dedicated to the Union celebration, which, in reality, praised socialism's superiority and Nicolae Ceausescu's personality cult. An example in this respect would be an article describing the commemorative activities in Alba Iulia city, entitled "It is unique the three coloured flag and the unique is the pride, Ceausescu, Party means Romania!"<sup>11</sup>. This kind of article is included also in the same category of positive appraisals from the participants at the celebrations at Alba Iulia, where it seems that the participants bring homages to Nicolae Ceausescu, even if the celebrations are occasioned by a tribute to the ancestors' deeds.

The way the participants addressed is reflected into a propagandistic title, "Much esteemed and beloved Comrade, Nicolae Ceausescu", and expresses their adherence to the Party's policies; propaganda used on numerous occasions this technique of the crowd that acclaims the benefits of the regime's policies in unison. In other words, on the background of the Union celebration, propaganda takes advantage of the moment and uses it as an argument for political discourse, as well as for the foundation of the personality cult, the following fragment being explanatory: "In full consonance with the will of our whole people, we assure you, beloved Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu - a symbol of our unity and freedom - of deep gratitude and boundless love for the tireless activity that you put with vibrant patriotism and revolutionary consistency in the service of our socialist progress and civilization [...]"<sup>12</sup>.

We also note that in some cases the celebration of the Great Union was overshadowed by other events considered to be more important, such as the visit of the Syrian Arab Republic

<sup>8</sup> Ion Mitran, "Din gândirea social-politică a tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu. Valoare supremă a istoriei patriei", *România Liberă*, 1 December 1983, p. 1 și p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Pavel Pereș, "Lucrare de neam", *România Liberă*, 1 December 1983, p. 1. ("That's why our home is one Country / Preserved in dignity and Union / In the throne: The homeland - The Party / The people take it ahead / The Communist countries opening / The President of Romania")

<sup>10</sup> Dan Rotaru, "Sub steaua comunistă", *România literară*, 29 November 1984, p. 1. ("Yes, Ceausescu is the hero of the nation / where a history has gathered through the centuries / He wants a world of peace in which children grow up in full freedom and the canon are silenced.")

<sup>11</sup> *România Liberă*, 2 December 1983, p.6.

<sup>12</sup> "Mult stimată și iubite tovarășe Nicolae Ceaușescu", *România Liberă*, 2 December 1983, p.6.

President, Hafez Al-Assad<sup>13</sup>, or the 1986's Peace Referendum<sup>14</sup>. Of course, the Union celebrations were given space in the newspapers, but the most important part of the event was focused on more current events.

Another part of the present study has been focused on children's literature, especially on comics found in children and youth magazines. Studies so far have highlighted that child literature has been subject to ideological manipulation through the introduction of topics such as peace fight, patriotic work, political education, etc. during the communist regime. The comics' themes included, in varying proportions, topics related to history, courageous deeds, great accomplishments of the Party, science-fiction etc. As far as the themes of history are concerned, they cover different moments of national history, important historical figures, and last but not least, the celebration of the Great Union. However, unlike other events, such as August 23 – the National Day, the comic strips regarding the Great Union are less frequent.

Comics stories were designed in the same way: a prominent representative from a Transylvanian village, a teacher, tries to convince the villagers of the importance of attending the Alba Iulia's Assembly. As a result, the "lord" of the village, called *the baron*, opposes, accusing the teacher of instigation and tried to retain them to make the trip to Alba Iulia city, but the villagers manage to arrive and in the end, they assist to the fulfilment of the national unity great dream<sup>15</sup>.

The negative character, the baron, is opposed to the great dream of national unity and independence, and in order to outline the negative traits, propaganda uses different techniques. An example would be a comics' dialogue, where the villain threatens the villagers with a letter: "Teacher, do not dare to take the children to the Union, otherwise you will not see your daughter again"<sup>16</sup>. It is worth noticing that in the threatening letter, the baron, the negative character and the representative of the oppressive forces, "writes" Alba, the city name, in lowercases, so the reader may find some of the Transylvanian Romanian exploiters' character traits: ignorance, negative thought regarding the Romanians' destiny, disdain for the inhabitants of Transylvania etc.

Positive characters, on the other hand, are endowed with almost heroic powers, a great spirit of sacrifice, and last but not least, they also have features of common people so that the reader can identify with them. Likewise, the positive characters, besides the dual character, have an identity, a power and a mission, elements used by the propaganda to present a comics' story shaped to the ideological demands of the time<sup>17</sup>.

We also note the existence of other topics such as the revolutionary theme, the theme of the youngsters - the future of the homeland, the theme of courage and sacrifice, the call to battle, the mobilization of the population against a common enemy etc. In other words, the comic strips on the Great Union have a moralizing character that highlights the Romanians' ancestors multi-millenarian struggles, the courage and deeds of them, promotes propagandistic themes such as peace fight, struggle for independence, etc. No less important is the fact that, in the end, comics are used for

<sup>13</sup>*România Liberă*, 1 December 1987, p.1 or *Scînteia*, 1 December 1987, p.1 The 1987's editions of that year are dedicated almost entirely to the official visit and discussions between the two presidents. The celebration of the 69th anniversary of the Union is thus set in a context favourable to the moment: peace, unity, friendship and harmony, etc.

<sup>14</sup>*Flacăra*, 23 November 1986. Much of this edition is dedicated to "the people's will for peace", the edition celebrates, of course, the Great Union, this time, in a context of the unspoiled desire of Romanians for peace and unity, the fulfilment of the great dream under the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party and the necessity of continuing this policy by Nicolae Ceausescu

<sup>15</sup> As examples: *Primăvara din Decembrie*, scenario Petru Demetru Popescu, drawings Elena Mihăescu, „Cutezători”, nr.44-48 1988; *Floarea din Decembrie*, scenario Petru Demetru Popescu, drawings Puiu Manu, „Luminița”, nr.12, 1986, 2 parts, pp. 8-9; *Trepte spre Marea Unire*, scenario Vlaicu Bârnea, drawings Valentin Tănase și Radu Vintilescu, „Cutezători”, nr. 42-48, 1983.

<sup>16</sup>*Floarea din Decembrie*, op.cit, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> More in Peter Coogan, *The Definition of the Superhero* în Jeet Heer și Kent Worcester (editors), *A Comics Studies Reader*, University Press of Mississippi Jackson, 2009 și de Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith, *Comics History, Form, and Culture*, New York, The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2009.



propaganda's purposes, being a political discourse with historical arguments, adapted to young people's understanding, in order to be an easy and entertaining way of mind manipulation.

For a complete insight into how the Communist press celebrated the Great Union, we also appealed to the magazine *Era Socialista* a self-titled publication *Theoretical and Social Political Journal of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party*. In this magazine we can notice articles, editorials, etc. signed both by historians who have been agreed by the Communist Party, and also by political world personalities but all converged towards the same direction, to reflect the historical-social thinking of President Nicolae Ceausescu.

An extensive four-page article in the *Era Socialista* magazine reviews the most important historical moments from 1877 to the contemporary period, recalling, of course, the heroes of antiquity or the Dacian legacy of the people. The article bears the signature of Nicolae Ceausescu, presented in this case also as a preserver and promoter of the moral-ethical values of society and a curator of the spirituality of the Romanian people: "[...] Comrade Nicolae Ceausescu contributed to the enrichment of the revolutionary conception of the world and society - the living, participative feeling with which the Romanian people are now bending over some of the events of its past, such as the conquest of independence, the building of the an unitary national state and many others"<sup>18</sup>.

At the same time, the article quoted above insists on the fact that the existence of Nicolae Ceausescu, whose belief is to honour the ancestors, and to understand the past, creates the new history of the Romanian people, "the Communist history of our people"<sup>19</sup> consequently, Romania is affirming itself in the contemporary world. It is worth to note that of the approximately two-and-a-half pages of the article, more than one and a half pages are devoted to the history of the "Ceausescu's Age" and to the progress of the homeland after Communists took power with a focus on the Ceausescu's time.

In fact, the magazine, which was published in 1987, celebrates 110 years since the conquest of Romania's state independence, and under the generic title "Fight for Freedom and Independence - Fundamental Coordination of the History of the Romanian People" a series of articles<sup>20</sup> are published outlining the struggle for independence. We should be aware, of course, about the fact that the articles were drafted to fit the imperatives of the regime and propaganda's speeches. In the end, they were based on a number of topics - the importance of popular masses, the fight against fascists, the safeguarding of the nation, the labour movement, national sovereignty, etc. - all with the same conclusion: "Brilliant follower of the glorious Romanian tradition of struggle, fully identified with his socialist ideals, the Romanian Communist Party affirmed itself [...] as a defender of the homeland's independence, unity and sovereignty"<sup>21</sup>. We note that most of the times, almost like a ritual, the conclusion of the articles converged towards the same direction, to the present time, but with the emphasis on the importance of the Party and the leader. Thus, the reader was also focused on the bright future represented by the Party and Nicolae Ceausescu.

Emphasizing the importance of fulfilling the national ideal of independence, the articles show the continuation of the struggles for freedom during the Middle Ages, the revolts of the

<sup>18</sup> Camil Mureșanu (prof. univ. dr.), "Cucerirea independenței depline de stat a României în 1877 și făurirea statului național unitar în 1918 – încununarea a luptelor necurmăte ale poporului nostru pentru păstrarea ființei naționale, pentru refacerea unității de stat pe vechea vatră dacică", *Era socialistă*, nr. 1, 10 January 1987, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> The following article appeared in *Era socialistă magazine*, nr. 8, 25 April 1987, pp. 30-39, in this order: Constantin Căzănișteanu, „Independența – aspirație permanentă, supremă a poporului român”; Nichita Adăniloie, "Cucerirea independenței de stat – etapă hotărâtoare în dezvoltarea României"; Camil Mureșanu, "Solidaritatea tuturor românilor în lupta independenței de stat"; Ion Mamina, "Mișcarea muncitorească și socialistă – promotor activ al independenței patriei"; Constantin Botoran, "Masele largi populare - forță hotărâtoare a făuririi statului național unitar român"; Nicolae Petreanu, "Independența și progresul social-economic al patriei"; Gheorghe Buzatu, „În fruntea luptei împotriva primejdiei fascismului și a războiului pentru salvagardarea independenței și suveranității naționale"; Ștefan Lache, "Socialismul - temelia afirmării depline a independenței și suveranității naționale".

<sup>21</sup> "Lupta pentru libertate și independență – coordonată fundamentală a istorie poporului român", *Era socialistă*, nr. 8, 25 April 1987, p. 30.

peasants etc., culminating in the Great Union of 1918, all under the sign of all regions Romanians' national conscience and solidarity. Although, as Cristian Roiban<sup>22</sup> notes, it is highlighted that the inhabitants of different provinces have been led by this permanent national conscience, the national historiography prefers to speak rather of national history and less of local history, and if there are mentions like those it refers to the Romanian population only.

As Emanuel Copilaș states, propaganda has promoted in an obsessive and exacerbated way the revolution or the independence wars in order to emphasize that these were stages of a revolutionary path that inevitably had the finality in the *Golden Age*, so the Party is presented as a follower of this battles, revolutions etc.<sup>23</sup>.

The publication of 1987, under the slogan "69 years after the creation of the Romanian national state", in the "pages of history" section of the *Era Socialista* magazine, elaborates an article describing the entire Romanian people's aspirations to freedom. The article insists, at the same time, on the interwar period, which, from the communist point of view, marked the development of the country in a negative way, justifying the communist political ideology necessity, the presence of the Communists, the justice of their actions ever since they took the political power. It also has the role of opposing the two periods of Romania, interwar and communist, pointing out that during the communist period, Romania has ascended many stages of civilization.

We also note a discourse on legality versus legitimacy, remarking that the legitimacy of the facts was sometimes more important than their legality, even if we talk about historical events. An example of this would be the commemoration of the communism's illegality times in Romania and the assumption of illegal activities to Ceausescu during that period. The illegal period, thus become a reason of pride and support for the cult of the Romanian leader's personality cult.

### **Conclusions**

The celebration of a historical event of such magnitude as 1918's Union, as expected, took place every year under the same slogans and often reached the same conclusions: the Romanian Communist Party represents the society's progress factor and is a fiercely militant against the exploitation of the Romanian nation. To support this, there were arguments of a historical nature, examples of the Romanians being exploited under different leaderships before the Communists took power, by the bourgeoisie. The dominance of the working class or of the peasantry by the privileged classes is accentuated by presenting the historical facts in a manner that rises to the level of the ideological and political imperatives of the *Ceausescu's Age*; consequently the period of communist rule is positioned in a favourable light where, finally, desires and aspirations for freedom are fulfilled.

Undoubtedly, 1918's Union is presented as one of the most important moments of national history, propaganda having the role of embodying a patriotic feeling and defining national consciousness, using historiography as a vehicle, to justify the necessity of continuing, through the communist regime, the national ideals fulfilment. On the other hand, the Party used every moment or event to expose the great achievements of communism in Romania, and to deepen even more the leader's personality cult so the celebration of the Great Union represented yet another opportunity in this respect.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Cutezătorii 1980-1989  
Era Socialista 1980-1989  
Flacăra 1980-1989

<sup>22</sup> Mai multe despre regiune și stat național în Cristian Roiban, "Regiune vs. <<stat național unitar>> în istoriografia național-comunistă", in Anuarul Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului și Memoria Exilului Românesc, *Marginalități, periferii și frontiere simbolice. Societatea comunistă și dilemele identitare*, volume IX, 2014, pp. 197 – 214.

<sup>23</sup> Emanuel Copilaș, *Națiunea socialistă. Politica identității în epoca de aur*, Polirom, Iași, 2015, pp. 190-192.

Luminița 1980-1989

România Liberă 1980-1989

România Literară 1980-1989

Scînteia 1980-1989

Șoimii patriei 1980-1989

Ceaușescu Nicolae, *Cuvântarea la încheierea dezbaterilor privind dezvoltarea învățământului de cultură generală, profesional, tehnic și superior în Republica Socialistă România. Plenara C.C. al P.C.R. din 22-25 aprilie 1968*, în „Documente ale Partidului Comunist Român privind dezvoltarea și perfecționarea învățământului”, București, Editura Politică, 1972

Coogan Peter, *The Definition of the Superhero* în Jeet Heer și Kent Worcester (editori), *A Comics Studies Reader*, University Press of Mississippi Jackson, 2009.

Copilaș Emanuel, *Națiunea socialistă. Politica identității în epoca de aur*, Polirom, Iași, 2015.

Duncan Randy and Matthew J. Smith, *Comics History, Form, and Culture*, New York, The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2009

Emanuel Copilaș, *Națiunea socialistă. Politica identității în epoca de aur*, Iași, Polirom, 2015, pp. 191-192.

Marin Manuela, *Nicolae Ceausescu. Omul și cultul*, Cetatea de Scaun, Targoviste, 2016.

Mihaela Precup, *The Image of the Foreigner in Historical Romanian Comics under Ceaușescu's Dictatorship*, in Carolene Ayaka and Ian Hague (editors), *Representing multiculturalism in comics and graphics novels*, Routledge, 2015, p. 98 -110.

Slama- Cazacu Tatiana, *Stratageme comunicaționale și manipularea*, Iași, Polirom, 2000.

*Teme comune pentru cursurile învățământului politico-ideologic*, editat de secția de Propagandă a C.C. a P.C.R., 1981

Thom Françoise, *Limba de lemn*, București, Humanitas, 2005.