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STUDIA TERRITORIALIA 1

THE POLITICS OF MEMORY AND THE REFASHIONING OF COMMUNISM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE: THE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO ROMANIAN COMMUNISM

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Abstract
This paper analyzes the contents of a pocket-sized booklet entitled *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc* (*The Illustrated Guide to Romanian Communism*), which was published to counter growing nostalgia for the communist era that is popular among Romania's young people. Influenced by family members and the media, the postmemory of Romanian communism among the country's youth tends to focus on the positive aspects of the communist period and ignore the crimes of the postwar regime. The guide provides a selective reading of the history of Romanian communism and identifies repression as its main feature. The critical visual analysis of the images in the guide identifies the various forms that repression took during communist rule. It targeted not only individuals but also entire social groups, who faced imprisonment on political grounds. At the same time, the repression took quotidian form as the regime extended its control over people's private lives and even their habits of consumption.
Keywords: Romania; public memory; postmemory; post-communist nostalgia; civic education; visual analysis
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Introduction

Although more than thirty years have passed since the Revolution of December 1989, the event still triggers hot debate about what communism in Romania was and how it should be remembered in the present day. During the last three decades, the public memory of communism has evolved from unanimous dislike to a mix of nostalgia for the good old times and vivid recollections of the crimes and human rights violations committed by the communist regime. Moreover, an increasing number of young people who did not directly experience communism have a positive image of it.[1]

My paper focuses on the project of a local NGO in Romania aimed at countering the nostalgia for communism that is popular among the younger generation. The project resulted in *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc* (*The Illustrated Guide to Romanian Communism*), a pocket-sized booklet intended to introduce young people to the "true" history of Romanian communism. The booklet provides a selective reading of that history. It stresses facts that its authors hope will reveal the repressive nature of communism and persuade young people to abandon nostalgic notions about it. The booklet identifies repression as the main feature of the communist regime and attempts to explain it to its young readers.

In this article I will focus primarily on the visual aspects of *The Illustrated Guide to Romanian Communism*. My analysis will address the following questions: what are the events that highlight the criminal nature of Romania's communist past in order to counter youth nostalgia for it? Does the guide interpret repression as an individual experience or as a collective trauma? Does the guide regard repression as a few exceptional events (e.g., imprisonment of dissidents) or as a daily experience of common people? To answer these questions, I will examine the visual content of the guide, which is intended to show how communist repression evolved and how its forms and its tactics changed over time.

In the process, I employ a critical visual analysis that focuses on the images in the booklet. My first step is *describing* the image by "pointing out features contained within it, such as formal properties of composition, color, tone and contrast."[2] The second step is identifying the *subject matter* and the persons, objects, places, or events captured in the image. Examination of the *form* of the image

[1] Manuela Marin, "Assessing Communist Nostalgia in Romania: Chronological Framework and Opinion Polls," *Twentieth Century Communism* 11 (2016): 20–21, doi: 10.3898/175864316819698558.

[2] Jonathan E. Schroeder, "Critical Visual Analysis," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research in Marketing*, ed. Russell W. Belk (Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Elgar Pub, 2006), 305.

focuses on the way in which the subject matter is presented.[3] Special attention will be given to the use of color and color combinations to convey a mood and enhance certain elements of the message.[4] In analyzing the images of *The Illustrated Guide* I will also consider what Victoria E. Bonnell has defined as *visual syntax*, namely "the positioning of figures and objects in relation to each other and the environment."[5] I will show how communist symbols and the historical roles of different communist personalities (for example, the Romanian leader Nicolae Ceaușescu) are reinterpreted (or their official meaning subverted) by the guide in order to convince its readers that repression was the main instrument the communist regime used to solidify its position in Romania.

Grasping the full meaning of the image in the booklet requires its analysis in relation to its other elements. As Gillian Rose notes, "visual images make sense in relation to other things, including written texts and very often other images."[6] While I do not analyze the texts that contextualize the events or characters that appear in the booklet's images, I organize this article according to the titles of its chapters and analyze the images it uses to illustrate them. In that way I intend to deconstruct the internal logic of *The Illustrated Guide* and its message. Lastly, I apply the *images in use* approach to critical analysis of visual communication, in which "images are not considered as meaningful objects in and of themselves but as part of the process of negotiating values."[7] I examine *The Illustrated Guide* as a tool used in the civic education of Romanian youth for raising their awareness of the repressive nature and the human rights violations of the Romanian communist regime.

My paper is structured in four main parts. An introduction is followed by a discussion of the theory of public memory, nostalgia, and post-communist nostalgia in particular. The purpose of this conceptual background is to show the reader how young people's "postmemory" is increasingly constructed by positive impressions of the communist past. I examine the process of coming to terms with the communist past in Romania and the contradictions in its public memory in the following part. The part after that focuses on the behind-the-scenes

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[3] Ibid., 305, 308.

[4] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016), 64.

[5] Victoria Bonnel, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 10.

[6] Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 22.

[7] Matteo Stocchetti and Karin Kukkonen, Introduction to *Images in Use: Towards the Critical Analysis of Visual Communication*, ed. Matteo Stocchetti and Karin Kukkonen (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), 3.

story of *The Illustrated Guide to Romanian Communism*, how it has reached young people all over Romania, and how it has inspired or become part of other cultural and educational initiatives. Lastly, the paper assesses the effectiveness of the visual content of the guide in countering post-communist nostalgia among today's young people in Romania.

Public Memory, Nostalgia, and the Young People of Romania

For the purposes of this paper, I have adopted John Bodnar's concept of public memory. According to Bodnar, "public memory is a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future." Public memory is a "communicative and cognitive process" that ideally takes place in the public sphere, where it "emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions." Official cultural expressions "[promote] interpretations of past and present that reduce the power of competing interests that threaten the attainment of their [the societal elite's and public authorities'] goals." In contrast, vernacular cultural expressions are produced by a set of diverse and constantly changing (and sometimes contradictory) interests, which make up the whole of society. Vernacular culture competes with official culture for control of the significance and interpretation of historical events that relate to "serious matters in the present."[8] As my paper will demonstrate, coming to terms with the communist past in Romania means that the public memory of communism has evolved from an exclusive focus on condemning repression to a blend of revulsion at its criminal aspects and nostalgia for its more positive aspects.

Since the 1990s, the Romanian public memory has endorsed an interpretation of the communist past that focused on repression. This was the all but exclusive narrative about communism in Romania until the mid-2000s. Since then, the dominant narrative has emphasized repression as the "true" nature of communism and employed its image to counter a growing strain of nostalgia for the days of communist rule (post-communist nostalgia) in the vernacular culture. I have chosen as a case study a pocket-size booklet called *The Illustrated Guide to Romanian Communism*. The booklet is one of many civic initiatives that attempt to reinforce the criminal image of communism for the purpose of

[8] John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13–15.

combating post-communist nostalgia, especially among young people. The guide "calls into question the communist past and its still potent symbols" in order to provoke public discussion of communism and dispel the myths being created around it.[9]

According to Svetlana Boym, nostalgia is a feeling of longing for past times, people, objects, feelings, events, and relationships that no longer exist. It implies "a sense of loss and displacement" based on an obvious contrast between a romanticized version of the past and a present that is considered inferior.[10] Nostalgia is not so much about the past but about the present and its relationship to the past.[11] My paper will show how the social and economic insecurities of the transition period favored the rise of a nostalgic reinterpretation of Romanians' lives as they were before December 1989. Opinion polls conducted in Romania after the fall of the communist regime indicate that this nostalgia is not of the *restorative* type, that is, it is not aimed at "rebuilding the lost home" or the communist political regime.[12] Most of the respondents longed for the social and economic stability of communism, but also wanted to preserve the existing democratic structure. The results of the opinion polls reflect two types of nostalgia: *endo-nostalgia*, nostalgia for the past one experienced personally, and *exo-nostalgia*, nostalgia for a past not lived personally.[13] As my paper will show, exo-nostalgia – arising from parental influence, advertising,[14] art,[15] and "cool" bars, pubs and restaurants decorated with "red" symbols and serving drinks and dishes with "communist flavor"[16] – tends to idealize the image of the communist period among a growing number of today's youth.

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[9] Caterina Preda, "Art and Politics in Postcommunist Romania: Changes and Continuities," *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 42, no. 3 (2012): 123, doi: 10.1080/10632921.2012.726550.

[10] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiii, xvi.

[11] See also Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979).

[12] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xviii, 41. On the roots of nostalgia for communism in Romania, see Marin, "Assessing Communist Nostalgia in Romania," 10–26.

[13] David Berliner, "Are anthropologists nostalgist?" in *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, ed. Olivia Angé and David Berliner (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 21.

[14] Dragoş Petrescu, "Selective Memories of Communism: Remembering Ceauşescu's Socialism in Post-1989 Romania," in *Gebrochene Kontinuitäten. Transnationalität in den Erinnerungskulturen Ostmitteleuropas im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Agnieszka Gąsior, Agnieszka Halemba, and Stefan Troebst (Köln: Böhlau, 2014), 314–319.

[15] Caterina Preda, "Le rôle de la nostalgie dans la mémoire artistique du passé communiste dans la Roumanie contemporaine," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 57, no. 3–4 (2015), 1–16, doi: 10.1080/00085006.2015.1092709.

[16] See for example, Emilia Sava, "Salata Ana Pauker şi cocktail Scânteia," *Adevărul*, March 1, 2010, 32.

The positive image of communism in the minds of Romanian young people illustrates what Marianne Hirsch has called "postmemory." In her understanding, postmemory "describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful ... experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right."[17] The transmission of postmemory usually takes place in the family, because "postmemory's connection to the past is not ... actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation."[18] When they decide to abandon their indifference towards the communist period, young people use stories they have heard or read from different sources to make sense of a social and political reality that is foreign to them.[19]

The Public Memory of Communism: From Disparagement to Divisive Remembering

The violent end of the communist regime in December 1989 and the then-recent memory of the severe hardships people had to face during the 1980s relegated the communist period to the trash bin of Romanian history for many years. The former communists that gained power in Romania in 1990 openly discouraged all debates about the communist past. They argued that the communist period had to be forgotten as soon as possible in order to build a new, democratic order in Romania. Some in the Romanian elite and civil society opposed what Vladimir Tismăneanu called the "politics of amnesia" with regard to the communist past and demanded official condemnation of the regime's criminal practices.[20] In response, public memory began to focus increasingly on political repression, dissident activities, the hardships and deprivations of everyday life under communist rule, and the crimes and surveillance of the infamous Romanian

[17] Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 103, doi: 10.1215/03335372-2007-019.

[18] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5, 34–40.

[19] On this subject see Albena Hranova, "Loan Memory: Communism and the Youngest Generation," in *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experiences in Southeast Europe*, ed. Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou, and Stefan Troebst (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2014), 233–250; or Kristen Ghodsee, *Lost in Transition. Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2011), 190–191.

[20] Vladimir Tismăneanu, "Democracy and Memory: Romania Confronts its Communist Past," *The Annals of the American Society of Political and Social Science* 617 (May 2008): 168, doi: 10.1177/0002716207312763.

secret police, the Securitate.[21] Positive memories of the communist period were repressed because those who expressed them were afraid to be dubbed "nostalgic for communism."[22] Such people were viewed as backward and rooted in the past. They were mocked for their apparent refusal to embrace the democratic and market reforms triggered by the regime change in December 1989.[23]

The situation changed in the second half of the 2000s.[24] Several developments eased the way for a new assessment of Romania's communist past. Since 2005, several advertising campaigns successfully marketed products that survived December 1989. The advertisements employed a romanticized image of the "good old times" of the communist period. Examples were ads for Dacia automobiles, produced in Romania since 1966, and Rom chocolate bars. The commercials brought idealized snapshots of the Romanians' lived experiences under communism into the mainstream. They liberated positive memories from the moral guilt of praising anything related to the communist regime. Hit hard by the world economic crisis of 2008, which jeopardized their country's relative economic prosperity, many Romanians began to look back on the communist period with nostalgia and reappraise the modest but risk-free life of the communist period. Positive memories of the 1965–77 period, when Romanians enjoyed relatively decent living standards, contrasted sharply with the problems the world economy was causing many Romanians in the twenty-first century. Memories of the economic hardships of the 1980s were overwhelmed by current worries.[25]

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[21] See Petrescu, "Selective Memories of Communism," 311–313; Daniel Barbu, *Republica absentă. Politică și societate în România comunistă* (București: Nemira, 1999), 107–117; Simina Bădică, "The Black Hole Paradigm. Exhibiting Communism in Post-Communist Romania," *History of Communism in Europe* 1 (2010): 83–95; Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, "Retribution, Remembering, Representation: On Romania's Incomplete Break with the Communist Past," in *Geschichtsbilder in den postdiktatorischen Ländern Europas. Auf der Suche nach historisch-politischen Identitäten*, ed. Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stoklasa (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009), 155–156, 164–166; Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, "The Canon of Remembering Romanian Communism: From Autobiographical Recollections to Collective Representations," in *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experiences in Southeast Europe*, ed. Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou, and Stefan Troebst (Budapest, New York: CEU Press, 2014), 45–70; Cristina Petrescu, "Websites of Memory: In Search of Forgotten Past," in *Remembering Communism*, 595–613.

[22] Dumitru Tinu, "Nostalgia normalității," *Adevărul*, March 23, 1999, 8.

[23] Marin, "Assessing Communist Nostalgia in Romania," 10–13.

[24] Petrescu, "Selective Memories of Communism," 305, 313, 319–321; Manuela Marin, "Communist Nostalgia in Romania," *Studia UBB Historia* 58, no. 2 (December 2013): 63–64.

[25] Petrescu, "Selective Memories of Communism," 319–321.

At the same time as Romania's public memory was beginning to accept selected positive aspects of communism, it was affected by the political changes of 2004. The neo-communists were ousted from power by a coalition of center-right parties that aimed to capitalize politically "on the rhetoric of confronting the past."[26] The new government issued an official condemnation of the communist regime's crimes in 2006.[27] Subsequently, it created the Institute for the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (Institutul de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului şi Memoria Exilului Românesc, or IICCMER) in 2007. This was the second research institute in Romania, created after the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism (Institutul Naţional pentru Studiul Totalitarismului), whose mission is to research and document repression and human rights violations during the communist period.[28] A similar public memory institution, founded in 1993, is the Museum of the Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of Resistance (Memorialul Victimelor Comunismului şi al Rezistenţei) established inside an infamous communist prison in the northern part of the country (Sighetu Marmaţiei). It is the only state-funded museum about the communist period in Romania. Although the exhibition mainly focuses on the repression in the 1950s at the beginning of communist rule in Romania and pays tribute to interwar Romanian political leaders who died in the Sighet prison, it also addresses topics concerning the history of European and Romanian communism through to its demise in 1989.[29]

While official expressions of the public memory of communism continue to underline its repressive nature, after 2008 the vernacular public memory has increasingly focused on its positive aspects. This was reflected in opinion polls

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[26] Mihai Stelian Rusu, "Transitional Politics of Memory: Political Strategies of Managing the Past in Post-communist Romania," *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 8 (October 2017): 12, doi: 10.1080/09668136.2017.1380783.

[27] See Bogdan C. Iacob, "The Romanian Communist Past and the Entrapment of Polemics," in *Remembrance, History, and Justice. Coming to Terms with Traumatic Pasts in Democratic Societies*, ed. Vladimir Tismăneanu and Bogdan C. Iakob (Budapest: CEU Press, 2015), 417–474; and Monica Ciobanu, "Criminalizing the Past and Reconstructing Collective Memory: The Romanian Truth Commission," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 2 (2009): 313–336, doi: 10.1080/09668130802630870.

[28] Iacob, "The Romanian Communist Past," 417.

[29] Bădică, "The Black Hole Paradigm": 96–97; Gabriela Cristea and Simina Radu-Bucurenci, "Raising the Cross: Exorcising Romania's Communist Past in Museums, Memorials and Monuments," in *Past for the Eyes. East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, ed. Oksana Sarkisova and Péter Apor (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 297–301; Vladimir Tismăneanu, "Democracy and Memory," 166–180; James Mark, *Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 38–44.

conducted after 2008. They show that some Romanians still approve of the leadership of the last Romanian leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, and the economic and social achievements of his regime. Some respondents identify him as Romania's best political leader of the past 100 years – and were he a candidate in an election, the great majority of those respondents would vote for him.[30] The reasons for the positive assessment of the communist regime were given as the job security and the predictability of the near future at the time, relatively decent living conditions, social equality, and the belief that the intentions of the system were essentially good. Moreover, the respondents highly valued state interventionism and the social protection measures of the paternalist state, which ensured a modest but risk-free life to citizens who played by its rules.[31]

The opinion polls in question, as well as a study commissioned by the Soros Foundation of Romania in 2010, came to a worrisome conclusion: many young people who did not experience communism at all had a positive image of it. The 2010 study indicated that 31 percent of those aged 20 and younger said that communism was a good yet poorly implemented idea, while 38 percent of them believed that the period of communism was better than the contemporary one. Their reasons for this exo-nostalgia were the current state of Romania's education and health systems, the inability of the state to enforce its laws, and last but not least, the current standard of living, which was considered to be lower than in the communist period. One can notice similar positive assessments of the communist period among Romanian adults. The responsibility of postmemory for the nostalgic image of the communist period was confirmed by questions about the respondent's main sources of information about the recent past. The findings show that in 82 percent of cases, the family was the main source. In

[30] See "Potrivit unui sondaj naţional al CURS despre nenorocirile abătute asupra României, Emil Constantinescu pe un preţios loc II după Nicolae Ceauşescu," *Adevărul*, November 17, 1999, 1; Valentin Protopopescu, *Mari Români. Povestea unui succes mediatic* (București: Trei, 2007), 72; Aniela Nine, "Barometru de opinie – Ceauşescu, înger şi demon," 2007, http://www.9am.ro/stiri-revista-presei/2007-12-06/barometru-deopinie- ceausescu-inger-si-demon.html; IRES-IRES-COP, "Românii şi nostalgia comunismului," July 2010, http://www.ires.com.ro/uploads/articole/romanii_si_nostalgia_comunismului.pdf; "Percepţia actuală asupra comunismului", September 2010, http://www.crimelecomunismului.ro/pdf/ro/evenimente/perceptiile_romanilorasupra_comunismului/perceptia_actuala_asupra_comunismului.pdf; Roxana Covrig, "Sondaj INSCOP. Comunism versus democraţie. Câţi români l-ar vota pe Nicola Ceaușescu," *Adevărul*, December 14, 2014, http://www.dcnews.ro/sondaj-inscop-comunism-versusdemocra-ie-ca-i-romani-l-ar-vota-pe-nicolae-ceau-escu_462287.html; IICCMER-CSOP, "Atitudini şi opinii despre regimul comunist din România. Sondaj de opinie publică, 23 mai 2011", 2011, http://www.crimelecomunismului.ro/pdf/ro/raport_sondaj_opinie_publica_iiccmer_ mai_2011.pdf, etc.

[31] Marin, "Assessing Communist Nostalgia in Romania," 17–19.

62 percent of cases in which children reported that their parents are nostalgic for communism, the children also had a positive opinion about the communist regime.[32]

Romanian young people's positive evaluation of the communist period also results from a rebranding of artifacts of the period as "cool stuff." Commercials, art exhibitions, and the opening of bars, pubs or restaurants decorated with "red" symbols or serving drinks and dishes with a "communist flavor" integrated the good memories of communism into the mainstream starting in 2007.[33] The trend was boosted by media publicity in 2009 that marked the passing of twenty years since the fall of the communist regime. Three national newspapers (*Jurnalul Naţional*, *Adevărul* and *Libertatea*) published articles and collections of readers' testimonies about the most mundane details of everyday existence before December 1989. Readers left comments fondly remembering their school years and childhood games, holiday celebrations and birthdays, and how they told jokes, watched TV, listened to the radio, attended Communist Party meetings and interacted with the communist authorities, shopped for carpets, stood in line for food, and bought goods under the counter and on the black market.[34]

Nostalgic memories of the communist period survived the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of communism in Romania, although they were beginning to fade somewhat. In 2019 the media industry did not commemorate the events of December 1989 the same way it did ten years earlier. Instead, the public memory was focused on events that accompanied the founding of democratic Romania. However, nostalgia for communism did not lose its appeal among Romanians, young people included. Opinion polls conducted in 2019 reported the same reasons for a positive evaluation of the communist period that were identified in 2009, including jobs for all, decent living standards, and readily available housing.[35] Moreover, over 64 percent of those polled had a good opinion of Nico-

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[32] Andrei Gheorghiţă, "Trecutul comunist în conştiinţa adolescenţilor," in *Implicarea civică şi politică a tinerilor*, Gabriel Bădescu et al. (Constanța: Fundația Soros, 2010), 65–71.

[33] Marin, "Assessing Communist Nostalgia in Romania," 15–16. Also see Alexandra Bardan, "Marketing Post-Communist Nostalgia in Romania: A Case Study on Contemporary Anniversary Events," *Styles of Communication* 10, no. 1 (2018): 50–73; or "Nostalgia Waves: A Media Framing of Post-Communist Nostalgia in Romania," *Polis* 29, no. 3 (2020), http://revistapolis.ro/documente/revista/2020/3(29)/2.%20Articol%20NOSTALGIE%20Alexandra%20BardanX.pdf.

[34] Marin Manuela, "Between Memory and Nostalgia: The Image of Communism in Romanian Popular Culture. A Case Study of *Libertatea* Newspaper," *Palimpsest*, no. 5 (2013): 4–16.

[35] "Nostalgici după comunism. Din ce în ce mai mulți tineri cred ca era mai bine pe vremea lui Ceaușescu," *Știrile TVR*, February 9, 2019, http://stiri.tvr.ro/studiu-nostalgici-dupa-comunism-din-ce-in-ce-mai-multi-tineri-cred-ca-era-mai-bine-pe-vremea-lui-ceausescu_841495.html

lae Ceaușescu, while one in five Romanians had an excellent opinion of him.[36] Another opinion poll conducted at the end of 2019 found that almost 60 percent of Romanian youth believed that people's lives were better under communism, while 20 percent of them had no interest in finding out more about the topic.[37]

These results confirmed the conclusions of other journalistic investigations of the increasing appeal of communism among Romanian youth. In 2017 *Vice.com Romania* published five short interviews with young people aged 16 to 18 who declared themselves to be communists. The motives they listed for their political choice included a desire for "social equality," the promise of "a guaranteed job and decent housing" and equal access to education, and a perceived lack of equal opportunity under capitalism. Some of them held Nicolae Ceaușescu in high regard for "the industrialization of the country," his "investments in science," or "good living conditions." One interviewee even swore to "take revenge for Comrade Ceaușescu," "destroy the rich parasites," and haul those who ruled Romania after 1989 and "destroyed" it before a people's court of justice. All of the interviewees mentioned that family members, especially their grandparents, had "only words of praise for the socialist period." Thus, the postmemory formed in their minds was based on images their elders had transmitted in which "people lived better, everyone had a roof over their head and a free apartment from the state, plus there were factories and plants built by Ceaușescu."[38]

#view; "Sondaj. La 30 de ani de la prăbușirea comunismului în Europa, peste jumătate dintre români cred că viața lor s-a înrăutățit," *G4Media.ro*, November 12, 2019, https://www.g4media.ro/sondaj-la-30-de-ani-de-la-prabusirea-comunismului-in-europa-peste-jumatate-dintre-romani-cred-ca-viata-lor-s-a-inrautatit-aceasta-cifra-ne-plaseaza-pe-ultimul-loc-comparativ-cu-alte-foste-tari-comun.html; Christine Leșcu, "Percepții despre comunism după 30 de ani," *Radio România Internațional*, December 18, 2019, https://www.rri.ro/ro_ro/perceptii_despre_comunism_dupa_30_de_ani-2609009.

[36] "Sondaj. La 29 de ani de la Revoluție, 64% dintre români au o părere bună despre Ceaușescu", *Revista 22*, January 2, 2019, https://revista22.ro/actualitate-interna/sondaj-la-29-de-ani-de-la-revolutie-64-dintre-romani-au-o-parere-buna-despre-ceausescu.

[37] "Aproape 60% dintre tinerii români cred că era mai bine în communism," *Europa FM*, December 20, 2019, https://www.europafm.ro/aproape-60-dintre-tinerii-romani-cred-ca-era-mai-bine-in-comunism-audio/.

[38] Răzvan Filip, "Tinerii români născuți după '90 mi-au spus cum au ajuns să fie comuniști," *Vice.com Romania*, September 8, 2017, https://www.vice.com/ro/article/3kk3p5/tineri-romani-nascuti-dupa-90-mi-au-spus-cum-au-ajuns-sa-fie-comunisti.

Educating the Youth about Communism: The Story Behind *The Illustrated Guide to Romanian Communism*

The Illustrated Guide to Romanian Communism was an initiative of Forum Apulum, a Romanian NGO. The idea of creating a booklet that would tell the history of the communist past in Romania originated in April 2017 as a result of experiences that members of the NGO had in working with young people. They noticed that Romanian youth were ignorant of communism and, moreover, often shared erroneous, nostalgic assumptions about the communist past held by their usually older relatives. Initially, Forum Apulum organized an open-air event called "The Party wants you to get a haircut" (*Partidul te vrea tuns*). The title echoed a very popular commercial for the Rom chocolate brand that survived the fall of communism. The commercial tells the story of a long-haired young man who, after taking a bite of Rom chocolate, travels back in time and is kidnapped off the street and shoved into a car by members of the former Romanian secret police, the Securitate. He is taken blindfolded to an interrogation room where a Securitate officer is casually reading the official newspaper of the Party, *Scânteia*. The agent tells him, "The Party wants you to get a haircut, you rocker!" and he is given a military-style haircut.[39] The commercial equated the pleasurable act of eating a chocolate bar with the "strong sensation" of mistreatment by the communist regime, and implied that communism was "cool." The event organized by Forum Apulum had a different goal. Youngsters were invited to attend lectures, discussions, and film screenings, from which they were meant to learn about the horror of the crimes and abuses of communism. Because the event was intended to take place regularly, once a year, Forum Apulum came up with the idea of creating a guide that would tell the story of the communist regime in Romania in a few words and with many colorful pictures. The Forum Apulum team, in cooperation with history teachers, made a draft of the guide and asked different Romanian artists to illustrate the episodes it depicted in the history of Romanian communism, using mainly three colors (red, white, and black). The texts accompanying the drawings were written Diana Filimon and Ciprian Cucu, the president and vice-president of Forum Apulum.[40]

The guide was officially presented in March 2018 at an event organized in Bucharest by another Romanian NGO, Funky Citizens. Funky Citizens aims to train "civically fit" young people. It teaches the history of communism in its

[39] The commercial with English subtitles can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pm8K1q0N-F4.

[40] Diana Filimon, President of Forum Apulum, in an interview with the author, August 14, 2020.

programs for the civic education of young people. *The Illustrated Guide to Romanian Communism* became one of its many projects. In May 2018, the guide and an exhibition about Romanian communism were featured at the Transylvania International Film Festival (TIFF), which is one of the most important cultural events in Romania.[41] The publication of the guide inspired Forum Apulum to sponsor other projects focused on the communist period in Romania, which were also geared for a young audience. They included an art exhibition called *Resisters* (*Rezistenții*), about the people who dared to oppose and protest the communist regime,[42] and a re-enactment on Instagram of the events of December 1989 in Timișoara, where anti-communist protests began. Above all, the Forum Apulum team responded to invitations from history teachers and visited elementary and high schools all over Romania. They distributed more than 4,500 copies of the guide. Each presentation of the guide was followed by discussions with students about communism and its consequences for the lives of people in Romania.[43]

The History of Communism as Told by *The Illustrated Guide to Romanian Communism*

The guide provides a selective reading of the history of Romanian communism, focusing on repression. Thus, it not only promotes the criminalization of Romania's communist past by making criminality "the essence of the communist ideology and of the regimes that claimed it,"[44] as Laure Neumayer puts it, but it also counters Romanian youth's post-communist nostalgia. The topics in the guide focus on events and phenomena that would be of interest to young readers. Additionally, the victims of repression are sympathetically portrayed as young people. Besides providing a visual history of Romanian communism, in its second part the guide attempts to dispel myths about the so-called good life during the communist period.[45]

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[41] "Partidul te vrea tuns," *Transilvania International Film Festival*, May 22, 2018, https://tiff.ro/eveniment/partidul-te-vrea-tuns.

[42] "Rezistenții," Forum Apulum, accessed June 7, 2021, https://forumapulum.ro/ro/educatie-civica/rezistentii.

[43] Diana Filimon, President of Forum Apulum, in an interview with the author, August 14, 2020.

[44] Laure Neumayer, *The Criminalisation of Communism in the European Political Space after the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2020), 2.

[45] *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020). The online version of an earlier edition from 2018 is available at https://forumapulum.ro/ro/educatie-civica/ghidul-comunismului.

Figure 1. Loading communism (1) by Dan Perjovschi. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 5.

The first part of the guide traces the history of Romanian communism from the end of World War II until the late 1980s. The theme of the narrative is repression as a violent assault on the individual and his or her human rights. Repression is portrayed as a collective national trauma and finally, as the daily experience of Romanians in the communist era. By touching upon sensitive themes, including the falsification of election results, plagiarism by Elena Ceaușescu, and bribery as a means of obtaining scarce goods, the guide is a useful tool for teaching civics to Romanian youth.

The first chapter opens with a drawing by Dan Perjovschi, who uses the symbol of communism – the hammer and sickle – and the word "communism" itself to graphically illustrate its repressive nature. The sickle skewers stick figures and the hammer hits them on the head. The word "communism" is written twice with the letters "om" (which means "human" in Romanian) crossed out. The drawing is meant to represent the basically repressive

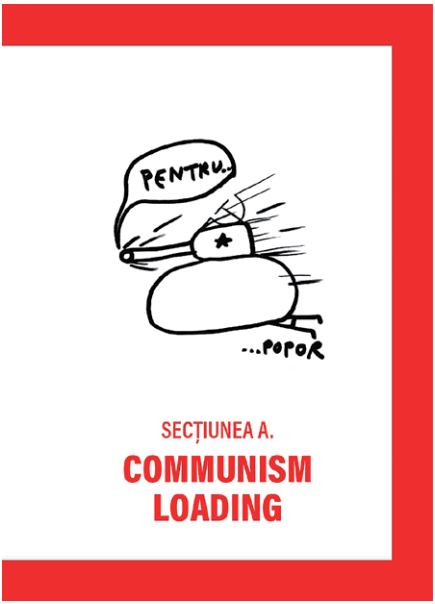

Figure 2. Loading communism (2) by Dan Perjovschi. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 7.

character of the regime, which destroyed the individual by annihilating its humanity (Fig. 1).[46]

The chapter "Communism Loading" is headed by another drawing by Perjovschi, which captures the forcible way communism was established in Romania. A tank blazoned with the Soviet star grinds over a stick figure, accompanied by the words *Pentru ... popor* [For ... the people] (Fig. 2).[47] This is a blunt allusion to the fact that the Romanian Communist Party was brought to power with the help of the Soviet Red Army, which occupied the country at the end of World War II. The text in the subsequent pages details how the communists managed to gain political power and implement their first repressive measures. Although their political ascension began shortly after the coup d'état of August 1944, the guide identifies the first postwar government led by political ally of

[46] *Ghidul ilustrat*, 5.
[47] Ibid., 7.

the communists as the zero hour of communist rule in Romania. Backed by the Soviets, the Romanian Communist Party used organized violence and electoral fraud to gain control over the apparatus of the state. The young king, Michael, was the last obstacle to the final installation of the communist regime. Communist leaders blackmailed him into abdication in December 1947 by threatening to kill almost 1,000 students who had been arrested in November as they expressed their support for the monarchy on the king's name day.[48]

Ana Kun, another well-known Romanian artist, created the illustrations for the first chapter of the booklet. In order to illustrate the many forms that violence took after 1945, she drew frowning human faces in red, which bombard the viewer with small texts outlining the main changes in Romanian society: the hope for a brighter future brought by the Soviet "brothers" and their fatherly leader, Stalin; the persecution of wealthy Romanian peasants; the subordination of the national economy to the Soviets; and new role models (such as Ana Pauker, the first woman in the world to become a minister of foreign affairs). The illustrations on the page that discusses the 1946 elections that brought the Romanian Communist Party to power on the back of gross electoral fraud follows the same pattern. Blood-red hands offer ballot papers up to the sun, the electoral symbol of the Romanian Communist Party and its allies. Each ballot contains a small text that describes in a different way how the communists won the elections: in sum, it did not matter for whom one voted, it mattered who counted the votes.

The text invites readers to appreciate the importance of fair elections in safeguarding democratic regimes.[49] This admonition is consistent with the purpose of the guide, which is to use the history of communism to educate young people in civic affairs. The next page, which describes the abdication of King Michael on December 30, 1947, contains a riddle. The reader is asked to identify the main political characters on the next page. Again, the faces are drawn in red and they seem to be engaged in a dialogue about the fate of Romania. Stalin is depicted at the top of the page, imperiously ordering Petru Groza, the acting Romanian prime minister in 1947, and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the Romanian Communist Party leader, who are portrayed as his subordinates, to depose the King by New Year's Eve. Groza passes the message to the King that Romania would become a republic that very day. King Michael protests, raising constitutional objections to ending the monarchy. Gheorghiu-Dej replies, pointing at a

[48] On the establishment of communist rule in Romania, see Dennis Deletant, *Romania under Communism: Paradox and Regeneration* (London, New York: Routledge, 2019), 26–88.

[49] Ana Kun, artist, in an interview with the author, August 18, 2020.

Figure 3. The Abdication of King Michael I by Ana Kun. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 13.

crowd of people in prison uniforms whose lives are at stake if the King refuses to abdicate (Fig. 3).[50]

The chapter "Communism Loading" also portrays the first measures taken by the new communist regime in order to enforce its rule. Personal freedom was severely limited and human rights were trampled. Well-known writers were purged from public life, and the entire national history was rewritten to create room for the heroes of the new era. The guide depicts the nationalization of industry and the collectivization of agriculture as the communists imposed their will upon Romania. In this case, the illustration is very simple. On a map of the country, the artist Arina Stoenescu writes the date on which the law on nationalization was adopted and also the number of properties confiscated as a result. The numbers frame factory furnaces, which are meant to suggest that

[50] *Ghidul ilustrat*, 8–13.

Figure 4. Dystopia Romania by Dan Perjovschi. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 18.

the aim of nationalization was to hasten the industrialization of the country. On the opposite page, dedicated to the collectivization of agriculture, figures on the same map of the country state that 3,000 people lost their lives and 80,000 were imprisoned because they opposed collectivization, which took place between 1949 and 1962. In the middle of the number of victims, the artist has depicted a seed, from which a stalk of wheat sprouts.[51] This image echoes a decorative element of the coat of arms of communist Romania.

The second chapter, entitled "Romanian Dystopia," details the repressive mechanisms developed by the communist regime during its early years. The preamble to the chapter again features drawings by Dan Perjovschi that illustrate how repression and terror destroyed the individual. The first drawing features a stick figure that gradually transforms from a normal, head-up person to an

[51] Ibid., 16–17.

upside-down figure, re-educated in accord with communist norms. Recalling the novel *1984*, Perjovschi depicts Communist repression of human nature with a boot stamping on human figures and crushing them. The same boot stamps first on the mouth of a human face, then on the whole head, and finally destroys its altogether. This is a blunt allusion to the way in which communist repression and censorship annihilated the human spirit (Fig. 4). The same repression is represented by a hammer and sickle that impale and spill the blood of a human figure.[52]

The text of the chapter explains the institutional mechanisms of communist repression and the ideological reasons for imprisoning so-called "class enemies," especially intellectuals. The Romanian media has covered persecution of citizens by penitentiary wardens and guards, and the guide gives further details of the harsh living conditions and the torture to which inmates were subjected by prison authorities.

The booklet pays special attention to the "Pitești Phenomenon," an "experiment" in the "re-education of prisoners" that took place at the Pitești Prison between 1949 and 1952. The idea of "re-education" was inspired by the theories of the Soviet educator Anton Makarenko (1888–1939). He was a specialist in juvenile delinquency and a partisan of re-educating young detainees with the help of their peers who were already indoctrinated. The Romanian communist authorities took Makarenko's ideas to the next level by turning permanent and extreme psychological and physical torture into a common instrument for the re-education of young students who displayed other political sympathies than communist ones.[53]

The illustrations of this chapter, by the Romanian artist Saddo, are rendered in different shades of blue and grey in order to suggest repression and death. The government's organs of repression are symbolized by the larger-than-life figure of an officer wearing a dark suit with a tie. He waves the flag of the Soviet Union above his head in order to display his solidarity with the Soviet Union. He adopts an aggressive posture with his huge fists clenched around the flagpole, apparently ready to punch the reader. The next drawing identifies the target of the communist official's fists: the intellectual elite, represented by a pair of broken glasses whose shards are scattered on the floor in a pool of blood. The experience of imprisonment is depicted in a drawing of a young man who sheds

[52] Ibid., 18–19.

[53] Manuela Marin, "Lovinescu–Ierunca Collection at Oradea University Library," COURAGE Registry, doi: 10.24389/27737, http://cultural-opposition.eu/registry/?uri=http://courage.btk.mta.hu/courage/individual/n31054&type=masterpieces.

Figure 5. The Pitești Phenomenon (1) by Saddo. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 24.

Figure 6. The Pitești Phenomenon (2) by Bogdan Topârceanu. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 27.

a large tear while sitting in a prison cell. The artist focuses on the prisoner's oversized hands, which tightly hold the bars of the cell in a futile effort to escape imprisonment (Fig. 5). The "Pitești Phenomenon," in which inmates tortured their fellow inmates, is illustrated with a drawing of two persons wearing striped prison uniforms. A re-educated inmate prepares to attack his fellow prisoner, who has been knocked to the ground. The victim raises his hands in a desperate attempt to protect himself from the coming blows. On a following page, a prisoner's boot crushes the head of another prisoner. Red blood flows from his nostrils and mouth.[54]

Terror is captured as the main feature of the political regime during the 1950s in a reinterpreted coat of arms of the Romanian state. The ears of wheat on

[54] *Ghidul ilustrat*, 26, 28.

Figure 7. The Golden Age by Dan Perjovschi. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 33.

the original seal are replaced by bullets and barbed wire. The mountains and the fir trees which featured in the center of the real coat of arms are substituted for by the Jilava prison building, one of communist Romania's most infamous houses of detention. The prison is set against the background of a cemetery and is topped by a hammer and sickle. The tricolor banner on the coat of arms is replaced by a solid red ribbon (the color of the Communist Party flag) that identifies the Romanian state not as the People's Republic of Romania but as the Totalitarian Republic of Romania. The entire coat of arms rests on a pile of bones, which once again reinforces the idea that the communist regime was built on terror, repression, and death (Fig. 6).[55]

The next three sections leap forward in time to deal with the rule of the last Romanian communist leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu. The reasons he is featured are

[55] Ibid., 27.

obvious: not only is Ceaușescu the most famous Romanian communist, but his rule is becoming the object of positive memories among Romanians.

The chapter entitled "The Golden Age" refers to the sycophantic praise that party propaganda heaped on Ceaușescu and his rule. Perjovschi's drawings represent Ceaușescu as a distinctive human figure, radiant as the sun. The rays he emits stab the people, who bow down to him, in an allusion to the hardships of Ceaușescu's reign, especially during the 1980s. The difference between what party propaganda said about Ceaușescu's rule and the harsh reality of everyday life is captured in the next drawing. The Ceaușescu figure speaks about how the sun is shining, i.e., the benefits of communism, while a figure representing a Romanian citizen lies prostrate in the pouring rain (Fig. 7).

The chapter provides a chronological journey through the history of communism after 1965. It starts with Ceaușescu's appointment as party leader and addresses several well-known aspects of his leadership, including a visit to North Korea that allegedly influenced him to strengthen his control of cultural life and promote a pompous cult of personality. Special attention is paid to Ceaușescu's wife, Elena. Because she lacked a university degree, she built her successful professional career on plagiarizing the work of others.

The illustrations in this chapter, by Răzvan Cornici, are the most colorful of the entire guide. Each of them is framed by red curtains that create the impression of a theatrical stage. The first drawing stresses the connection between Nicolae Ceaușescu and the Soviet Union. His portrait mirrors that of the Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, as on a playing card.[56] This indicates that despite some political and cultural liberalization at the beginning of his reign, Ceaușescu remained a faithful ideological and political soldier for the Soviet Union. The choice of Leonid Brezhnev to represent the USSR reflects the fact that the two led their countries at the same time and that in both cases, their rule was a period of stagnation, followed by internal crisis.

The next illustration links Ceaușescu with the most eccentric leader in the communist world: Kim Il-Sung, the North Korean leader that he so admired. The two are portrayed in official attire, standing next to each other and holding models of their most famous constructions, in Ceaușescu's case, the gigantic House of the Republic (Casa Republicii).[57] Kim Il-Sung puts his hand on

[56] Ibid., 34.

[57] Casa Republicii, nowadays hosting the Romanian Parliament, was supposed to accommodate various state institutions, such as the Communist Party's headquarters, the government and the State Council of the Socialist Republic of Romania. It was part of a grandiose Civic Center project and entailed the demolition of an entire Bucharest neighborhood rich in historical buildings.

Figure 8. The Ceaușescus by Livia Coloji & Răzvan Cornici. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 38.

Figure 9. Elena Ceaușescu by Livia Coloji & Răzvan Cornici. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 41.

Ceaușescu's shoulder, in a gesture suggesting that Kim approved of Ceaușescu and entrusted him with his legacy. The illustration reflects the widely shared belief that the North Korean model inspired Ceaușescu to create his own brand of communism.[58]

Another negative feature of Nicolae Ceaușescu's leadership was his and his wife's cult of personality. Artist Răzvan Cornici draws the Ceaușescu couple in official attire, smiling widely and holding the sun and the moon in their hands. This refers to the unconditional power they exercised in Romania. White doves fly around them, indicating the supposed peace and prosperity that their leadership brought to Romanians. The Ceaușescus stand on a yellow podium supported by several mountaintops. This is a mocking reference to the Romanian

[58] *Ghidul ilustrat*, 36.

leader's claim to be "The Carpathian Genius." In turn, the mountains rest on the heads of four children wearing the red ties of the Communist children's organization, the Pioneers. As a whole, the illustration suggests that Ceaușescu's rule, with its false claims of peace and prosperity, only stunted the growth of young people, who had to bear the burden of his leadership (Fig. 8).[59]

The last drawing in this chapter is dedicated to Elena Ceaușescu and speaks of the academic fraud by which she transformed herself into a renowned scientist. She is depicted wearing a white lab coat, a hint of her alleged profession as a chemical engineer. She holds rewards for her "prestigious" academic activity: a laurel wreath and a bouquet of flowers. The fact that her career was based on plagiarism is illustrated by her standing on the back of an unidentified colleague in a white lab coat, who has an oversized brain (Fig. 9).[60] The drawing is based on fact: Elena Ceaușescu's doctoral dissertation and scientific papers were the result of research performed by employees of the National Institute of Chemistry, of which she was the director despite her utter lack of qualifications.

The fourth chapter deals with the so-called *decreței*, the "children of the decree." They are the children who were born after the issuance of the government's Decree 770 in 1966, which prohibited abortion. The focus of the chapter is on how this legislative measure deprived women of the right to control their own bodies and resulted in many tragedies: women died as a result of abortions performed illegally and many unwanted children were abandoned in orphanages.[61] Black and red are the main colors used for the illustrations, which is meant to convey death and repression. The fact that women's bodies and their children's lives were subject to external (political) control is best captured in a drawing that depicts the belly of a pregnant woman whose unborn child is tied with a red chain. The chain is coming out of the woman's body as if pulled by someone unidentified, who is controlling and organizing her life even before she gives birth (Fig. 10).[62]

Ceaușescu's ambition to increase the country's population to 22 million was his reason for banning abortions. Thus, another drawing by artist Emilian Mocanu features his portrait against a black background, in which a chart on a red background replaces Ceaușescu's eyes. The lines on the chart show the upward demographic trend envisioned by the Romanian leader. The color red and some

[59] Ibid., 38.
[60] Ibid., 41.
[61] On this subject, see Gail Kligman, *Politics of Duplicity. Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
[62] *Ghidul ilustrat*, 45.

Figure 10. The decree's children (1) by Emilian Mocanu. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 45.

Figure 11. The decree's children (2) by Emilian Mocanu. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 51.

small skulls suggest that demographic growth was accomplished by victimizing women and children.[63] Both women and children were victims of the forcibly pronatalist policy of the Romanian Communist Party.

As mentioned above, many children were abandoned at birth by their parents because they did not have the means to take care of them. Some died in the unbearable living conditions of Romania's orphanages, while others ended up on the streets. The orphanages where children were sedated, isolated, and maltreated by those responsible for their wellbeing is still a shameful topic in Romania. As a consequence, the chapter on the *decreței* ends with a drawing of a young man sitting by a window, with his head bowed and his hands clenched on his legs. He does not notice that a rat is crouched behind him. The room is dark and the only light that enters through the window is red. The light casts a red

[63] Ibid., 47.

Figure 12. Life on rations by Dan Perjovschi. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 53.

shadow of the young man's silhouette on the floor next to the rat. The red light is a metaphor for the communist power that was responsible for the tragedy of the youth confined in social care institutions (Fig. 11).[64]

The last chapter of the part of the booklet on the history of communism addresses the economic crisis that the Romanians experienced during the 1980s. The crisis resulted in the rationing of food and basic consumer goods, and forced people to spend most of their time queuing to buy the necessities of life. In Perjovschi's drawing that introduces the chapter, long lines of people are attached to the letters of the word "life" (*viață*, in Romanian) to show that standing in line was the main activity of Romanian life during the 1980s. A stick figure has his stomach hollowed out by a hammer and sickle, a clear allusion to the incompetence of the communists, whose economic policies condemned people to starvation (Fig. 12).[65] The chapter traces the causes of the economic crisis of the 1980s and describes its consequences for the population. Shortages of consumer goods

[64] Ibid., 51.
[65] Ibid., 52–53.

Figure 13. Food store by George Roșu. Source: *Ghidul ilustrat al comunismului românesc*, 2nd ed. (Alba Iulia: Forum Apulum, 2020), 63.

contributed not only to standing in line, but also to a flourishing black market which favored people with personal connections. The corruption stimulated the first movements of protest against the regime.

The topic of rationing is illustrated with an image of a food store. Artist George Roșu adds the letters "ție" to the Romanian word for food store, *alimentara*, to create the image of "rationing" (in Romanian, *rație*). The idea that the food store shelves are empty is conveyed by the rest of the drawing, which depicts a store window with a notice announcing that "We have nothing," even though potential buyers are welcomed by an "Open" sign.[66] The limited amount of consumer goods available transformed sales clerks into important persons in society: they were the only ones who had access to needed goods. One could only buy something if he or she had personal connections with a seller or was part of the local political elite.

The next drawing features a food seller behind her scales. Her face is symbolically divided in two. Each face addresses one type of customer: she turns a

[66] Ibid., 59.

frowning face to common customers wearing plain grey clothes, whom she tells that her store has nothing to sell. Her smiling face is turned to wealthy shoppers who wear blue hats and coats as a sign of their superior political and social status (or perhaps even their membership in the Securitate). She tells them that she has goods to offer (Fig. 13).[67] The drawing uses the mundane situation of buying goods to dismantle the myth of people's equality under communism. It underlines the reality that the political elite enjoyed higher standards of living than common Romanians.

Speaking of myth-busting, the second part of the *Illustrated Guide* deconstructs five myths about the communist period that are at the core of postcommunist nostalgia and young people's postmemory. The text provides statistics and describes the mechanisms the communists used to promote the so-called communist welfare. The text and photographs provide young readers with solid arguments that dispel the myths that the communist economy performed well, that most people owned their own homes, that there was no unemployment, that economic policies were sustainable, and that the education system was better than it is now.[68]

Conclusion

My paper analyzes the illustrations in a pocket-size booklet entitled *The Illustrated Guide to Romanian Communism*, which was published to counter growing nostalgia among Romania's young people for the communist period. The work of a local NGO, the guide provides a selective reading of the history of communism, focusing on the criminality of Romania's communist past and stories that might interest its young readers but about which they probably know little. *The Illustrated Guide* endorses the official expressions of the public memory of communism, which emphasize political repression, suppression of dissident activities, crimes, and the hardships and deprivations of everyday life. The hope of the booklet's authors is to influence the vernacular public memory of the recent past. The weightier influence of family, corporate marketing, and the mass media is leading young people to express positive opinions about the communist regime and develop a positive postmemory of the times. In order

[67] Ibid., 63.
[68] Ibid., 67–75.

to counter the nostalgic messages about the communist past, the guide stresses repression as the key to understanding the entire communist period.

A critical visual analysis tells us how the guide identifies the various faces of repression and its evolution during the communist period in Romania. While repression was an assault on individual human rights, it also targeted most of the social groups in Romania, including peasants, students, and the old, capitalist-era economic, political and cultural elites of the country. Individuals and their loved ones could face imprisonment and re-education for political misdemeanors in the early days of communism. The repression continued under Nicolae Ceaușescu's rule, but it took on more mundane and quotidian forms. People's family intimacy and especially women's bodies came under the close scrutiny of the Romanian communist party and the state as a means of increasing the birth rate. The result was many unwanted children whose childhoods were ruined in bleak orphanages. The rationing of basic goods and long queues for buying shoddy goods were another face of communism that people experienced in their daily life. These and many other topics, such as fraudulent elections and the destruction of all forms of political opposition, are addressed in the guide as a warning to its young readers against the consequences of disregarding their civic responsibilities and failing to protect democratic rule in contemporary Romania.