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Between Manipulation, Propaganda and Education – the Activity of the Romanian Journals for Children during the Communist Regime

Între manipulare, propagandă și educație – periodicele pentru copii în timpul regimului comunist

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Abstract: The Communist regime installed in Romania with the support of the Soviet army set out on a large-scale propaganda mission to implement the new ideology, backed up by new legislation. Children were one of the targeted age groups, and the strategies of indoctrination adopted confirmed that the Soviets had advanced knowledge concerning the stages of children's cognitive development. Some of the most effective instruments in creating the «new man» were the periodicals dedicated to children, which were actually press organs of the Romanian Communist Party. However, this detail was ignored by most parents, and thought irrelevant to the children's universe. A number of other factors secured the success of this means of propaganda: the trust and appreciation of these publications among children, an excellent distribution network, low acquisition cost, the limited number of books available, and reduced access to the same. In an era dominated by austerity in terms of communication and forms of entertainment, children's periodicals represented an escape from the poverty and banality of everyday life.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the role that children's publications played in the formation of the new generations.

Key words: manipulation; propaganda; press; children; communism.

Rezumat: Regimul comunist, instaurat în România cu sprijinul armatei sovietice, a acordat o atenție deosebită îndoctrinării populației. Una dintre categoriile de vârstă vizate au fost copiii. În elaborarea strategiilor de îndoctrinare, sovieticii s-au dovedit buni cunoscători ai etapelor de dezvoltare cognitivă a copiilor. Unele dintre mijloacele cele mai eficiente în procesul de creare a omului nou au fost periodicele care se adresau copiilor. Acestea erau în realitate organele de presă ale Partidului Comunist Român, lucru ignorat de către majoritatea părinților și neimportant în universul celor mici. Existau o serie de considerente care asigurau succesul acestui mijloc de propagandă: încrederea de care se bucurau aceste publicații în rândul copiilor, rețeaua de distribuție, costul redus sau accesul redus la cărți. Într-o epocă dominată de austeritate și în ceea ce privește comunicarea și tipurile de divertisment, periodicele pentru copii reprezentau o evadare din banalitatea cotidianului. În acest fel copiii se simțeau importanți. Scopul prezentului studiu este acela de a analiza

rolul pe care publicațiile pentru copii, al căror scop poate fi situat la granița dintre manipulare, propagandă și educație, l-au avut în formarea noilor generații.

Cuvinte cheie: manipulare; propaganda; presă; copii; comunism.

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1. Introduction

Dreams, hopes, games and an imagination that made us believe that we had the power to change the world, the enthusiasm of the years of innocence was entirely exploited by the infernal propaganda machine of the communist regime installed in Romania with the help of the Soviet Army shortly after the end of WW II. The majority of Romanians associated USSR with the idea of an enemy country, a reason for the communist leaders to realize the difficulties they were up against in the process of indoctrination of the Romanians. One reliable ally in the process of manipulation and propaganda proved to be the press, which underwent a fast and profound transformation. The result of this process was a total obedience of the press. The communist reality was being built by the messages the press conveyed (Stan, 2004, p. 72). Since the takeover, the communist propaganda's sole purpose was to impose the ideology, with nothing held back in using all the means at their disposal. The morals were not important in this struggle – the final result had to prevail (Denize, 2011, p. 22). In the Romanian press history, children's publications had always had an important place due to a long tradition in gaining the trust of the population. The children's press represented a means of entertainment on whose stage the heroes, realistic or imaginary, came on to tell their stories. It was a frenzy of colors and shapes dressing up fairy tales, cartoons, songs, poetry, and contests (Păunescu, 2006, p. 119). In Romania, children's periodicals originated in the XIX century and they were a big part of the journalistic landscape: *The School's Friend*, (*Amicul școalei*, 1861-1865), *The Patriotic Student* (*Elevul patriot*, 1866-1867), *The Children's Pal*, (*Amicul copiilor*, April-October, 1891), *Children's Morning* (*Dimineața copiilor*, 192-1947), *The Flicker* (*Luminița*, 1931-1940), *The Youth's Pal* (*Amicul tinerimii*, 1895-1896, 1904-1905, 1906-1906, 1910-1911), *Children's Gazette* (*Gazeta copiilor*, 1923-1924), *Children's Universe* (*Universul copiilor*, 1932-1942), *The Youth* (*Tineretea*, 1935-1940, 1941-1943), *The Stream for Kids and the Young* (*Curentul pentru copii și tineret*, 1933-1944), *The Youth's Review*, (*Revista tineretului*, 1943-1944), *Students' Review* (*Revista elevilor*, 1948-1949) (Rad, 2007, pp. 250-251).

The propagandistic messages were scarce in the children's press in the beginning, but, over time, they became predominant and the publications lost

their original purpose of their creation. A quick glance at the children's press from the communist time reveals a mirror of a society whose sole purpose was the creation of the so-called «the new man». Besides these propagandistic materials we can also find some authentic pieces of literature meant to develop children's imagination. Children's loyalty was built on the specific characteristics of children's literature: the presence of imaginary, of the spectacular, of the daily routine (like a reality check), the comfort of reading (text adapted to the age, photos, caricatures, cartoons), timeless specific topics that can be stored, read again and again, and can be passed on to kin and friends (Petcu, 2000, pp. 233-234). The usage of the press for manipulation, propaganda, and disinformation aims was also possible because of the largely-spread idea that culture and education were free of these phenomena as the creators of culture were people who could be trusted. The impact of the published texts in the children's press wasn't due exclusively to the lack of other means of entertainment, but to the fact that they carried educational elements without moralizing overtones, thus facilitating the reception of the message and its acceptance. The formation of character takes place naturally, like in a game, because the narrator «is smart to be at the same time the friend, the big brother, the advisor, of 'these flunkies' that he is whipping» (Cândroveanu, 1988, p. 191). In case education's purpose is to form good citizens it will take the shape of a mold in which behavior and conscience will be cast uniformly. The child will be formed according to the society's aims developing according to the ideology while ignoring influences and the free judgement of history. This isolation from reality and the evolution of other countries constitute a great danger that lurks behind the educational disinformation (Cathala, 1991, pp. 54-56). The communists knew that disinformation through education of the new generation was the easiest means to cast characters loyal to the future builders of socialism. Longing to be accepted into the adults' world, the children do not put up any resistance to the information coming their way, they don't judge it and do not question its authenticity.

This disinformation strategy was perfectly combined with manipulation and propaganda, under the permanent control of the state. Dressed in uniforms, chanting the same eulogies, learning the rewritten history of the country, the children's personality, attitudes and morals were identically cast. Becoming adults, some of these children will become, in their turn, disinformation and propaganda agitators, peddling to the masses the same fabricated image of reality. The Romanian communists didn't even bother to create their own system; they just copied the Soviet one, where «the information belonged to the psychological warfare» (Cathala, 1991, pp. 221-223). To meet their objectives, they accepted the USSR's meddling in the country's politics and rewriting the country's history in line with the Marxist ideology became mandatory (Denize, 2011, p. 25).

Experience gave the adults the upper hand in judging what was going on and they were less likely to comply and succumb to disinformation. But in children's case, the press had a free hand in pushing grandiose events and facts of life meant to impress and create the civic spirit in the young generations who were totally unaware that they were duped to believe in things that were impossible to achieve.

The children's press is a powerful tool for information and education and its messages do not only explain but also influence the readers. The intrinsic purpose of the message is to generate attitudes and behavior in the personality of the reader (Botez, 1987, p. 26). When reading about the activities of the Country's Hawks and Scouts (Pioneers), each and every child wished he/she had been part of those organizations, never suspecting that they were designed to control the mind, the time, and their entire existence. The communist organizations were exploiting the honest desire of children to be part of a team and to perform accordingly and they supported this natural inclination of children by feeding them role models and party ideology to embrace. These objectives are openly expressed in the literature circulating in those times where the necessity to educate the young in the spirit of the party, of the work for the construction of socialism and «the blooming of the country» are commonplace (Rațiu, 1979, pp. 7-8). The text are full of examples and advice through manipulation is carried out (Enache, 2005, p. 49). Presented as games, as entertainment for the spare time, the recommended activities were actually means of active manipulation of children through the press. Leafing through the children's press of the time leaves you with the impression that it is child's play that everything is a game full of good spirits and energy, but, in reality, the activities featured in it are part of a plan to stimulate the readers for meeting or exceeding the party's expectations. The communist manipulation focused on the subliminal level of the context featuring: identity, relations, space, time and norms (Muchielli, 2002, pp. 54-55).

In the game of manipulation, the main role was played by the jargon, a special language, by which the writer creates the impression that he is using the words honestly, but which leaves only one alternative to interpret the message.

Masters of manipulation, the communists used a series of linguistic methods to push their goals in the press. For example, the way the verbs are used. They are most of the time in unusual modes, but under the pretense of «collective» authorship, in impersonal modes like gerund and infinitive, but suggesting an imperative from a collective authority (Mihai, 2012, p. 212). The gerund is always present – «an impersonal mode» – that leads to «a false concrete, a false movement» in forms like «it is said, it is heard, it seems, etc.». «Notable is it is necessary» that abounds. The result is a false participation of the speaker (Betea,

2012, p. 185). Another tool of manipulation was the excessive use of statistics (Mihai, 2012, p. 211).

To suggest the unity of leaders and masses, the pronoun «I» is replaced in most situations with «we» (Thom, 1987, pp. 19-20). In addition, communist ideology split the world into «we, the good» and «the others, the evil» that represented the decay of capitalism. In this context, the words begin to have different nuances compared to their use in every-day language. The words with positive connotations become part of the communist jargon to depict the successes of the new order, representing progress and social justice, while all the pejoratives in the language become tools to incriminate the opposition, the old system, the class enemy, the traitors and spies (Denize, 2011, p. 190). In case their use was necessary to lash at capitalism, they were used between quotations marks to indicate that the meaning was exactly the opposite. Frequently used, a number of words like freedom, justice, democracy, communist, etc. can make an impact on the reader and their sense could change depending on the context. In case agreement was sought (usually happening unconsciously) to an idea, the word was associated with positive entities (Căprioară, 2009, pp. 80-83). All the newspapers used to had lists of suppressed words like «bitter cold, hunger, lines for food» that described the dramatic reality of the Romanian society (Roșca, 2006, p. 141). These words were used only when contrasting communism to the previous capitalistic regimes. Choosing terminology depends on the manipulatory intent of the author and it is what John Van Cuilenburg named semantic strategy (Van Cuilenburg, 1991, p. 183).

One technique frequently used in children's press is the overstatement that «refers to the exaggeration in importance of an event or the exaggeration of its weight within an article on a minor issue» (Căprioară, 2009, p. 106).

Manipulation was possible due to the specificity of the children's press whose main objective was to form personalities. The knowledge children acquire at early age are useful for the entire life. The time when children acquire most is in the first grades, the sources covering a large area, with knowledge coming from parents, school, books, and many other sources of mass-media, like magazines and newspapers (Berson, Outzts & Walsh, 1999, pp. 85-92).

In order to be assimilated and liked by children, the texts need to meet some requirements. The literary critic, G. Călinescu thought that each of us kept some of the childhood naivety, a reason for the children's quality texts to be «interesting to mature and learned people also» (Călinescu, 1964, p. 274). In the second place, it's important that the author conveys the feeling of authenticity, children lacking the ability to tell true from false (Rogojinaru, 1999, p. 83). Then, regardless of age, the young reader prefers literature with conflicts, strife,

action, heroes, good-versus-evil struggle, entertaining throughout and with a happy ending (Bodișteanu, 2007, p. 22). Connecting fiction to reality made the children imitate adults and become heroes in their own minds (Rațiu, 2003, p. 5).

Depending on his age, the child takes a passive or active attitude towards his environment: reactive (the reaction of the child to the factors depends on his personality), evocative (the adults' reaction is modified by the child's personality), and proactive (with age, children will learn to select contexts and persons to interact with, getting more actively involved) (Crețu, 2009, p. 28). In communist societies, the child's environment was very limited and closely controlled. He lived in a neighborhood with similar conditions to others, he went to the same school as the others, he was obligated to participate in the same extracurricular activities as the others, he read the same magazines, he watched the same TV as the others and listened to the same radio. As a result, he was never exposed to other kind influence but the one prescribed by the government (Kapferer, 2002, p. 103).

Children's press was subjected to the same regime of disinformation, manipulation, and propaganda as the rest of the periodicals, all passed through the filter of censorship. This was the main part of the giant machinery, «whose primary objective was to limit drastically, and ultimately, to annihilate any piece of information that contravened to the interests of the regime» (Petcu, 1997, p. 7).

In order to be attractive, but also easy to understand by all age groups, the children's periodicals carry a lot of illustrations, mostly pictures that come to complete the text. Their persuasive effect is greater than the words' «because they become arguments to the facts in the article» (Căprioară, 2009, p. 109).

2. The Purpose of the Study and the Methodology

The purpose of the present study is to demonstrate the manipulative and propagandistic nature of children's magazines and the way they contributed to the creation of «the new man». For this, we've chosen six children's periodicals that ran during communist times (1944-1989): *Children's Journal* (*Jurnalul copiilor*), *The Pioneer* (*Pionierul*), *Pioneer's Spark* (*Scânteia pionierului*), *The Red Necktie* (*Cravata roșie*), *Pogonici* and *The Brave Ones* (*Cutezători*). Our idea came out of the radical changes in the content of these magazines after 1944, the year communists came to power, but also to the role they played in the formation of the young generations. Our project had an initial stage of identifying the children's periodicals during communism, followed by a classification of their

topics and content analysis. Our later work is based on the methods of applied research: investigation, text analysis, case study, synthesis, classification and comparison. We also focused on how the same topic was presented over a long period of time. Leafing through magazines and glancing over articles was like a trip in the past. From the drawers of my memory sprang out flashes of my own experience on the issue, as I was one of the children of that regime. In contrast to the generations born after the Romanian Revolution of 1989, who may find their parents' and grandparents' stories about communism exaggerated, we, who had that first-hand experience, think it is in our advantage to judge now that chapter in our history. In the kindergarten classes as The Motherland's Hawks and later on, in elementary as Pioneers, we wore with pride the insignia of those organizations and enthusiastically participated to the activities they provided. For the children of those times it was the only choice. The communists had made sure there was no alternative – all activities were set up according to their plans and policies. The control was fully theirs. I had the opportunity «to taste» the communists' elixir without feeling that that every step was getting me closer to the ultimate goal of the manipulators. At the time, I understood little of the eulogies to the party or of those street parades I was obligated to participate to. Those lucky ones who were protected by their families felt less pressure than those totally unaware of what was going on and they lived a relatively ordinary childhood. The liberation that came after the Revolution and our coming of age made us understand the whole monstrosity of the manipulators' plans. In order to have a huge workforce necessary to their megalomaniac industrial plans, the communists moved millions of people from the villages to the cities, built a wide network of vocational schools thus creating a huge working class who had neither time nor skills to help their children with their homework. Their education became entirely the responsibility of the state, which, in turn, unleashed on them the entire propaganda machine. The system became a welfare state, but the work was hard and the long hours of overtime deprived parents of their quality time with their children. Nobody was home after school and children carried the key of the house on a string around the neck for which they were nicknamed «the key-around-the-neck generation». Those youngsters were very vulnerable to the state-run organizations like Pioneers and became interested in the activities offered because there were no alternatives. For us, at that age life was a game, the children's universe being extended into adults' specific activities that we wanted to adopt and follow accordingly. The communist propaganda was not after the formation of «the new man», loyal servant of the party, totally obedient to the orders from above, but also after a feeling of gratitude towards those who were providing us that kind of life style. Even when the power was down and were forced to do homework at candle light, or we had to wash with cold water, we

used to be reminded that even in hard times we were living a better life than the generations before us, when the country was run by capitalists. It was never mentioned the effects on the economy of uprooting the countryside population, in general, and on the food industry, in particular, as shortages of basic necessities went from bad to worse and in the end they led to the revolution and the collapse of communism.

3. Between Manipulation, Propaganda and Education – The Romanian Journals for Children during the Communist Regime

In order to serve the interests of the party, the transformation of the children's press took place in three stages: 1944-1965, 1965-1972 and 1973-1989 (Rad, 2007, p. 251). The first stage took place while the traditional magazines of information, education, and entertainment of twenty years (*Children's Universe*, *The Stream for Children and Youngsters*, and *Children's Morning* etc) were replaced with publications that reflected the new political order. In contrast to publications which during the communist times changed their names reinventing themselves and weren't shut down, the publications before the communist takeover could not follow the same policy. The traditional children's magazines were supplements of the big daily newspapers, *The Universe (Universul)* or *The Morning (Dimineața)*, whose editors in chief were charged as «enemies of the people», tried, and sentenced to prison by communists. The target public were teenagers up to 14, but due to the lack of publications for other age groups (communists limited even access to toys, let aside books and radio programs), the preschoolers were enjoying the same press for entertainment. These situations were more widespread in families where preschoolers had elder brothers and sisters. In these cases the impact of the propaganda press was even greater as the younger ones were imitating their elders' behavior without discernment. Another aspect was circulation. Having the country in their hands, communists set up an excellent system to send the central press, at subsidized prices, to the outskirts of the country, thus facilitating anyone's access to subscriptions. Magazines were printed in large numbers to cover as much of the market as possible: *The Pioneer's Spark*, (570.000), *The Little Light* (114.000), *The Little Hedgehog* (85.000) (ANIC, ds. 10/1967, f. 23). At a closer look, the magazines of the beginning of the communist era differ greatly from those of the later years when their power was absolute. The first magazine at the onset of the legal communist party, *The Children's Journal*, appeared between 1947 and 1949, maintaining the format of a regular issue for youngsters, with very little propaganda and manipulation in the content, except for big events, like upcoming elections. The last issues of the magazine, though, are heavily politicized, announcing the appearance

of a new one: *The Pioneer*. This transformation was a decisive move towards a major overhaul of the children's press that totally renounced the purpose of its creation and became an instrument of manipulation. At the same time, a new arrival, *The Red Necktie*, was inaugurated, totally political, to carry out the party's objectives with regard to the young generations. The battle cry of this one was, «In the struggle for the cause of Lenin and Stalin, charge!», with the two founders of communism always present in its pages. Besides the two, the soviet heroes were the main topics, used as examples for the new generations to follow into their steps. *The Pioneer* (1949-1953) falls in the same category, but also *The Pioneer's Spark* (1953-1967). The first one focused on the spread of the Soviet Union's image and its Russian communist leaders. The motto of the *Pioneer's Spark* was the well-known communist battle cry «Workers of the world, unite!» At its 10th anniversary, the editors published a message to underline the role the magazine played in the character building of the readers: «Through the care of the Party for the country's children, for their formation as reliable citizens of the socialist society, a magazine of their own was founded. A magazine that writes about them, about their activity, that prepares them seriously in their tireless and energetic struggle for the construction of socialism in our motherland». This magazine «brought the Party's word, its appeals and its urges», advised them how to study, what profession to choose, and to get to know the happy soviet pioneers (*Scântea pionierului*, # 24, 1959, p. 1). *The Red Necktie*, the pioneers' and schoolers' magazine, the press issue of the Central Committee of the Union of the Working Youth, had two mottoes: «In the struggle for the cause of Lenin and Stalin, forward!» (until 1955) and «Workers of the world, unite!» (after 1955). After Stalin's death in 1953, the magazines concentrated on the successes of the communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu and later on (after 1979) of his wife, Elena Ceaușescu, fueling their personality cult. That was the time when cultural events appeared in it, with an educational-informative side, from inside and abroad, which were not exclusively propagandistic. For the younger children, *Pogonici*, an illustrated magazine, featuring fairy tales, was less politicized, but each issue carried an article dedicated to the Party. The drive to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu's wife led to a change in content, with articles and pictures sustaining the personality cult of the two.

To demonstrate the propagandistic and manipulative character of the children's periodicals it is necessary a review of the topics featured in them. In the first place, this review confirms that the selection of the information ignored the reader's needs, and, as a result, we have a passive attitude of the public and a lack of critique (Roșca, 2006, p. 166). The press was totally subdued, and no one could afford to speak of freedom even on topics the press was authorized to carry. It's common knowledge that all the topics were handpicked by the Party. The

chief of the Romanian Press Agency, Dumitru Popescu, vouched for this truth: «The Party helps us understand which is the main line of a communist newspaper, of a foot soldier on the ideological battlefield» (Popescu, *Presa noastră*, # 3, 1962, p. 11). Aiming at indoctrination, but also controlling children's imagination, the communists agreed with the editors policy to run only a small number of topics. For this reason and to make sure that the message gets across to children, these topics were repeated over and over to saturation. The process was slow, but the effects were durable in the long run. The short statements, precise, repeated, had the power to settle into the sub conscience and activate the deepest mechanism of mentality when called upon (le Bon, 2012, pp. 60-63).

The primary objective of the communist propaganda was to change the general attitude towards the Soviet Union. In World War II, Romania was an ally of Nazi Germany and both invaded the Soviet Union at the same time. Romania was a dictatorship at the time, with the same political doctrine: defeat communism as the enemy of democracy. The entire country feared communism. After three years of war, the Soviet Union pushed her enemies back after famous battles like Stalingrad and Kursk. Romania capitulated and the former bitter enemy was now in the country as a liberator from fascism, shaping her future according to Stalin's plans to convert East and Central Europe to communism and incorporate them into the Russian empire. Just overnight, the people of Romania found themselves playing a different tune to please the Russians or else... For this gigantic task all means of persuasion were employed: propaganda, disinformation, manipulation, cohesion, deportation, forced labor, and death, with all this process designed and supervised by Moscow, whose envoys as counselors ran the country along with a handful of Romanian communists. The topics in the children's magazines are not age-oriented and their language is not adjusted to facilitate comprehension. This was simply due to the fact that illiteracy was widespread in the country and everybody, child or adult, was subject to education. The children read the materials first and then passed on to adults by storytelling. This way, the parents became indoctrinated too.

The battle was raging on two fronts: showcasing the success of the Russian socialist economy (during the war the Russian economy grew 10 fold) and publicizing the economic disaster the country was in because of the past regime (Căprioară, 2009, p. 140). The final result of this campaign was the annihilation of any form of national creativity and a serious identity crisis. The Soviet Union was advertised as the most advanced and civilized country on earth where socialism was almost completed and in the shortest possible time would go on to the ultimate stage of social development, communism, «a true Paradise on earth» (Denize, 2011, p. 254). All the topics about the Soviet Union were praising the economic wonders of the system, the pioneers' happy life and

activities, Lenin's and Stalin's biographies, the Red Army, Romania's liberator, the language and culture (included in the curricula at all levels). USSR became the only example to follow and their leader's idols to worship. Mankind had always needed idols to embody essential qualities that galvanize a nation around its leaders and that time the Russians outdid themselves (Chelcea, 2006, p. 337). In children's imagination, heroes occupy a crucial role and shape their character. Even Lenin's death became cause for celebration, a hero whose name «became the symbol of the new world, from East to West, and from North to South» and whose «everlasting memory will stay in the hearts of all working people in the world, legendary Lenin who had led the Russian proletariat to victory during the Great October Revolution in 1917, opening the era of non-exploitation of man by man» (*Pionierul*, # 3 (138), 1952, p. 1). For their contribution to the development of the country and their well-being Romanians were supposed to show their gratitude to the Soviets: «Love the great Soviet Union whose help is the basis of the victories of our people» (*Scânteia pionierului*, # 48, 1954, p. 1). It is featured that the Soviet Union was the one who created unity among the socialist countries and made peace possible (*Scânteia pionierului*, # 32, 1958, p. 5). To show their gratitude, the Romanian authorities used to dedicate every year a month to celebrate the friendship with the Soviets, an occasion during which the working class was informed of the successes in «economy, science and culture of the great country of socialism» (*Scânteia pionierului*, # 41, 1958, p. 1). Another activity meant to bring homage to USSR was exhibitions: «We've tried to show the long journey our motherland has covered so far with the multilateral help from the Soviet Union» (Vicol, *Cravata roșie*, # 2, 1953, p. 14). Thirty years from the fateful August 23, 1944, (capitulation day) at a new exhibition of the country's progress USSR was not mentioned (*Cutezători*, # 34, 1974, p. 2). The USSR's progress was not only a press topic, but also in movies and books, recommended to young viewers and readers. An example of a movie was *The Call of the Sky*, «the story of a young man who dreams of becoming a test pilot for the new generation of fighter jets» (*Scânteia pionierului*, #27, 1958, p. 7). In literature, most books translated from Russian had Lenin as the main character, an example to follow by the Russian people. In 1950, *Pogonici* ran a series of stories on Lenin's childhood, *Stories about Lenin* (*Cravata roșie*, # 1, 1955, pp. 2-3).

Due to the generosity of the Soviet Union, called «the guiding lighthouse», the Romanian society was on the path to progress: «Our country is holding in high regard the Russian people whose brotherly help and their rich experience leads them to an ever flourishing motherland» (*Scânteia pionierului*, # 6, 1959, p. 1). The education in the spirit of the communist doctrine was carried out not only through propaganda materials, but also through field trips in USSR and

the travel journals published in children's magazines. «In one of the rooms I saw a statue in white marble of Vladimir Ilici Lenin as a child, standing, resting his hand on a stack of books. I was convinced that everything in the House of the Children's Books was achieved through the vision of the genius of the founder of the socialist state of the Soviet Union». The article was signed by Mihail Sadoveanu, a well-known Romanian writer of the time after such a field trip (Sadoveanu, *Cravata roșie*, # 5, 1953, pp. 3-4)/

Reviewing now the articles published over the years in children's press, we can see that it reflected all the trials and tribulations of a communist society, with special attention to the children's organization (Preda, 2014, pp. 30-31). All the topics relating to this organization and their deeds are present in every edition, regardless of the country's situation or the political relationships with the Soviet Union. Periodically, explanations are offered regarding the statute and the pioneers' obligations and their activities. These publications often carry letters from school children who had recently joined the organization and who want to share with others the overwhelming emotion when they received the red necktie, the symbol of membership: «A piece of the flag of the working class that I wear as the red necktie obliges me to pledge that I live and study so that I become a loyal and devout citizen of our beloved country, the Romanian People's Republic» (Stanca, *Scânteia pionierului*, # 93, 1954, p. 1). If in some cases we can only suspect that the letters were bogus, in other cases this is absolutely obvious. Such a case was when the first pioneers declared their gratitude towards Stalin and the Soviet state: «We are sending you, Comrade Stalin, the most beloved and best parent of all the children of the world, our ardent salute and our endless gratitude for everything you and the Soviet Army have done for the liberation and development of our motherland» (*Pogonici*, # 18, 1949, pp. 4-5). Each stage in the life of the children was, a preparation for future activities which demonstrates that the state was in full control of the lives of all Romanians (*Cutezătorii*, # 22, 1973, p. 6).

The communist propaganda activists admitted openly that the purpose for founding the pioneers' organization was «for the children to be educated, from the earliest age, in the spirit of endless love for our free motherland and our working people, for the Romanian Workers' Party – the leader and the maker of our new life» (*Scânteia pionierului*, #14, 1955, pp. 1-2). The Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party was the policy maker for the pioneers' organization that issued the program «of action and moral-political education of those who wore the red necktie»; in other words, each and every pioneer was supposed to be an excellent student, to love work, «to be an ardent patriot», to be honest, to have initiative and do patriotic work (*Cutezătorii*, #38, 1973, pp. 2-3). Every article published carried this message for the formation of the new

generations, who were supposed to become «true citizens of the socialist state – brave, honest, cultivated, good and sensitive with friends, unforgiving with enemies, real builders of communism, followers of Lenin’s cause, of the cause of our party» (Emelianov, *Cravata roșie*, #4, 1955, pp. 1-3).

The inclusion of all children in the pioneers’ organization was the easiest method to keep everyone indoctrinated and under control both during class time and free time, when the activities were usually held, including vacations. There are articles which specifically indicate how the children were supposed to spend their free time, including a daily agenda by the hour (*Scântea pionierului*, #19, 1953, p. 3). Detailed advice was also featured: «You, pioneers, don’t forget: before you set out, make a work plan for vacation time and seek suggestions from all in the organization». In other words, think collectively, do not waste any time, help can come only from within (*Scântea pionierului*, # 43, 1954, p. 1). As an example, a school was mentioned where the pioneers in the 3rd grade decided that their unit would spend their vacation time by weeding the local fields of wheat and garlic. (Coasă, *Scântea pionierului*, # 43, 1954, p. 3). Children were urged to study hard in order to be rewarded with vacations in summer camps either at seaside or in the mountains. Before vacations or exam sessions the special conditions created by the Party for the best students were advertised. In return, children thanked the Party for sending them free of charge to camps:

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank the Party and the government from the bottom of my heart for everything they do for us, children, to live such a happy and worry-free life. I’m determined to learn even harder so that when I grow up to be able to work well and skillfully for the construction of socialism in our motherland (Radu, *Scântea pionierului*, # 38, 1958, p. 5).

Just like the adults, the pioneers were inspired by their counterparts in the Soviet Union, and so did the magazines: «For the editorial team *The Pioneers’ Spark*, the Russian magazine *Pionierscaia Pravda* has been and still is a wonderful means of acquiring the advanced Soviet experience in the field of children’s press». All the materials published in *Pionierscaia Pravda* «have contributed to the upbringing and the education of many generations of children in the spirit of love for their great motherland, the Soviet Union, for the Soviet nation and their great leader, the Communist Party» (*Scântea pionierului*, # 20, 1955, p. 1).

Work was a main issue for the regime, be that paid work or volunteer, adults or children. Through his essence, the communist was a worker who, under the new ideology, was working for himself as work became «a moral necessity», a leisure, not an obligation (Boia, 2005, pp. 136-137). The communist society had to be built from the ground up, as reforms needed important financial resources. In the first stage, communists were confronted with a huge foreign debt caused

by WW II, and later on the problem persisted as they borrowed more money to build a massive industry that created millions of jobs. Among other obligations, they had to pay war reparations to the Soviet Union for the invasion in 1941, as ally of Nazi Germany. The appeals to volunteer work and the emphasis put on sacrifice were two principal punchlines communists held on to the bitter end. In order to get good rates on borrowed money they always claimed to be a «developing country», never a full-fledge economy (Zafiu, 2012, p. 156). Under these conditions, the state had to make use of everything in hand: labor, industry and natural resources. Volunteer labor was heavily publicized and politicized and people complied. Children's contribution through volunteer labor to the country's development was publicized as a «great virtue» (Denize, 2011, p. 211) and it was not limited only to agriculture, but also to shaping up playgrounds or raising building like libraries or schools. The children's press carried a lot of success stories having children as heroes of volunteer work thus stimulating others to join in. These campaigns never stopped and they were based on seasons: planting trees in the spring, landscaping, and in the summer picking medicinal plants, harvesting crops in the fields, or tending silkworms. All these activities had to look like pioneers' initiatives, but in reality they were child labor under a different label. For example, we found an article about children who had to work on a road to make it suitable for a parade on the International Labor Day, May 1, a much publicized communist event (Stroja, *Scânteia pionierului*, #34, 1957, p. 1). These landscaping activities that the Party bragged about in the press were done with child labor, under the name of pioneers' enthusiastic contribution to the country's improvement. Also publicized in the children's press was the contribution of the proletariat in the struggle for freedom of the communists, as their party had been outlawed before the war. From the series of articles dedicated to this struggle, we remember the events that led to the bloody repression of the strike of railroad workers at Grivița, in 1933. It was a labor-related confrontation during the first worldwide depression (1929-1933), but the communists claimed it as their own struggle against capitalism, a symbol of solidarity against injustice and inequality, «with the Communist Party as the only true representative of the working class, and the only voice raised against the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941» (Ștefănescu, *Pionierul*, #6, 1953, p. 1).

Another popular topic in the children's press were the fieldtrips, especially those to factories, where the communists hoped children would get familiarized with the labor environment, learn what was in store for their future, and publicized their industrial progress at the same time. Interestingly, intellectual work was never mentioned or stimulated and children of the intelligentsia never wrote letters to these magazines. There was a lot debate about the future professions and judging by the children's comments in the press, everybody

wanted to become factory workers, carpenters, builders, bakers. Labor served one purpose only – «to fully contribute to the betterment of the country and to raise the standard of living of the working class» (Nanu, *Scântea pionierului*, #46, 1954, p. 3). This testimony is no exception, as children seemed preoccupied about their professional future. But this maturity in thinking it's hard to prove even for children growing up in those hard times. A 7th grader wrote: «I keep thinking what profession should I choose for my future, so that I can contribute to my country's progress and never feel sorry that I chose that particular one» (Necula, *Cravata roșie*, # 7, 1955, p. 29). On these field trips to factories it was the worker who answered the children's questions, an act of interaction to win the kids over by telling them how proud they were «to contribute to the country's bounty» as they worked for everybody's benefit. To underline the progress made under the new regime, comparison to the former regime was often employed. In contrast to the past, when the country belonged to private owners, now it was in the hands of the working class and they all worked «full heartedly» (Albu, *Scântea pionierului*, #36, 1955, p. 3).

In order to create new traditions, but also to strengthen the Party's image, the communists paid special attention to specific days related to their history. These days were May 1 (International Labor Day) May 8 (the party's birthday), August 23 (capitulation to the Soviets in 1944, also called liberation day), The Soviet Army Day, The Socialist Revolution Day (in Russia, 1917, on November 7), etc. During the communist consolidation years, all these events celebrated in the Soviet Union occupied ample space in the Romanian press. After 1965, when Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power, only May 1 and August 23 continued to draw most attention. These historic days generated grand scale festivities to celebrate the party under whose leadership «our nation will always go forward, from victory to victory» (*Scântea pionierului*, #34, 1953, p. 1). Gratitude for the new life was expressed through poetry and songs whose authors were children: «The Soviet soldiers were our liberators, and you, great day, were our gift from the winners» (Papae, *Pogonici*, #16, 1950, p. 2). These manifestations of gratitude and solidarity (in the first stage of communist rule) toward the Soviet Union were a good opportunity to rewrite history, but also to lash out at the Western politics. Articles on this topic can be found throughout the history of the communist regime, with primary targets the countries democratic by tradition. These democracies are shown to be the enemies of their own nations as they lacked social services, like health care for the poor (Spain) where child mortality was high, but «where the people haven't lost hope in the struggle for peace and liberty» (*Pionierul*, #22, 1952, p. 3). The same type of information is featured about other countries like USA, Great Britain, or Indonesia, on which children were instructed to discuss and come to hate them: «Don't forget the

atrocities that the American barbarians are perpetrating in North Korea and other places where they stuck their bloody claws. They are the children's mortal enemies. Hate them with all your heart and be on the side of all children of the world who know that one day the peace will defeat the war» (*Pionierul*, #22, 1952, p. 3). Other examples that aimed to discredit and misinform appeared in many editions of the time. For example, it is written that in Italy there was a market where parents auctioned off their child for money that enabled them to raise the others. The article comes with a picture in which a mother is holding in her arms a child whose face shows horror as he didn't want to become «a slave» (*Scânteia pionierului*, #43, 1953, p. 2). One page is dedicated to the Korean War where a letter signed by a child from Turnu-Severin is published in which the author expresses her entire hatred for Americans and support for the children of that country. Written in iron language, the letter is so good, revealing more the attitude of an adult communist than the knowledge and emotions of a child who was reading «in the papers and magazines about the atrocities committed by Americans, mad animals». The letter goes on: «How couldn't I hate those who have destroyed hundreds of villages and cities, killing without mercy innocent children and sow bubonic plague and cholera? I can't help hating them!» The impact is realized with words that reveal violence (*Pionierul*, #25, 1952, p. 3).

May 1 was a good opportunity to lash out at the regime before the Russian occupation and change of government when workers were «exploited». The communist takeover is compared to the sunrise phenomenon that conveys the feeling of a limitless ego (*Scânteia pionierului*, #31, 1954, p. 1). The May 1st picture always looks like a victory parade with happy people who love their leaders, giving them flowers «with much love», full of speeches and The Internationale sung by all (*Scânteia pionierului*, #32, 1954, p. 1).

In the first stage of communism the school children used to get materials to be displayed in their classrooms for the celebration of the October Revolution in Russia (*Pogonici*, #20, 1950, p. 16) «as the entire country celebrated the 33rd anniversary of the regime led by Lenin and Stalin who united their forces to defeat the enemies of the revolution» (*Pogonici*, #21, 1950, p. 3). After coming to power in 1965, Nicolae Ceaușescu dropped celebrations of foreign events and simply turned his birthday into a national holiday. The propaganda machine shifted into high gear and children were asked to write, sing, dance, parade for the dictator. He would come out of his palace and take pictures with the hand-picked representatives of the pioneers organizations. In the 4th edition of the magazine of 1973 there is an interesting picture in which the dictator is hugging a pioneer, but he seems to avoid him, although both are smiling at the camera. The message under the picture says «the thoughts of all pioneers and children of the motherland are directed with endless love towards comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu»

also named «a great friend and tutor of the new generations» (*Cutezătorii*, #4, 1973, p. 4).

The press was a solid instrument in implementing the reforms. Children's magazines chipped in too especially in spreading the news about the campaign to eradicate illiteracy. From time to time there was also news about other reforms, like land reform and fiscal reform, when all the land in the country was nationalized and the first collective farms were set up. Interestingly, minorities in the country were not left out of this campaign, as communists wanted to show that all citizens were supporting the reforms. A letter written by a minority child, a Hungarian girl, got our attention. In it, she tells about her parents' work in the collective farm and the financial gains after they sold the products paid with for their performance in the cornfield. In the first place, the Hungarians in Transylvania had a very poor command of the Romanian language at the time. Secondly, children took very low interest in their parents' business. Thirdly, only some minorities supported government reforms in agriculture, while most land owners resisted them. It is very likely that the letter was a fabrication and probably not the only one in the press of those days (Puskas, *Pionierul*, #35, 1952, p. 3).

The most publicized campaign of the communists was the one to eradicate illiteracy, largely represented in the children's press. Lack of education was always blamed on the past regime that deprived its citizens of this civil right. Literacy was the way the new regime «was perfecting the revolutionary successes of the working class» (*Scânteia pionierului*, #37, 1958, p. 1). The pioneers were actively participating to this campaign by being assigned an adult to tutor a few times a week (Crăciun, *Cravata roșie*, #2, 1954, p. 11). Pioneers were also asked to scout for kids without education and bring them into the fold because «our state plan for 1950 is to bring to school every child of school age. No one should remain out of it» (*Pionierul*, #7, 1950, p. 1).

Elections were another grand-standing event in communism. The campaign filled practically all publications and the children's were no exception. In spite of the unpopular reforms forced upon the nation, the communists needed these votes to show the world that the system worked and it was legitimate. The social reforms meant to raise the standard of living were directed towards the medium and lower classes whose massive vote was to meet the communists expectations. The publicity was meant to bring children on the side of the government as they had some influence on their parents and they were grateful to the Party (*Scânteia pionierului*, #64, 1953, p. 1). The children were told that «all the enlighten in this country are supposed to persuade those still confused to take part in the elections». Words, expressions, and slogans to match were employed for the task,

like «heroes», «record numbers», «your powerful forces», «we dare all our readers» – they all made a serious impact, it is hard for a child not to want to become a hero, to ignore a challenge, that may bring his name on the front page of his favorite magazine (*Jurnalul copiilor*, #49, 1948, p. 1). The manipulation of the kids through school and press was essential for the manipulation of the parents who couldn't read or write (Heller, 1985, p. 180). A few days before the vote, *The Children's Journal* comes out with an edition in which the children are simply held responsible for their parents' participation to the polls, but especially with their choice of candidate: «You, the little ones, cannot vote yet. That doesn't mean you don't care what will happen on Sunday». Two issues prior to this one, some articles from the new Constitution related to children's rights were published. This way, the children were made proud to be part of the new order and stimulated to ask their parents to vote «The Sun», the communist symbol: «Mom, Dad, are you going to vote for the sun or for the darkness?» The sun, in red ink, the symbol, was also featured on the top of the article, apparently written by a child, who explains what the sun means: «Peace and a free and happy Romania!» Moreover, the child tells his peers to do the same and ask their parents to vote «the sun»: «I also urged my parents vote the sun» (*Jurnalul copiilor*, #50, 1948, p. 1).

The topics presented here were the main ones in the children's press, which, along with school teaching materials formed the backbone of propaganda and manipulation of the masses to establish a totalitarian regime. There were other topics featured in the press, but all of them, under different disguise, served the same purpose: promoting the Party and its successes.

4. Conclusions

Through their entire activity, children's periodicals represented a lifeline between the Party and the youngsters, contributing to their character formation in the process. Having enjoyed a long tradition and trusted for their formative qualities, children's periodicals had the full attention of the manipulators and communist propaganda machine who understood right from the start how important this instrument was for the implementation of their policies and reforms. The declared purpose of the communist apparatus was to create «the new man». In children's press, the materials were carried over from the central press, with some adjustment for comprehension, but the language was still stiff (iron language), with very little metaphor and expressive value – the same slogans and stereotypes repeated over and over about the class struggle of the proletariat, its solidarity with the world communist movements, and their unity in taking over the entire planet and make it the bright future of mankind.

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