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CENSORS AND CENSORIAL RELATIONS IN COMMUNIST ROMANIA: CUSTOMS, CONVENTIONS, AND PRACTICES

Abstract

The communist state monopolized and directed the cultural sphere but, in opposition to traditional accounts, I maintain that it was not a domination based on destruction. As I show, communist censorship did not emerge in a vacuum but drew on local traditions, institutional continuities and historical particularities, as much as on ideological improvisation and practical expediency. Whereas the censorial system was certainly effective in defending the state's cultural monopoly, it is an overstatement to cast the socialist culture as the offspring of the censor's pencil. The institutional censorship seems often trapped between its ambition to engage actively in cultural production and the supervisory powers granted by its charter.

Keywords: censorship, cultural control, cultural construction, East-European communism

The communist state developed a vast web of institutional structures to turn the cultural producers into both subjects and objects of the new socialist culture. The Agitprop possessed nearly complete authority to ideologically monitor the cultural production of the Ministry of Culture, various creative unions and publishing houses, trade unions, and the Radio Station. Because the state culture was thought to express the people's latent cultural productivity, it was assumed that it would be correctly consumed.

In a cultural system decidedly oriented towards production, the state censorship offered an additional level of supervision. Characteristically, the General Directorate for Press and Printed Materials (GDPPM) was not designed as an ideological-advisory board for the media and cultural institutions, but operated as a government agency of restrictive control ideologically subordinated to the Agitprop. As one of the officials of

the censorial agency explained at an internal meeting, the institutional censorship did “not deal with the artistic realization but with the political rightfulness of a manuscript.”¹ However, he admitted, “the artistic realization itself could be a political problem too ... like, for instance, when a novel which explores the socialist transformation of agriculture is poorly written, this novel becomes a political issue because it does not serve the collectivization campaign.”² As we will see later in this article, such paradoxes not only problematized the institutional boundaries of formal censorship, but they also often rendered its work and institutional jurisdiction ambiguous in practice.

To be clear, I am not arguing that censorship, in its institutional dimension, operated as a purely negative, thus repressive force. Parts of its workings had always been “productive” by helping to create, partly deliberately, partly circumstantially, a consensus on what was socially and politically acceptable. In the broad context of the socialist culture, censorship also acted in tandem with creativity: not only as a reason and precondition for it, but also as an agent of creativity (self-censorship).

It would be counterproductive, indeed impossible, to understand how communist censorship functioned if the analysis were to privilege the Party-state’s thirst for power for the sake of power. In using the potential of the modern administrative state apparatus for erecting a cultural state, the Party-state posited itself as the antithesis of the bourgeois type of politics. Cultural creativity mattered but only to the extent to which it helped bring about a new society and polity.

The opening of the former communist party archives offers both an excellent opportunity to gain insight into the functioning of the state censorial mechanism – often subject to more mythologization than analysis – and the possibility to place the censorial body on an historical continuum. Not only does it offer a practitioner’s perspective, but it also offers an invaluable window into the cultural transformation of the first decade of communist rule.³ Of course, I further argue, in speaking of censorship we should transcend its bureaucratic undertakings and consider the whole context of the state-directed process of cultural production and distribution. A focus on the Romanian communist censorial agency – the GDPPM in the first decade of its existence – offers a new lens for the analysis of what is traditionally considered, in the literature, as the most important aspect of the cultural policy, the Party-state control of cultural sphere.

I will argue that after the war the official censorial body, building on the previous interwar experience, embarked on an ambitious program to monitor and regulate the various media outlets and literary forums. Its “proscriptive” agenda, however, was complemented by a “productive” one, as the censorial agency’s mission went beyond correction and standardization to the all-encompassing goal to educate the masses in the new orthodoxies and contribute to the creation of the communist new man. Progress in both directions, however, was impeded by the structure of the censorial agency itself and its position in the cultural mechanism. Long before self-censorship or external opposition made censorship either obsolete or ineffective, the tenuous relation between rival communist cultural organizations with overlapping competencies, the ambiguity of the censors’ tasks, and their occasionally conflicting goals considerably limited the reach and efficiency of censorship.

Conventions, Customs and Continuities in Institutional Censorship

The General Directorate for Press and Printing Materials (GDPPM) was established in May 1949 in an attempt to coordinate and centralize the censorial functions of the state, previously divided between a cross-ministerial network of agencies. Like other institutions of the cultural system, the censorship agency drew extensively on practices rooted in its prewar tradition. The centralized institutional structures for overseeing the cultural and informational sphere were central to the inter-war nation-building process and no less so for the wartime propaganda and surveillance. Thus, they predated the communists.

The first constitution of Greater Romania (1923) was generous in proclaiming the defense of civil liberties and freedom of expression. It contained provisions forbidding any form of prophylactic censorship, such as, for example, the state’s attempts towards silencing the media.⁴ In practice, however, the control of the printed word was exercised by the state in both post- and pre-publication forms. Built on the structure of the Ministry of the Interior’s Press Agency, the first unified censorial body, the Directorate for Press, was set up in 1926. During the interwar period, the Directorate for Press found itself under the jurisdiction of several ministries, such as the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Council of Ministers but its main functions remained largely the same:

the supervision of foreign publications and the regulation of the domestic book market and press.⁵

Predicated on a nationalist myth of territory, Greater Romania envisaged itself as a homogenous ethnic state.⁶ For its “progressive and normal development”, an organic relationship with the public sphere was key. The authorities drew heavily on the cultural vocabulary of biopolitics, biologization of national belonging, and a self-perceived unfinished ethnic revolution in their definition of the “state interest.”

In defining the acceptable, they defined the undesirable too. The “desirable” publications would, ideally, feature “nothing offensive or injurious to the Romanian people or state.”⁷ On the other hand, it was common for censors to adopt a harsh line in dealing with socialist literature and other “undesirable” literature, constructed as “acts of disrespect towards the nation and its ruling elite.”⁸ In the newly acquired provinces, where a state of siege was proclaimed for extended periods of time, the military tribunals and courts administrated both the daily press censorship and a licensing system, as well as assuming pre-publication censorial powers. They could close down newspapers and withdraw undesirable books, and granted special licenses for newspaper articles.⁹

By and large, two major paradigms of governmental censorship operated. First, to defend the state both at home and abroad, censorship suppressed what was deemed as damaging to the “state interest”. Second, by restricting public access to various media products and books, censorship assumed a role in the moral education of society. In other words, censorship was wielded when, by cultivating a disharmony between political culture and public culture, the media was perceived as having a potentially dangerous influence on the nation. The interwar Directorate for Press developed practices later adopted and refined by the communist censorship agency: the licensing of all foreign publications, such as newspapers, books, magazines, and the editing and licensing of domestic publications. When these practices fell short of expectations, the authorities relied on the judicial process to take journalists and authors to court. A Directorate for Press review report on “the press and political offences committed by journalists pertaining to the ethnic minorities from Transylvania” is also indicative of the level of harshness displayed by the authorities. Between 1919 and 1934, the report reads, the authorities investigated 308 alleged “agitations against the unity of the state” and handed final convictions to 314 journalists, that is, to almost 60% of those investigated.¹⁰

The fast-paced decline of the already feeble democratic experiment in the 1930s abruptly moved the country towards far-right politics.¹¹ In 1938, King Carol II proclaimed a royal dictatorship by disbanding the institutions of the parliamentary system and by abolishing the old Constitution of 1923. Echoing the fascist turn in Europe, the King outlawed all political parties and allowed the existence only of his own mass party, the National Renaissance Front (*Frontul Renasterii Nationale*).¹² In parallel, steps towards the monopolization of the mass media and cultural production were also taken. The cohabitation between a single party and the state administration institutionalized new techniques of surveillance and control. For a tighter calibration of the media message alongside propaganda, a General Directorate for Press and Propaganda was established in March 1938 under the jurisdiction of the Council of Ministries. It unified the former Directorate of Press, the Radio Station, the newswire agency, Rador, and the Directorate for Cinematography.¹³

When the war broke out, the newly set-up Ministry of Propaganda incorporated both the propagandistic and censorial structures.¹⁴ It became instrumental in the tightening of press monitoring, to the extent that only the news compiled and distributed by the central newswire agency could be published. Prior to publication, newspapers were assessed for ideological and political errors by commissions set up in ministries.¹⁵

More radical practices of control, such as the daily press advisories (*normativul*), further tied the media to the government. Stretching from instructions requiring the media to prioritize or avoid certain topics, to doctored news articles compiled by the General Directorate for Press, the advisories constituted both orders and guidelines for the media.¹⁶ The censorial body often worked in concert with the similarly chartered military censorship to implement the government advisories in practice.¹⁷

During the war, the mass media representatives were required to attend periodical review sessions at the Ministry of Propaganda. In a striking similarity with the later practices of the communist censorship, the General Directorate for Press compiled periodical reports to assess how newspapers were complying with the official advisories.¹⁸ Thus, the publishing became inextricably linked to the state. Such practices illustrate the wartime government's political ethos to shape the boundaries of the people's political thinking and secure their loyalty. But in conjunction with this use of propaganda they also redefined the social role of the media as an appendix of the government.

In the aftermath of 23 August 1944, the censorship agency reported to multiple ministries, from the Ministry of Propaganda (1945), to the Ministry of Information (1946), and the Ministry of Arts and Information (1948).¹⁹ However, until the Allied Commission of Control (ACC) was disbanded in September 1947 following the Paris Peace Treaties, the Directorate for Press shared censorial competencies with other agencies. Local censorship offices, headed by county prefects, would completely merge with the Directorate for Press only in late 1946, while a censorial office, administrated by the Allied (Soviet) High Command, also functioned on the basis of the Armistice Agreement. The latter issued all publication licences, approved films and artistic performances, and assumed unrestricted post-publication powers to censor and to withdraw and suspend licences.²⁰

After the proclamation of the Republic on 30 December 1947, the Directorate for Press was made part of a larger institutional reconfiguration which integrated the cultural bureaucracy in the dualistic Party-state system. As a governmental agency under the aegis of the Council of Ministers, the new GDPPM was created in 1949 to centralize the censorship of the media. By coordinating all censorial activities, the GDPPM transcended the Party-state dualism to become a major player in the cultural sphere. Yet, given its authority as a regulatory body to oversee the media and cultural production, it did not have jurisdiction in ideological counselling. In the words of one of the deputies, the GDPPM was “a state agency which oversees the activity of agencies and institutions with ideological character. Under no circumstances should it have a guiding role.”²¹ Reflecting on the lessons of the Paris Commune of 1871, Marx warned “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes. The political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation.”²² One can see the almost verbatim revamping of the wartime organizational design as confirming Marx’s prediction. Although the official reports highlighted a purportedly transformative dimension of the censorial apparatus, “a transformation from an old instrument of propaganda into a state organ of proletarian dictatorship,” in practice the transformation was less remarkable. However, I do not argue that the communist regime was not ideologically distinct in the way it engaged in censorship and other surveillance practices. Due to their revolutionary ideology, the communists were more prone to employ a more drastic censorship at times. Yet, far from marking a break with the interwar tradition, the communist power, as

Peter Holquist has written of the Russian Revolution, “represented only the most forceful and successful implementation of the new view of politics.”²³

In the broad context of cultural revolution, the inherited institutional design rather limited the social transformative aims of the censorial body. Instead of the vehicle for social transformation communists so often held it to be, the censorial body was itself part of what needed to be transformed.

How Institutional Censorship Functioned

According to its charter, the communist censorial agency was established to oversee and regulate all printed publications and printing distribution licensing system.²⁴ In the early 1950s the GDPPM implemented censorship through four major directorates. The Directorate for the Central Press and Periodical Publications and the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces oversaw the central and provincial press, the Official Gazette, as well as the Radio Station’s news bulletins. Foreign literature, such as newspapers, books, and academic journals, were censored and licenced by the Sub-Directorate for Foreign Press. The fourth directorate, the Directorate for Printed Materials, supervised the book market through its two sub-directorates, the Sub-Directorate for Book Licensing and the Sub-Directorate for Book Supervision. Whilst the latter sub-directorate dealt primarily with the literature banned by the de-fascization laws, the former licenced the new literary production.²⁵ In 1952 the GDPPM was endowed with new powers which extended its authority over all radio programs, public exhibitions, museums, and cinemas.²⁶

By 1954, the GDPPM cemented its position in the administration of the publishing market.²⁷ To cope with the booming state cultural production, the officials broadened the jurisdiction of the censor’s office, whilst implementing a censorial system based on the censor’s specialization by topic expertise. Before the 1954 changes, the censors within the Sub-Directorate for Book Licensing fulfilled their tasks by working in rotating shifts. The new system introduced specialist subjects such as book licensing, and control of the libraries and bookshops.²⁸ Consequently, it was expected that the institutional censorship would achieve a more centralized and more geographically uniform character.

Like all the other institutions belonging to the cultural bureaucracy, state censorship was subject to planning and standardized guidelines. But, unlike them, its activity was top secret. A public admission of censorship

not only would have violated the 1948 and 1952 constitutions (they proclaimed the freedom of the press and free speech),²⁹ but it would have also questioned the Party's ability to act as a cultural mediator in the interest of the people. Riddled with such tensions, the work of the censorship board was officially formulated in terms of "regulation," "overseeing," and "advisories," rather than plain interdictory language.

In practice, neither the authors nor the publishers were permitted to discuss their submissions or interact in any way with the censors. Abstract and impersonal, censorship had to express the commitment of a conscious cultural producer, not a personal affair. The officials feared that the development of interpersonal relations between censors and producers would have threatened the integrity of the censorial act. Thus, inter-institutional communication was exclusively carried out by the heads of the directorates, the deputies, and by the chief censor. After a publisher had submitted a manuscript, the censor's report was merely the first step in the censoring process. Censors would deliver their final report only after refining their ideological critique of the manuscript's weaknesses and omissions in informal meetings with senior censors. Upon approval, the report was finally forwarded to the publisher. During the process the author of the manuscript could neither intervene nor dispute the report.

Censoring a newspaper was as much a matter of political abilities as it was one of bureaucratic rigour. Censorship started with the censors checking the typesets. Before an issue went to press, another and final check-up was conducted at the printing house. To use the official terminology, the newspaper was "censored in page."³⁰ Time mattered too: the censors were expected to read and proofread a newspaper in less than an hour and a half.³¹ An error, be it ideological, political, spelling error, or a factual inaccuracy on the part of the censor could have significant consequences. In addition to exposing the censors to sanctions, the errors could also lead to newspaper issues being withdrawn from the market.³²

The GDPPM central office in Bucharest set up uniform national standards and presided over a network of semi-autonomous local branches. At its most prominent directorate, the Directorate for Central Press and Periodical Publications, the censors monitored and licensed the press, radio news bulletins and programmes, the news bulletins of the state news agency (the Agerpres), advertisements, street posters, and various other printed materials.

The censors within the central agency divided their working time between the central office and their dedicated offices at the printing

houses. To serve both as proof of accomplishment at work and educational material for fellow censors, the most important censorship were recorded in special registers. The encounters between journalists (especially *Scântea*'s) and censors at the printing presses, where the censors asked for last-minute changes, were often charged.

The Party's flagship newspaper, *Scântea*, served as a crucible for the dissemination of the Party-line. By embodying the Leninist *dictum* – collective propagandist, agitator, and organizer – it set the agenda for the entire press.³³ The censors themselves were required to read *Scântea* as part of their ideological enlightenment. Given that *Scântea* was recognized as an "authoritative organ" of the communist leadership, the censors found themselves caught in a paradox: assigned to censor the newspaper, in practice they merely checked it out for spelling errors and factual inaccuracies.³⁴ In the editorial offices of the central newspapers, well connected to political circles and sites for aspiring Party politicians, the censor's red pencil was often regarded as a personal offense.³⁵ Whereas the journalists denounced censorship as "inimical," the censors perceived their criticism as weakening the logic of the institutional censorial act.³⁶

For example, in 1951, feeling humiliated by a journalist from the *Scântea Tineretului* (The Youth's Spark), a censor petitioned to Iosif Ardeleanu, the censor chief. In his letter he complained about the mockery he suffered at the hands of the journalist whilst on his night shift at the galleys at the printing house. The censor reported that he was doing his routine work. Checking the next day's issue proof sheets, he ordered the copy-editor to remove parts of the text on the grounds that they revealed industrial production figures, which had recently been added to the regularly updated "secret lists" of the GDPPM. Infuriated, the copy-editor used mockery to rebut the censor. He picked up a red pencil from the desk, handed it to the censor and ironically asked him to mark off the numeral "1946," a number chosen from the newspaper issue at random. "The numeral can be an industrial production figure too and, you know, it is deadly dangerous to let such figures pass into the printed issues", the copy-editor parroted the censor.³⁷ As the exchange intensified, the copy-editor reportedly went as far as calling the censorship agency a "bureaucratic state apparatus." Although the censor reported the incident to Ardeleanu claiming that it had undermined his authority at the printing press, the GDPPM could do little to vindicate him.³⁸ Most likely, this was not an isolated incident within the Directorate for Central Press. It

frustratingly exposed the limits of authority of the GDPPM as well as its ambivalent status as a state agency exercising political control.

Replicating the duties of the main office in Bucharest, the local branches in the provinces also supervised the press, the radio programmes, and the literary production. They functioned under the double jurisdiction of Bucharest's Directorate for the Press in the Provinces and of the local Party's regional branches.³⁹ To assert its authority over the local branches, the Bucharest Office employed a variety of authoritative means, the most common one being the regular assessment of local censors' work.

Censorial interventions had to be approved, customarily via telephone, by the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces in Bucharest.⁴⁰ In addition, the local branches filed periodical reports to keep track of the most important censorial interventions, suggestions to editors, and forms of hostility or resistance to censorship.⁴¹

When the Bucharest censors conducted periodical inspections in the provinces, they evaluated the local censors' work against these reports.⁴² The locals were paired with, and shadowed by, monitors from Bucharest as a means of having their ideological skills supervised and assessed. The supervising reports, almost without exception, criticized the poor political training of the local censors. For example, a report reviewing a two-month tour through twelve cities in the spring of 1951, worryingly concluded that "the work of censorship is not being taken as seriously as it should be taken."⁴³

Because of limitations in terms of staff, the local branches lacked specialized offices. Thus, the local censors dealt with all aspects of the censoring process, from controlling the printing houses and checking the foreign literature, to reading newspapers and literary magazines. Concerns in Bucharest regarding poor training in the provinces led to the decision not to award full authority over sensitive topics, such as the local literary reviews and radio scripts, to local branches. Instead, the central office used to double-check the censorships undertaken by its local censors (*post-control*).⁴⁴

To build a professional expertise in censorship, the GDPPM established in 1952 a Directorate for Professional Training. The Directorate ran tutorials with censors and organized regular (usually quarterly) seminars with censors in Bucharest and multiagency meetings where censorial matters were discussed. For its role in training the censors, the censorial body administrators regarded the Directorate for Professional Training as pivotal in professionalizing the act of censorship. Yet, it was not until 1957

that the officials could claim to have established a body of professional censors. Whereas previously the censors organised the materials according to a system based on the frequency and types of publications (daily, periodical, book etc.), the new system ("professionalisation of censorship") assigned the publication to censors by topic.⁴⁵

A third major directorate of the GDPPM, the Directorate for Foreign Publications, censored the daily foreign press, the foreign literature, the academic journals, and all the other various foreign publications, at the port of entry into the country. The censors delineated the foreign publications according to three rubrics. First, the literature considered as having "an outright or a masked hostile line, anti-democratic, anti-communist, instigating to war," was classified under the "strictly prohibited" rubric. Second, when the censors decided that publications might occasionally touch upon, but not feature the topics prohibited by the first rubric, they would licence them as "secret." According to regulations, only the Council of Ministries could grant licenses to the strictly prohibited publications.⁴⁶

Publications licenced as "secret" and "strictly prohibited" were barred from circulation. They were either stacked in special library repositories, or shipped to individuals and institutions who received prior special approval (usually granted for research purposes). The Directorate for Foreign Publications held the formal right to grant "special permission" to institutions and individuals, but, at times, informal agreements between high ranked academics and seniors from the Agitprop superseded its authority.

For example, in 1951, in a letter to Ardeleanu, a member of the Romanian Academy of Science claimed that, although an "authorized" subscriber to a scientific French magazine, he had not received the publication for five months in a row. As it turned out, the academic was not in possession of a formal GDPPM licence, but cited a verbal agreement with the head of the Agitprop: "I discussed the matter with comrade Răutu and he assured me that I should encounter no problems in receiving magazines from France and Belgium for the purpose of my research."⁴⁷ Ardeleanu had tacitly complied and forwarded the letter to his deputy with the request to release the withheld issue. The handwritten note intimates that this was not an isolated case.⁴⁸

Third, the only foreign publications exempted from licensing were those imported from the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc.⁴⁹ The reason was twofold. As publications from "fellow socialist countries" they were "credible" and "trusted". At the same time, a considerable degree of control

had been achieved through editorial agreements with countries from the Eastern Bloc. For example, in November 1951, Romania concluded an editorial agreement with Hungary which established mutual assistance and the coordination of their editorial plans.⁵⁰

By handling the pre-publication and post-publication mechanism, a fourth major directorate of GDPPM, the Directorate for Book Publishing, oversaw the book market. Its two main sub-directorates, the Sub-Directorate for Book Licensing and the Sub-Directorate for Book Supervision, both licensed book manuscripts and conducted the purging of fascist literature, as defined in the de-fascization laws.⁵¹

Of course, book manuscripts had already undergone various forms of control and alterations before they finally reached the censor's desk. For instance, before it was included in the yearly editorial plan, a book proposal was a matter of a double negotiation, first between the author and the publisher and then between the publisher and the Agitprop.⁵² The Directorate for Book Publishing could neither review editorial plans nor intervene in the writing process. It could only assess the book manuscript in its final form. Alterations in content and form were negotiated only between publishers and the Agitprop's Sector for Literature. A part of the state publishing sector, including the Party's publishing house and the Romanian Academy, were exempted from sending manuscripts to the GDPPM. In these institutions the key editorial positions were controlled by members of the Central Committee, hence there was a high level of trust in them.⁵³

The censors reviewed the manuscripts and the editorial plans of publishing houses according to internal guidelines which established boundaries of expertise and the reading pace.⁵⁴ The censors were required to keep up with a reading time, following which they were expected to write a report underlying the errors they spotted as well as the reasons for their censorial interventions. As a senior censor explained, in the censorial work there were two types of interventions, mandatory and comments. Whereas the mandatory interventions aimed to remove the "serious political-ideological errors," with comments censors would ask for textual improvements.⁵⁵ This classification was implemented to deter the censors' practice of distinguishing between "lesser" and "fuller" errors. "Such misguided distinctions," a senior censor pointed out, "render the act of censorship unstructured since one cannot distinguish between errors at all ... it invites compromises which invites errors."⁵⁶ For example, in June 1952 the Directorate received for reviewing 520 manuscripts (books and

brochures) which amounted to a reading volume of almost 80,000 pages. The censors made 148 annotations and demanded 120 censorships.⁵⁷

On the basis of the censors' reports, the senior censors decided whether the publication would receive the license.⁵⁸ If corrections were required, the manuscript, together with a standardised form outlining the changes to be made, was returned to the publisher.⁵⁹ Yet, in practice, the censors often took a self-serving approach to censorship. They feared that failing to spot all political errors would result in disciplinary actions against them, so they censored whatever might have been regarded as suspicious.⁶⁰

To ensure that only works deemed necessary for the spreading of socialist culture circulated required not only the establishment of a state system of print production but also the removal of the literature which might hamper this goal. The censors within the Sub-Directorate for Book Supervising both built on and broadened the scope of the de-fascization legislation to include "[all books] which promote the rotten bourgeois culture ... an ideological barrier which the working class must break down on its way towards socialism."⁶¹ According to the GDPPM's guidelines for book purges, that meant "all printings with hostile and obsolete character."⁶² Far from being distinctly communist, such practices built on an established interwar and wartime tradition. For example, only a few years before the communist book purges, the wartime Directorate for the Press had employed similar practices to target Jewish writers as well as films and theatrical performances starring Jewish actors.⁶³

In the 1950s the GDPPM's control over the printing industry was more limited than it would later become. In particular, the censorship agency lacked power to actively meddle in the publishing industry. The GDPPM's sense of incomplete power over the state publishing system resulted in frequent complaints to the Agitprop about institutions disregarding the censorship protocols. For example, in late 1951, the GDPPM wrote to the Agitprop to complain about the institutional behaviour of the State Publishing House which, allegedly, printed materials without the censor's stamp of approval. Similar accusations were also levelled against the Agerpres, the state newswire agency. To reassert the GDPPM's authority, the Agitprop stepped in and called a multi-agency meeting at its main office. Both "offenders" were reprimanded for neglecting to respect the GDPPM's authority.⁶⁴

This complex and elaborate mechanism of formal censorship was closely supervised by the Party's Agitprop agency. With resounding priority in all matters having a "Party character", the Agitprop had its

own sectors for press, literature, and printed materials which provided regular instructions to the analogous departments of the GDPPM.⁶⁵ In meetings at the Agitprop office, through telephonic notes, and through written memos, the GDPPM received guidelines ranging from how to conduct an inspection of a large library, to advice on how to assess the censors' reports.⁶⁶

The daily activities of the GDPPM and the Agitprop were even more intertwined in the provinces. The local branches of the GDPPM often shared buildings with the local Agitprops, whilst the latter also supervised the recruitment of censors.⁶⁷ The censorship body's discontent with the recruitment process and with the part-time nature of the censorial work in the provinces would often lead to tensions with the Agitprop.

However, as the next section of this article illustrates, given its lack of systematic power, the GDPPM's influence in the publishing system remained largely a negative one.

Modes of Restrictive Control

The example of the newspaper copy-editor who ridiculed the arbitrariness of censorship's taboos can be seen as more than a conflict over symbolic status in the state publishing sphere. The incident also draws attention to the limits of authority and effectiveness of the formal censorship mechanism. The censorial act, like all state acts, can be performed only by people in a recognized relationship with the "official". To be effective, the censorial act has to materialise in a dual dimension – as a disciplinary set of norms and formal regulations (objective dimension) and in "things and minds", in the processes which permeate and mediate the mental structures and identity (subjective dimension).⁶⁸

The restrictive control of the GDPPM focused primarily on the circulation of information. At the infrastructural level, the media and the publishing system were reconfigured into a system of centralized production and distribution. In order to advance the development of the socialist culture, a cultural project had to have social utility. The Agitprop coordinated the institutions of the cultural bureaucracy and acted as the Party's authority in defining aesthetic and professional standards, as well as the ideological nature of a cultural product.

The cultural system was designed to ensure the realization of cultural products deemed necessary, whilst excluding those deemed harmful. Yet,

the GDPPM's position was not designed to be at the "productive end": "it is essential that the censors understand that we are not an institution which guide the newspapers, but an institution which reviews the newspapers to prevent errors."⁶⁹ The head of the Directorate for Book Publishing made a similar remark: "let us not forget that we are defending our state ... we are soldiers who defend the state secret and the ideological purity."⁷⁰

Fighting the "errors" of newspapers and printed materials was the main responsibility of the GDPPM in the 1950s. The censorship agency distinguished between three main categories of errors: political errors, errors related to breaches of "state secrets", and formal or general errors.⁷¹ The early guidelines issued in 1949 were concerned primarily with the prevention of "incorrect" political messages, i.e. messages "instigating against our government, undermining the class-struggle ... instigating to racial hatred against minorities".⁷² A political error denoted a difference between a textual representation and the relevant interpretation of the topic by the Party (Party-line). For example, in an article entitled "We are showing our enthusiasm for the global peace movement," published in a daily newspaper in Bucharest, the author wrote: "everywhere we go, we hear rumours about the imminence of a new war; these rumours determine us, the working people, to look with great concern at the future of our children and brothers." By assessing it as being contrary to "the interest of our republic," the censor removed the phrase from the body of the article on the grounds that it "instilled unnecessary pessimism which could lower the spirits of the working class."⁷³

The Agitprop regularly updated the censorial body with lists of "state secrets." Lengthy prohibitions referred to news or print materials deemed to endanger the national security. Such errors were defined under the umbrella term of "state secret" to include military and economic matters, and, indeed, anything which was considered politically sensitive. When the initial guidelines were released in 1951 they delineated categories of state secret such as military, economic, agricultural and zootechnics, transportation, state investments and constructions.⁷⁴ The guidelines covered a broad array of topics, from references to the geographical location of different factories, touristic maps, statistical information to names of products and pictures of industrial sites.⁷⁵ In developing the guidelines, the officials acknowledged the Soviet influence: "as a general rule, as regards the defending of the state secret, the press will have to follow the Soviet example."⁷⁶

The guidelines on state secrets were further compiled into booklets (*caiete de dispoziții*) which became an important work tool for censors after 1953.⁷⁷ It featured mainly economic taboos, but at the same time it targeted public representations or lexical constructions potentially detrimental to linguistic unity. The interdictions varied and included: “nothing about chess, crosswords, sports camps, joint training of our athletes with foreign athletes, foreign trips of our sport teams” [they could awake the people’s interest in foreign countries], “nothing about financial benefits and bonuses, prizes, etc.”⁷⁸ [people will become envious] “do not disseminate pictures with peasants still working in traditional peasant sandals.”⁷⁹

The guidelines similarly prohibited news critical of the government or of the Soviet Union and its leaders, as well as news and articles popularizing cultural events from a non-Marxist position. Condensed under the rubric of state secret were also the references to religious values, to various images and information supposedly revealing state secrets to “imperialist countries,” and the publishing of news about certain disasters which could potentially instil panic in the population.⁸⁰

Yet, in the beginning, dealing with articles about industry and industrialization – industrial outputs, references to the number of people in the workforce, product names, production costs, units location etc. – posed the greatest challenge for censors. The skills showed in handling economically sensitive information gave the measure of a trained censor. By offering “crucial information to the enemy,” too many details on economic issues could have breached the orders regarding the state secret. On the other hand, by overshadowing the Party’s achievements, an unwarranted intervention by the censor was considered to weaken the strength and the quality of the propaganda. In the words of the head of the Directorate for Central Press: “when the figures and the industrial outputs do not serve the internal and external enemies ... we just weaken the power of our propaganda and agitation work [if we censor them].”⁸¹

As essential tools in the construction of socialism, the newspapers had to present, in a convincing manner, the achievements of state policies. An overzealous or superficial censor, the senior censors claimed, could have inflicted “hardships on newspapers ... and prejudices against our institutional reputation.”⁸² As a senior censor of the Directorate for Central Press put it, “the way the state secret issues were handled [by the Directorate] showed a mechanical attitude which betrayed a poor

understanding of the Party's political line ... which placed a great burden on newspapers and impaired our institutional prestige."⁸³

This type of taboo construction should be seen as acting as a pedagogical technique in tandem with a "language ideology" – it assumed that without public representation, neither the image nor the actual object of reference of a lexical construction would be significant.⁸⁴

A correct censorial interpretation of the censors would "enrich, not hamper the realization of our regime of popular democracy", the senior censors highlighted.⁸⁵ Yet, despite of the latter's claims to a unified system of knowledge control, the wealth of advice and updates sometimes contradicted one another. Of course, it was tempting for censors to take the easiest path, namely, when in doubt, to request the outright removal of all the economic and industrial related outputs. But, for the GDPPM's leadership, such an approach epitomized "leftist excesses," and a "mechanical attitude towards work and political ignorance."

For example, in 1952, in the midst of the First Five-Year Plan, a censor flagged a newspaper article on the grounds that it disclosed economically sensitive information related to the national electrification process. Because it contained economic figures, the censor reacted instinctively by asking for the removal of the entire article. To his hierarchical superiors, however, his decision revealed no more than a "bureaucratic attitude towards work". The censor should have known that the figures had already been circulated in a report delivered by the Party's general secretary, Gheorghiu-Dej, therefore they were no longer a matter of secrecy.⁸⁶ From the reprimand we also learn that the mishandling of economic information was a recurrent problem and the censorial board regularly petitioned the Agitprop for counsel.⁸⁷ However, because the majority of updates and advisories were delivered verbally it is difficult to fully grasp the Agitprop's scale of control.

Supervised by the ACC, the censorial agency had already begun its purges of the "fascist" literature from libraries and bookshops in 1945.⁸⁸ Yet, the subsequent instructions, compiled in book indexes, expanded the purges to almost all undesirable political topics. Whereas the GDPPM gave the final approval, the initial purges were conducted by librarians. The printed materials fell into three categories. All literature printed after 23 August 1944 received authorization, as did publications printed before this date but which were nevertheless deemed "progressive for the times when they were published". In the second category, the censors placed the printings "with obsolete character but not openly hostile ...

necessary for research,” whilst the third category referred to “all hostile materials, anti-democratic, anti-communist ... authors who are enemies of democracy, peace, and socialism.”⁸⁹

The GDPPM oversaw the libraries and bookshops’ compliance with the regulations governing the book trade. For example, the “non-hostile” printed materials (in the first category) were placed in the general collections of the libraries, whilst the publications in the other two categories were banned to the public and were held in special repositories with access restricted to authorized readers. By the end of 1951, to extend their control over the purged printings, the authorities established special regional repositories where printings in the third category made up the so-called “secret collection.”

As was the case with the guidelines compiled for the state secrets, the Party also issued regularly updated instructions to assist the censors with the book purges. The instructions classified the printed materials both chronologically – books published before the Russian Revolution, between the wars, and after August 1944 – and by topic.⁹⁰ For example, among the topics barred from publication were religious, occult, Zionist, mystical, and pornographic publications. With other topics censors had discretionary powers to purge. In the case of the “nationalistic literature,” for instance, the guidelines stated that it “would be purged gradually.” But the censors were expected to rely on their political training and to “approach the national question using an internationalist standpoint.” In the same vein, erotic literature was permitted only if it depicted “a healthy, optimistic, and life-affirming kind of love.”⁹¹

The censors would be at times caught between inconsistent directives overriding guidelines adopted previously. For example, during an inspection in 1952, the censors ordered the librarians of the University Library in Bucharest to remove all technical books published between 1918-1944 from the general collection (works of general interest). The internal guidelines of GDPPM stipulated that the books had to be removed and restricted to “research purposes.” However, by the time the librarians implemented the order, the GDPPM’s guidelines had once more been updated. The new instructions requested that only the books “permeated by cosmopolitanism” but not all technical books from the interwar period, were to be removed from general collection. Overtaken by events, the censors returned to the library and demanded that the librarians reverse the previous order and comply with the new directives.⁹²

The GDPPM's teams of censors conducted inspections at libraries (public and university libraries), bookshops and checked whether recent books incorporated had complied with the revisions demanded by censors before publication. Since cultural consumption became both a matter of state interest and a tool for social change, the non-state institutions diminished in importance and, to a certain extent, ended up discredited. Culture was evaluated by political utility, and the censors from the Sub-Directorate for Book Control often clashed with the private booksellers: "private book selling is just a commercial pursuit, thus it is straightforwardly against the interests of the working class ... it only facilitates the spreading of the bourgeois poisons."⁹³ Used booksellers were banned in late 1950, but the censors still focused on the used book market. Their searches for "black marketeers" sometimes took them to unconventional places such as the flea markets on the outskirts of Bucharest.⁹⁴

The GDPPM's regulations for the overseeing of the foreign news required that the media outlets covering foreign policy incorporate, most often verbatim, the news bulletins released by the official news agency, the Agerpres.⁹⁵ Of course, the censors checked how the media carried out the task. However, external offices at different ports of entry in the country managed the censorship of the foreign press, foreign literature, the academic journals requested by libraries and private individuals, and other printed publications. The removal of the "negative" content followed a familiar pattern: the Directorate for Foreign Publications decided which individuals and libraries could receive foreign publications, it censored articles, and, in some cases, banned newspapers and magazine issues. Even if an individual or institution were granted a license to receive foreign literature, this was not necessarily a guarantee that, for example, they would receive all the issues of a foreign magazine.

To pick an example, in 1951 several issues of an Austrian magazine, licensed to a local scientist, were retained by GDPPM. The censors questioned the "scientific character" of the magazine and cancelled its authorization. In the report, the censor underlined the "covert capitalist propaganda" of the magazine, as well as its "commercial character, featuring articles laudatory of the United States and the Marshall Plan."⁹⁶ Another magazine, this time from the UK, was similarly refused by the censors. Although it was a specialized academic magazine (forestry industry) the censors turned it down for "its biased comments about the Soviet forestry industry."⁹⁷

When the elaborate pre-publication system of censoring could not prevent “bold political errors,” the GDPPM reacted by withdrawing from the market the “erring” newspapers, books and other printed materials. Instead of the phrase “we must reduce the *consumption* of raw materials,” a local newspaper mistakenly printed on its front page “we must reduce the *communism* of raw materials.” The censors reacted by withdrawing the offending issue, but, in spite of their efforts, 80 copies sold before the ban came into force remained to be found.⁹⁸ Similarly, at the construction site of the Danube-Black Sea Canal, a newspaper issue was withdrawn in 1952 because the censors spotted a discrepancy between the front-page picture and the person it was supposed to portray.⁹⁹

But regardless of how rigorous these surgical operations upon language were, the spectre of the double entendre was present: “long live comrade Stalin! The war instigators are falling and collapsing everywhere and this is because of the *battle* which the Soviet Union carries on in the *peace camp*” (my emphasis).¹⁰⁰

In practice, actual socialism seemed rather “unwilling” to follow the theoretical direction imposed onto it, and therefore a sense of semantic indeterminacy pervaded the work of censorship. In his attempt to grapple with this sense of indeterminacy, one senior censor defined censorship as “not a spontaneous act of free will but a permanent knowledge of everyday political problems.”¹⁰¹ The “political error” represented the most important error for censors and it was defined broadly enough to designate a mismatch between a media representation and the Party-line. The seniors took the hardest line on them: “dozens of prevented errors cannot compensate for a serious political error which makes it into print.”¹⁰²

Indeed, the distinction between the various types of “errors” was more blurred in practice. One journalist told me that his worst ever error was a misspelling. While working for a local newspaper, the journalist wrote an article with a standard-mobilizational title “To the battle for people’s bread” (in Romanian, *La luptă pentru pâinea poporului muncitor!*). However, during the printing process a scribal error erased the letter “r” from the word *popor*, the Romanian for *people*, and replaced it with the letter “u”. Since *popou* means booty in Romanian, the title acquired a lethal-subversive connotation. Further complicating the matter, the error was treated as a political one and the local Party branch and the Securitate investigated the case as an “act of sabotage.” The authorities were alarmed that the media text could have been picked up by the anti-communist media from abroad (i.e. Radio Free Europe) in order to shame communist Romania.¹⁰³

After being subjected to weeks of investigation and multiple declarations to the Securitate, the journalist was cleared of any counterrevolutionary intent. He got off with a verbal reprimand.¹⁰⁴

In 1953, Iosif Ardeleanu, the chief censor, admitted to the “indeterminacy” of censorship: “the work we are doing here at the censorship [agency] depends pretty much on meaning.”¹⁰⁵ As will we see in the next section, institutional censorship was trapped between the ambition to provide systemic meaning to the cultural signifiers of the socialist cultural order and its limited, mainly restrictive, powers granted by its charter.

Productive Textual Practices

Besides monitoring the daily media and cultural production, the censors also sought to proactively refine the language of the cultural products: they negotiated argumentation, inserted the latest pronouncements of the Party, and, not least, suggested new ways to increase the efficiency of cultural production and its mass reception.

As we have already seen, in spite of the GDPPM’s overall “negative” influence over the state sector (text suppression, bans, book purges), in helping to create a kind of consensus around what was or should be socially acceptable, state censorship also acted “productively.” On the other hand, assuming a “too positive” role, i.e. an active involvement in the ideological content of a cultural product, fell beyond the rather limited powers of the institutional censorship. For example, in late 1949, while on duty at the Radio Station in Bucharest, a censor convened a meeting with a group of editors. According to the GDPPM’s report on the case, in his speech to the editors the censor delivered both criticism and advice on dealing with ideological sensitive issues. When the superiors learnt about the censor’s undertaking they reacted with indignation. Making ideological observations, the report stressed, went beyond the scope of a censor’s work, namely to “check on the Party and state agencies and not to offer political and ideological guidance.”¹⁰⁶

But one can find similar cases across all the directorates and offices of the GDPPM. For example, in 1949, censors from the Directorate for the Central Press took it upon themselves to rephrase sentences of the Agerpres news bulletins. A news release reporting the visit of a Soviet delegation to Romania stated that the visit “sparked a *genuine* manifestation of the

masses' love." However, the censor felt that only a rephrasing could prevent the lurking danger of a double meaning. Hence his intervention: "it should have said: generated an *enthusiastic* manifestation of *love from* the masses ... and why does the author say 'genuine'? Only these particular manifestations of love were genuine?"¹⁰⁷

The censors working in book censorship faced the greatest challenges in accommodating these tensions. As the head of the Sub-Directorate for Book Licensing stated, "we find ourselves in a vicious circle because too often the principle we are led by – to be a supervisory body – is distorted."¹⁰⁸

A newspaper picture, a reportage, or a book could warrant pages of comments, stretching from evaluations of the correct incorporation of the political line to interpretative judgements of a particular character's behaviour and clothes. For example, an article published in a previously approved French magazine debated the life expectancy in the United States to conclude that it had risen since the end of the war. The censor in charge with reading the issue promptly intervened and banned the article on the grounds that "private health insurance, which is nothing more than a tool of oppression, is depicted as an advantage in the article."¹⁰⁹

Another censor, echoing socialist realism's aim to create, not just to reflect, reality turned down a novel arguing that although the plot fitted the accepted paradigm – it was about the British colonial exploitation in India – "it is virtually impossible to find a single positive character in the entire novel ... also there is not any mass movement to take on the bloody slayers ... today, after the war, this type of prose can no longer be accepted."¹¹⁰ Through literary works, the cultural officials aimed to shape the taste of the public and not necessarily to satisfy them. As the censor report's concluding remarks put it: "the novel is of no help for the reader, it does not help the reader to understand the real situation in today's India, and in general, the political situation in the colonies."¹¹¹

Often, censoring was very close to copy-editing. A censor reviewing an article which discussed the political situation in the Balkans struck out the most problematic passages and asked the author for a rephrasing. The article, due to be published in a literary magazine, argued that "in the Balkans there are still two states which continue the role of the lighter of the *powder keg of Europe*, namely Greece and Yugoslavia ... they rely on provocations which are *also* aimed at the countries of popular democracy in the region" [censor's emphasis].¹¹² Adopting a condescending tone, the censor gave his reasoning: "first of all, today we can no longer speak

of the Balkan region as being the *powder keg of Europe*. It is a mistake because in the Balkan Peninsula there are three popular democracies, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania ... the Titoist provocations aim exclusively and not *also* at the countries of popular democracies." But the censor was equally concerned with the ambiguity of the text: "the author is ambiguous, one can assume that the Titoist provocations are aimed at other Balkan countries too, whereas the fascist monarchy of Greece and Turkey are in reality Tito's allies."¹¹³

In some cases, the censors were advised by the Party officials not only to consider the political stakes of a text, but to assess its aesthetic realisation as well. The censors assessed the quality of translations in news bulletins and books and in problematic cases they would flag "errors in translations" by making comments such as "the translation of the book is inaccurate in parts and, thus, can be confusing."¹¹⁴ They also often objected to outdated information in texts. One censor demanded that an article from a literary magazine be eliminated so that "such an outdated article would not jeopardize the overall quality of the issue."¹¹⁵

A self-assumed pedagogical mission made the censor get involved in matters which went beyond correcting ideological flaws. The manuscripts received by the censors often featured stylistic shortcomings, faulty grammar or logical contradictions. Sometimes censors could not resist the temptation to offer advice in the margins but their hierarchical superiors took care to remind them of the limits of their role.¹¹⁶

In their reports on newspapers, the censors would sometimes comment on the quality of graphic design composition and on the employment of "political weapons" such as photography and caricature. For example, a censor criticized the *Scântea Tineretului* (The Youth's Spark) newspaper for not doing enough to popularize the Party's achievements: "photography and caricature are leading instruments of agitation and propaganda but they are not used in a creative way ... only the issues 220 and 221 feature pictures depicting the work of our Party ... the comrades from the Central Committee are photographed giving lectures ... the caricatures are too few and only one of them can be considered as being a creative one."¹¹⁷

The level of politicization of a text demanded the most attention. For example, in stylistic constructions such as "socialism will reconstruct the world devastated by capitalism," the censors saw a "weak politicization" and asked for a rephrasing.¹¹⁸ Other constructions were deemed to suggest a sense of political uncertainty, and again, revisions were required. In a phrase such as "at this crucial moment in history, the great Stalin...,"

the censor would sense “uncertainty”: “why *at this moment?* Change, it suggests uncertainty.”¹¹⁹ Overall, such errors were assessed by the censors as reflecting the publications’ treatment of political “matters in a lukewarm manner ... not with the commitment of the class spirit.”¹²⁰

Characteristically for the communist handling of the formal censorial mechanism, even when the censors conducted purges of libraries and book shops, their work extended beyond the disciplinary dimension. For example, Flaviu Schäffer, a high-achieving censor in the Sub-Directorate of Book Supervision, always included in his reports a special section to discuss the “proletarian literary talents” he encountered during his inspections of libraries. Schäffer’s punctiliously written reports reveal that the censor spent part of his time in discussion with librarians about amateur writers with working-class background in their regions.¹²¹ Back in Bucharest, Schäffer would forward his recommendations to the Agitprop.¹²²

The abundance of instructions, advisories, and updates received from the Agitprop aimed at framing the censors’ work and action within tight political boundaries. The quality of a censor’s report, the censorship seniors believed, reflected both the censors’ performance and their ideological training.¹²³ The reports featured rubrics for essential and minor censorship, political and state secret related interventions, and miscellaneous interventions. It was meant to embody what was called “the new superior censorship”, which was realized in “careful support given to all publications.”¹²⁴ Channelled properly, the adequate support offered by censorship would only bring more linguistic effectivity to a newspaper or a book, thus sometimes “salvaging the prestige of a publication.”¹²⁵ Conversely, the supporting mission of censorship failed to materialize when the censors’ interventions were unwarranted, which ran the risk of delivering weak ideological products to the public. As a report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Authorizing instructed its censors: “after every article, poem, and novel read the censor must pause and think about the main argument of the text, its political and ideological implications. A censor must always ask himself the question: who benefits from the text?”¹²⁶

The RCP leadership’s greatest concern was that its capacity to control the production of meaning would be overshadowed by the residual “bourgeois” language in public space. As Michael Holquist aptly argued, the essence of all censorship resides in a “monologic terror of indeterminacy.”¹²⁷ In order to overcome this indeterminacy, the RCP

invested notable resources and time for an exact “calibration of the referential properties of language” in order to protect the people from other types of cultural mediations.¹²⁸

Conclusion

The establishment of the communist censorship agency marked not a revolutionary “moment” but rather a “fusion” with the prewar and wartime traditions. The communists relied on established practices, although they employed them in a more radical fashion in pursuit of a more radical political end. The censoring of “inimical” and “dangerous” foreign publications, the various pre-publication censorial interventions, the daily advisories sent to the press, and the doctored materials which the media was constrained to publish on behalf of the government, were all practices which predated the communist takeover. The war and the Ministry of Propaganda redefined the role of the media in relation to the state, while it also gave legitimacy to state intervention in media and culture.

Considered within the broad spectrum of cultural institutions the censorial body reveals certain limits of action. The Central Committee’s Agitprop, as the main organ for cultural change, developed, established and transmitted downwards the standards of ideological quality. It did so through a vast network of institutions and mass organizations which transmitted regular and obligatory guidelines. The Agitprop relied on the work of its own ideological instructors to oversee newspapers, periodicals and the literary field. Both complementing and drawing “inspiration” from the Agitprop, the creative unions, the Ministry of Culture and the state mechanism of publishing and planning also mediated the form of the cultural product.

As all censorial systems across history, the system of cultural control operated under a twofold function. On the one hand, the censorial system was sometimes brutally repressive of what it considered as harmful or dangerous. On the other, its design facilitated a “productive” dimension. The censorial body was expected to shape the cultural artefacts that the Party considered necessary for the enlightenment of the masses, the building of socialism and for the forging of a consensus on issues of what was culturally acceptable. Of course, this dual stance impacts on how we should understand communist censorship. To overcome the limited

understanding of censorship as negative suppression one must consider the GDPPM in the broader context of cultural production. It is too simple to state that the centrally planned formal system of censorship was just a cynical exercise in controlling, manipulating, and infantilizing the population.

Paramount for the Party-state's cultural production was the control over the production of the collective consciousness.¹²⁹ However, to consider the official culture as the offspring of the censor's pencil, as has often been suggested, means not only to assume the existence of "two cultures" but also to overestimate the role played by the censorial agency. True, the GDPPM's system of regulation was to some extent effective in defending the state cultural monopoly, or in reshaping different cultural products. But to assign it a main role in constructing the communist cultural hegemony goes beyond its rather limited means of action. As its modern bureaucratic design suggests, the GDPPM acted more like a regulatory agency, concerned with the distribution and the incorporation of the Party-line knowledge.

NOTES

- ¹ Arhivele Naționale ale României (hereafter ANR), Fond Comitetul pentru Presă și Tipărituri (hereafter CPT), file 24/1957, 27; report of the Directorate for Literature covering the period October to December 1957.
- ² ANR, Fond CPT, file 24/1957, 27; report of the Directorate for Literature covering the period October to December 1957.
- ³ Dominic Boyer, "Censorship as a Vocation: The Institutions, Practices, and Cultural Logic of Media Control in the German Democratic Republic," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003): 514.
- ⁴ Law no, 282, Constituția României, *Monitorul Oficial*, 29 March, 1923.
- ⁵ Marian Petcu, *Puterea și Cultura. O Istorie a Cenzurii* (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 132-33.
- ⁶ The broad consensus across the political spectrum was that the Romanian nation had special rights in relation to the territory it inhabited. In repairing the damage of the past, the nation needed protection from corrupting political influences. See Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation. Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 18-19.
- ⁷ ANR, Fond Ministerul Propagandei Naționale (hereafter MPN), file 2/1924, 13; a censor's report submitted to the head of the Directorate for Press, 20 September 1924.
- ⁸ ANR, Fond MPN, file 14/1926-38, 36-37; letter of the head of the Directorate for Press to the Minister of National Defense, 20 January 1934.
- ⁹ During the interwar period the state of siege was only briefly suspended by the first National Peasant Government in 1930, to be reinstated in 1933 and again in 1938, when King Carol II assumed dictatorial powers. For example, Bessarabia had been under martial law since its annexation in 1918 and given the purportedly "Bolshevik menace" and internal vulnerabilities, the state of siege was never to be entirely suspended in the province. But as much as it was a reaction to external threats such as the Bolshevik revolution and the irredentism of neighbouring states, the state of siege was a preferred disciplinary and powerful tool in dealing with internal disturbances labelled conveniently as "socialist agitation and propaganda".
- ¹⁰ ANR, Fond MPN, file 285/1934, 2-5; report about the political offences committed by journalists from Transylvania pertaining to ethnic minorities during the period between June 1919 and 1 August 1934.
- ¹¹ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 416.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 423.
- ¹³ Decree-Law no. 3599, *Monitorul Oficial*, 11 March, 1938.
- ¹⁴ Mioara Anton, *Propagandă și război. Campania din Est, 1941-44* (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2007), 67.

- ¹⁵ For example, the Ministry of Interior demanded a newspaper remove from its front page a picture portraying a group of people in top hats: “no other communist propagandistic pictures like these must be allowed from now on” (it implied that the top hat might be read as a critique of the upper class). Cited in Ioan Lăcustă, *Cenzura veghează, 1937-1939* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2007), 95.
- ¹⁶ For example, an advisory from 19 February 1939 read: “All newspapers are obliged to publish daily until 27 February the joint statement of the bishops of Transylvania ... the bishops’ signatures on the statement must appear clear on the left and on the right of the first page”. Cited in Lăcustă, 235.
- ¹⁷ When censorship was ordered after the newspapers’ issues had been finished, in lieu of the purged articles the published issues would feature rectangular black boxes. See Alexandru Baci, *Din însemnările unui secretar de redacție. Pagini de jurnal, 1943-1978* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1997), 27.
- ¹⁸ ANR, Fond MPN, file 385/1938-43, 84-85; report of the General Directorate for Press for the period 6 September 1940-15 August 1941.
- ¹⁹ See Decree-Law no. 462 for the Disbanding of the Minister of National Propaganda, *Monitorul Oficial*, part I, no. 218, 21 September 1944; Decree-Law for the Re-Establishment of the Ministry of National Propaganda, *Monitorul Oficial*, 24 March, 1945.
- ²⁰ The Soviet-led Allied High Command extended its protection to the RCP publications and during the political struggles between the RCP and the traditional parties would often censor the opposition’s publications. See Mihaela Teodor, *Anatomia cenzurii. Comunizarea presei din România, 1944-1947* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012), 47-50.
- ²¹ ANR, Fond CPT, file 13/1949, 8; internal decree issued by the GDPPM’s Collegium, 23 September 1953.
- ²² Karl Marx, “The Civil War in France,” in *Writings on the Paris Commune*, ed. H. Draper (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 196.
- ²³ Peter Holquist, “What’s So Revolutionary about the Russian Revolution? State Practices and the New-Style Politics, 1914-21,” in *Russian Modernity. Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, eds. David L. Hoffmann and Gianni Kotsonis (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 91.
- ²⁴ ANR, Fond CPT, file 13/1950, 57-58; copy of the decree no. 218/20 May 1949 for the establishment of the GDPPM.
- ²⁵ GDPPM’s directorates and offices, June 1949. See also ANR, Fond CPT, file 10/1949, 2-3; copy of the decree 461/28 May 1951.
- ²⁶ ANR, Fond CPT, file 4/1952, 19-21; the GDPPM’s organizational structure in 1952.
- ²⁷ Three “sectors” – the Press, the Book, and the Propaganda and Visual Agitation – each headed by a deputy, took over the traditional directorates. At the same time, a new Directorate for Staff Training and Supervision was established to oversee the ideological education of the censors. See ANR,

Fond CPT, file 10/1949, 18-21; copy of the decree no. 267/1954 issued by the Council of Ministries.

28 Ibid.

29 For the 1948 Constitution see *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 87 bis, 13 April, 1948; for the 1952 Constitution see *Buletinul Oficial*, no. 1, 27 September, 1952.

30 ANR, Fond CPT, file 1/1950, 280; monthly work report of the central office of the GDPPM, December 1950.

31 ANR, Fond CPT, file 18/1951, 153-55; minute of a meeting between the GDPPM, the Agerpres, and representative of journalists held at the Agitprop central office, 20 November 1951.

32 For example, in September 1951, the authorities withdrew from the market two newspaper issues amounting to 250,000 (see ANR, Fond CPT, file 1/1950, 281; monthly work report of the GDPPM, December 1950).

33 ANR, Fond CC al PCR, Secția Propagandă și Agitație (hereafter Secția PA), file 1/1945, 102-104; speech by Ilie Zaharia at the first Party national conference on agitation and propaganda. See also Emilia Șercan, *Cultul secretului. Mecanismele cenzurii în presa comunistă* (Iași: Polirom, 2015), 45.

34 ANR, Fond CPT, file 3/1949, 5; report of the Directorate for the Central Press, September 1949.

35 Conversation of the author with Pavel Țugui, 22 July 2013.

36 ANR, Fond CPT, file 6/1952, 150; minute of a meeting of the Directorate for the Central Press, 18 January 1952.

37 ANR, Fond CTP, file 1/1951, 388; letter of the censor Tarnovschi Ludovic to Ardeleanu in which the author reported that he was disrespected by a journalist, 14 December 1951.

38 When the censor's report ended up on Ardeleanu's desk, the censor chief called for immediate sanctions against the offender. The lack of any subsequent follow-ups in the archives deprives us of the outcome of the story. Yet, even if the story could have been reconstructed, it would have added little to the central aspect of it. Confrontations like this between censors and copy editors, we learn from the censor's petition, were by no means singular.

39 In the cities without GDPPM offices the licences were granted by the local popular councils. (see ANR, Fond CTP, file 7/1951, 139; report compiled by an instructor of the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces, 11 December 1951). The local branches received powers to censor the printed materials yet no right to issue publication licences, which remained in the jurisdiction of the central branch (ANR, Fond CTP, file 14/1949, 14-22; minute of a GDPPM Collegium meeting, April 1950).

40 ANR, Fond CTP, file 14/1949, 14-22; minute of a GDPPM Collegium meeting, April 1950.

41 ANR, Fond CTP, file 7/1951, 27; work report of the instructors of the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces, November 1951. In 1951 the GDPPM concluded that the regular work reports sent by the local branches

- were too “formalistic”. As a consequence, the interval of submission was changed from one to three months (ANR, Fond CTP, file 16/1951, 30; memoranda sent by the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces to the local censorship branches, 26 April 1953).
- 42 When the central office double-checked the Hungarian-language newspapers published in December 1951, it spotted 39 “political errors” and just over 100 stylistic errors. ANR, Fond CTP, file 20/1951, 19; report of the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces, December 1951.
- 43 ANR, Fond CTP, file 2/1950, 9; report of the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces, May 1950.
- 44 ANR, Fond CTP, file 2/1952, 4-11; report of the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces, July 1952.
- 45 ANR, Fond CPT, file 24/1957, 95-96; work report of the Directorate for Book Publishing, July 1957.
- 46 ANR, Fond CPT, file 10/1949, 41-42; guidelines regarding the import of foreign press and publications, 15 March 1952.
- 47 ANR, Fond CPT, file 2/1951, 119; letter of Mihail [Buduru] to Iosif Ardeleanu, 1951.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 119.
- 49 ANR, Fond CPT, file 10/1949, 40; guidelines regarding the importation of foreign press and publications, 15 March 1952.
- 50 For the text of the agreement see ANR, Fond CPT, file 2/1951, 180-85; Agreement between the Romanian People’s Republic and the Hungarian People’s Republic Concerning the Coordination of the Editorial Process, 15 November 1951.
- 51 Every printed material had to have two stamps of approval. One certified that the publication passed the censor – “approved for printing” (*bun de imprimat*) – while the second one gave the final clearance at the printing house, “approved for distribution” (*bun de difuzat*).
- 52 The editorial plan stated in advance the number of books to be published in the forthcoming year; therefore, the censors knew, for example, that in the third quarter of 1951 they would deal with 700 new titles coming in from publishers. ANR, Fond CPT, file 1/1950, 151; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Licensing, October 1950.
- 53 For example, in 1949 the Party’s publishing house had its own internal censorship office, with censors provided by the GDPPM. After the office was disbanded, in early 1950s, the publishing house would no longer be subjected to GDPPM oversight. ANR, Fond CPT, file 4/1949, 17; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Authorizing, October 1949.
- 54 For training purposes, the book manuscripts assigned to recently hired staff were also assessed by a second, more experienced, censor.
- 55 ANR, Fond CPT, file 24/1953, 55; report of the GDPPM’s Collegium, July 1953.
- 56 ANR, Fond CPT, file 23/1952, 74; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Licensing, November 1952.

- 57 ANR, Fond CPT, file 5/1952, 99-101; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Licensing for the third quarter of the year 1952, June 1952.
- 58 ANR, Fond CPT, file 6/1952, 45; meeting of the Sub-Directorate for Book Licensing, 2 September 1952.
- 59 Liliana Corobca, *Controlul cărții. Cenzura literaturii în regimul comunist din România* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2014), 149-50.
- 60 ANR, Fond CPT, file 5/1952, 106; work report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Licensing, 1 October-15 January 1952. The guidelines also required that a censor's stamp of approval be applied on the first fly leaf of a book, whilst in the case of pictures on the back of each picture (ANR, Fond CPT, file 14/1953, resolution of Ardeleanu, December 1953).
- 61 ANR, Fond CPT, file 14/1950, 25; report on the activity of the Directorate for Book Control, 20 September 1950.
- 62 ANR, Fond CPT, file 4/1953, 20; guidelines for the classification, preservation, and circulation of the printed materials.
- 63 Petcu, 154.
- 64 ANR, Fond CPT, file 18/1951, 25-33; meeting at the Agitprop central office between the GDPPM, the Book and Printing Distribution Agency, and the Agerpres, November 1951.
- 65 To use institutional language, the Agitprop "oversaw how the Party-line was translated into practice by the GDPPM" (ANR, Fond CC al PCR, Secția PA, file 3/1950, 33-34; the Agitprop charter).
- 66 ANR, Fond CPT, file 50/1951; Agitprop's instructions about how to conduct inspections of libraries, 15 May 1952.
- 67 ANR, Fond CPT, file 4/1949, 8-9; report on the activity of the GDPPM for the period 1 July-1 October 1949; ANR, Fond CPT, file 1/1950, 282; report on the activity of the GDPPM for the year 1950, December 1950.
- 68 Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1989-1992*, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 35.
- 69 ANR, Fond CPT, file 7/1951, 83; minute of a meeting of the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces, 11 May 1951.
- 70 ANR, Fond CPT, file 4/1952, 101; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Supervising, 2 September 1952.
- 71 For example, a report of the Directorate for the Central Press from April 1952 mentions that out of a total of 1, 080 censorship carried out in the central newspapers in April, 486 were political and 247 prevented the violation of state secret in the press (ANR, Fond CPT, file 5/1952, 284-85; report of the Directorate for the Central Press, April 1952).
- 72 ANR, Fond CPT, file 13/1949, 41-42; guidelines for the censoring of the press and printings, May 1949.
- 73 ANR, Fond CPT, file 3/1953, 76; report of the Directorate for the Central Press, August 1951.

- 74 ANR, Fond CPT, file 3/1954, 62-71; copy of the decree no. 34 from 1951 – guidelines for defining state secrets in the press, books, printings, brochures, radio broadcasts, films, theatres, exhibitions, museum, conferences etc.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 ANR, Fond CPT, file 18/1951, 76-77; guidelines for defending the state secret in the press.
- 77 The *Perechen'* or the Talmud, as the censors sometimes called it, was a list of information which constituted state secrets and it was the main tool of the Soviet censors to enforce orthodoxy. It was a top-secret list comprising lists of authors and texts banned from circulation. See Jan Plamper, "Abolishing Ambiguity: Soviet Censorship Practices in the 1930s," *Russian Review* 60, no.4 (2001): 351; Martin Dewhirst and Robert Farrell, eds., *The Soviet Censorship* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1973), 55; Marianna Tax Choldin and Maurice Friedberg, eds., *The Red Pencil: Artists, Scholars, and Censors in the USSR* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 18-19.
- 78 ANR, Fond CPT, file 14/1949, 47; lists featuring terms and expressions banned from publication.
- 79 Emilia Șercan, "Institutiile cenzurii în perioada comunistă. Instrumente și proceduri de lucru în 1965," in *Revista Română de Istorie a Presei* no. 10 (2011): 100.
- 80 ANR, Fond CPT, file 1/1950, 237-238; guidelines for the censoring of the press and printings.
- 81 ANR, Fond CPT, file 13/1949, 7; transcript of a GDPPM board meeting, 19-20 August 1953.
- 82 ANR, Fond CPT, file 5/1952, 3; minute of a meeting of the Directorate for Central Press, 17 November 1951;
- 83 ANR, Fond CPT, file 11/1951, 3; minute of a meeting of the Directorate for the Central Press, 17 November 1951.
- 84 Boyer, "Censorship as a Vocation," 134; Schiffelin et al., *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 85 ANR, Fond CPT, file 5/1952, 83; meeting of the Sub-Directorate for Book Authorizing, November 1952.
- 86 ANR, Fond CPT, File 5/1952, 106; work report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Authorizing, 15 January 1952.
- 87 ANR, Fond CPT, file 5/1952, 83; minute of a meeting of the Sub-Directorate for Book Approval, November 1952.
- 88 In the early postwar period the purges were conducted by the cultural counsellors from the Ministry of Propaganda, which later became the Ministry of Arts and Information. See Liliana Corobca, *Epurarea cărților în România (1944-1964)* (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2010), 38-40; See also Decree-Law no. 2, *Monitorul Oficial*. 2 May, 1945.
- 89 ANR, Fond CPT, file 4/1953, 20; guidelines for the classification, preservation, and circulation of the printed materials.

- 90 ANR, Fond CPT, file 50/1951, 9-10; guidelines for conducting inspections of libraries.
- 91 ANR, Fond CPT, file 8/1949, 197-98; guidelines for conduction defascization of public libraries and book shops, July 1949.
- 92 ANR, Fond CPT, file 6/1952, 29-30; minute of a meeting of the Sub-Directorate for Book Supervising, 11 November 1952.
- 93 ANR, Fond CPT, file 14/1950, 25; Activity report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Supervision, 20 September 1950.
- 94 ANR, Fond CPT, file 1/1950; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Supervision.
- 95 Since the RCP monopolized all the news production through a single news agency, the Agerpres, strict orders prohibited the sourcing of the news from alternative sources. This does not mean that the “official” news did not go through censorial control.
- 96 ANR, Fond CPT, file 2/1951, 74; weekly report of the Directorate for Foreign Publications, 20 April 1951.
- 97 Ibid., 76.
- 98 ANR, Fond CPT, file 7/1951, 98; report of the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces, February 1951.
- 99 ANR, Fond CPT, file 14/1952, 5; report of the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces, February 1952.
- 100 ANR, Fond CPT, file 1/1950, 30; report of the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces, 10 October 1949.
- 101 ANR, Fond CPT, file 2/1950, 11; activity report of the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces, June 1950.
- 102 ANR, Fond CPT, file 13/1953, 21; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Authorizing. September 1953.
- 103 Conversation with Tănasache, 5 August 2018.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 ANR, Fond CPT, file 4/1954, 85; Ardeleanu’s speech at a board meeting of the GDPPM.
- 106 ANR, Fond CPT, file 13/1949, 8; resolution of the GDPPM Collegium, 23-25 September 1953.
- 107 ANR, Fond CPT, file 3/1949, 2; memorandum on the activity of the Agerpres, compiled by the Directorate for the Central Press, August 1949.
- 108 ANR, Fond CPT, file 6/1952, 19; minute of a performance assessment meeting in the Directorate for Books (speech by Flavius Schäffer, the head of Directorate), 11 December 1952.
- 109 ANR, fond CPT, file 2/1951, 74; weekly report of the Directorate for Foreign Press, 20 April 1951.
- 110 ANR, Fond CPT, file 3/1951, 166; censor’s report (from the Directorate for Book Licensing) about the Hungarian language novel “Frunza de ceai” (The Tea Leaf), 27 February 1952.

- 111 Ibid.
- 112 ANR, Fond CPT, file 7/1951, 108; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Authorizing, July 1951.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 ANR, Fond CPT, file 6/1951, 8; internal memorandum about an impending re-organization of the GDPPM, 27 November 1951.
- 115 ANR, Fond CPT, file 3/1951, 108; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Authorizing, 12 December 1951.
- 116 ANR, Fond CPT, file 32/1950, 78; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Authorizing, October 1950.
- 117 ANR, Fond CPT, file 5/1950, 44; report on the newspaper *Scântea tineretului* for the period 15 December 1949 – 1 January 1950.
- 118 ANR, Fond CPT, file 59/1951, 53; report regarding the book manuscripts sent by the State Publishing House in June 1951.
- 119 ANR, Fond CPT, file 3/1951, 96; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Supervision for the period 1-8 December 1951, 8 December 1951.
- 120 ANR, Fond CPT, file 7/1951, 79; activity report of the Directorate for the Press in the Provinces, 1 May 1951.
- 121 ANR, Fond CPT, file 7/1948, 151-52; report of Schäfer about an inspection of the libraries of the city of Ploiești, December 1948.
- 122 Ibid.
- 123 ANR, Fond CPT, file 6/1952, 22.; minute of a meeting held on 12 December 1952 in the Office for Book Licensing.
- 124 ANR, Fond CPT, file 11/1951, 16; memorandum of I. Rusu, the head of the Directorate for the Central Press, discussing the improvement of the work in the Directorate, 8 December 1951.
- 125 ANR, Fond CPT, file 2/1956, 32; work report of the Directorate for the Central Press for the period July-December 1956.
- 126 ANR, Fond CPT, file 13/1953, 22; report of the Sub-Directorate for Book Authorizing; September 1953.
- 127 Michael Holquist, "Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship," *PMLA* 109, no. 1 (1994): 14.
- 128 Dominic Boyer, *Spirit and System. Media, Intellectuals and the Dialectic of Modern German Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), 136.
- 129 A point made by Domic Boyer in "Censorship as a Vocation: The Institutions, Practices, and Cultural Logic of Media Control in the German Democratic Republic," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (July 2003): 521.