Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov • Vol. 4 (53) No.2. - 2011 • Series IV
Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies

LEGITIMISING POWER DISCOURSE: *POLITICAL IDEOLOGY WITHIN THE ROMANIAN CULTURAL PRESS IN THE LATE 1940s AND 1950s*

Andrada FĂTU-TUTOVEANU[1]

Abstract: *Political power and, in particular, totalitarian regimes use sophisticated instruments of propaganda in order to legitimise their abusive or repressive measures. Ideologies were used to support, during the 20th century, totalitarian regimes, the latter's ultimate failure leading to the "end of ideology" (Knight 622). The study is interested in the relations between the "totalitarian ideology" applied in its practices by Communism and cultural manifestation, the latter being transformed into an instrument of propaganda. The roles of art and literature within propaganda are intimately connected to the legitimising mechanism. Culture is forced to abandon any aesthetic interests, losing independence and becoming tributary to a role and a cause. It was functional, as transformed in discourse manifestations of the communist ideology with the purpose to legitimise power. It meant an artificial and dramatic shift for all Eastern Europe cultures as their natural aesthetic orientation was replaced by functionality and subordination to politics. This trauma was also experienced by the Romanian culture in the late 1940s and 1950s – case particularly analysed in the study – being forced to follow this new function of legitimising a regime that was consolidating its fragile bases.*

Key words: *ideology, legitimacy, power discourse, communism, Romanian cultural press.*

1. Introduction

Moto:"How can literature be ideological? Should we admit that all cultural creations -including literature-have an ideological dimension?"(George A. Huaco)

While the image of totalitarianism is usually associated with force and repression, a very interesting and paradoxical mechanism related to this type of political regime refers to its attempts to suggest that it is based on legitimacy and mass support. This legitimising "obsession" is one of the most relevant phenomena when speaking about culture in a totalitarian state, as the former is used as an essential instrument of propaganda. Legitimising discourses are in general associated to political power – as Max Weber argued when speaking of domination and political regimes. "Every such system – Weber says - attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its

[1] Transilvania University of Brasov.

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)

legitimacy [emphasis added]. But, according to the kind of legitimacy that is claimed, the type of obedience, the kind of administrative staff developed to guarantee it and the mode of exercising authority will differ fundamentally" (213).

For a totalitarian regime, the legitimising mechanisms are even more necessary and therefore more sophisticated and manipulating, in a perfidious game of dissimulating aggression into what was meant to be convincing propaganda. While Buharin spoke about appropriating art as a necessary step before conquering power, in the 20the century communist totalitarian regimes, the order was reversed. *After* ascending to power, an artificial image of the regime and its public support were constructed through propaganda and communicated by means of cultural discourse. The language of culture, considered an attractive[i] expression to disguise political manipulation, was artificially re-shaped on ideological coordinates, its functionality within propaganda surpassing all other features. In the relation between literature and ideology in the 1950s, aesthetics became a minor factor, while legitimizing the official ideology and *power* became the major role of culture.

Literature was *functioning* as a discourse manifestation of the communist *ideology* with the mere purpose to legitimise power. The official discourse (adopted by all social levels as well as culture and media) was *dominant,* silencing all alternative forms of expression: all writers and journalists seemed to use the same monochrome voice, suggesting "unity" and "collective efforts".

2. Ideologies and Culture in the 20th century. Totalitarian Ideologies

Because the term *ideology* – employed here particularly in relation to communism – covers a more complex area (whether we speak of its history or of its use), it should be better circumscribed for a correct placement within the 20th century cultural and political movements, as well as in relation to totalitarianism. "*Ideology* is one of few terms to have originated in political science, having apparently been invented by Count Antoine Destutt de Tracy, who survived the revolution to publish *Eléments d'Idéologie* in 1817 (Hart 2002; Head 1985). The term has been controversial almost from its birth, and more than one call has been issued to desist from its profligate use (Sartori 1969). […] In broader terms, *ideology* can be defined as the way a system - a single individual or even a whole society - rationalizes itself. Ideologies may be *idiosyncratic* (Lane 1962), *impractical*, or even *delusional*, but they still share the characteristics of coherence and temporal stability [emphases added]" (Knight, 619)

"Marx's writings occupy a central position in the history of the concept of *ideology*. With Marx the concept acquired a new status as a critical tool and as an integral component of a new theoretical system. […] While Marx is undoubtedly the most important figure in the history of the concept of *ideology*, his writings do not offer a single, coherent view. He uses the term occasionally and erratically. […] For Marx's work offers not so much a single coherent vision of the social-historical world and its constitution, dynamics and development, but *rather a multiplicity of views*. […] While the concept of ideology was initially employed by Marx and Engels in the context of their attack on the Young Hegelians, it subsequently acquired a *more general role in their characterization of social structure and historical change*. This more general role is already evident in *The German Ideology,* as Marx and Engels begin to link the production and diffusion of ideas to the

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)

relation between classes. 'The ideas of the ruling class', they remark, 'are in every epoch the ruling ideas, *i.e.* the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force'. […] Ideology expresses the interests of the dominant class in the sense that the ideas which compose ideology are ideas which, in any particular historical period, articulate the ambitions, concerns and wishful deliberations of the dominant social groups as they struggle to secure and maintain their position of domination [emphases added]" (Thompson, 29, 33, 37-38)

There is no wonder therefore that ideology – interpreted as the complex of essential (and unique) social, economical and cultural guidelines plays a significant part in the dominating discourse of communist totalitarian regimes. "This system is logically structured, with certain fundamental premises from which can be deduced less general propositions applicable to concrete human problems. The doctrine includes a conception of a final perfect state of human affairs based upon a complete ethical rejection of existing society and conceived as applicable to the entire world. The method by which the utopia is to be realized is among the 'most important aspects of human existence' covered by the doctrine's implications. Finally, the totalitarian leaders believe that all men should adhere to the doctrine and therefore they enforce this belief upon those whom they control" (Cassinelli, 69).

The 20th century was a period "enchanted" with ideologies but after their failure (because of their employment in legitimising totalitarian regimes), the "enchantment" was followed by disillusionment and even by a so-called "end of ideology" (Knight 622). As already stated, the disillusionment was mainly based on the manner in which totalitarian regimes used these systems of though to support and legitimise their abuses and violence. However, *a relation of necessity exists between totalitarian regimes and ideology*: despite the distortional use of the latter, their connection is extremely strong and with significant effects. "Ideology is a precondition for totalitarianism. […] Arendt says that ideology is not necessarily totalitarian, although it always has an *affinity towards totalitarianism.* […] In rejecting every contrary opinion or judgement as wrong by definition, ideological thinking is an act of excluding, a kind of outlawing *in nuce*. […] The essence of totalitarianism is thus to outlaw pluralism. [emphases added]" (Heller, 30, 32)

Totalitarianism is the framework of a very specific and dramatic employment of ideologies and culture, which are reduced to a few instrumental characteristics which evolve towards stereotypes. Totalitarianism re-creates a simplistic ideology which is used as a legitimising basis for all political acts and measures (which apply, within totalitarian regimes, to all economical, social and cultural levels), offering all answers and establishing fixed, dogmatic boundaries. "The most widely accepted explanation of totalitarian attitudes toward ideas is that there is a system of beliefs, or a 'doctrine', which covers the most important aspects of human existence and which is completely accepted by those who control the totalitarian regime.

Arendt is again the theorist of this essential relation between totalitarianism and ideologies, (which are transformed into the schematic and dogmatic "totalitarian ideology", with very specific and limited features) which has, we believe, a very relevant legitimising role. "Marx's thought unquestionably includes two of the three purported principal

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)

ingredients of totalitarian 'ideology': he predicted a utopian social order, the classless society where all are in the same relationship to the means of production, by means of his analysis of the existing social order, where the 'contradictions of capitalism' create economic relation- ships incompatible with the prevailing political and legal relationships." (75)

The mechanism is similar to religious domination discourse (**"**Nazism and especially communism are often called "secular religions", 70): people should believe – in a religious manner, without doubts – the discourse of these "books" of ideas (Marx's or later Mao's simplified ideological writings play the role of "Bibles"), while the guidelines have to be obeyed as the supreme credo and applied to all types of social, political, cultural or economical behaviour. "Just as terror, even in its pre-total, merely tyrannical forms, ruins all relationships between men, so the self-compulsion of ideological thinking ruins all relationship with reality" (Arendt, 1953, 321).

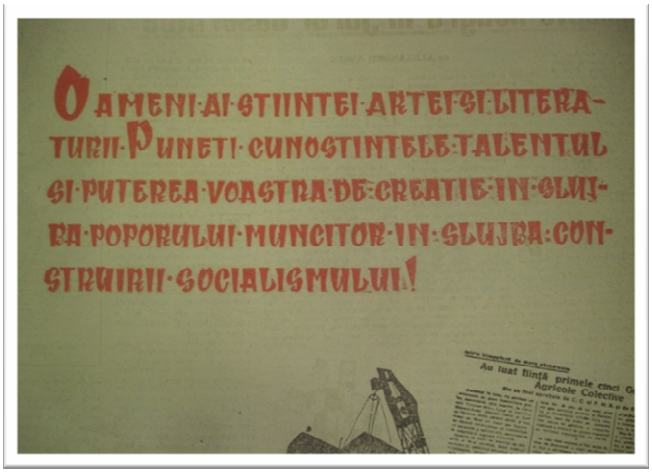
Interpreted and served as the conclusions of superior minds, which cannot be questioned, these ideas were imposed as both dominant and legitimising all specific repressive or abusive measures – such as, for instance, the nationalisation of private properties – which were presented as taken on the basis of this superior ideological thinking. Stalin himself argues that a party of the working class cannot play the role of leader "*unless it has mastered Marxist-Leninist theory.* […] The power of the Marxist- Leninist theory' he adds, 'lies in the fact that it enables the party to find the right orientation in *any situation*, to understand the inner connection of current events, to foresee their course, and to perceive not only how and in what direction they are developing in the present but how and in what direction they are bound to develop in the future. Only a party which has mastered the Marxist-Leninist theory can confidently advance and lead the working class forward" (Stalin, qtd. in Bolsover, 170).

There is, however, a gap between the message of the official discourse of communist leaders and the actual role and manner of employment of ideology in propaganda: " 'Marxist- Leninist theory,' Stalin says, recalling a phrase of Lenin often quoted in articles on ideology in the Soviet Press, 'is *not a dogma but a guide to action* ' " (Stalin, qtd. in Bolsover, 171). However, the mere "guide to action" had very strict directions which had to be followed and every deviation was sanctioned - political, philosophical, artistic, scientific, and historical ideas must conform to what the leadership considers 'correct'." (Cassinelli, 68). For artists, criticism came from both specialists and proletarian readers or authorities, the "wooden language" being equally employed by both.

3. Culture as the Instrument of Power

Because the intellectual message had to be transformed and shaped in favour of the official regime, culture was one of the most vulnerable areas to political influence. "The comprehensive and detailed control of *all ideas, beliefs, and statements* is one of the most problematic features of totalitarian regimes. [emphasis added]" (Cassinelli, 68). Moreover, propaganda needed both to hide its manipulating message behind literature and arts ("culture was just a form of propaganda while propaganda was the highest form of culture", Pipes, qtd. in Osman, 50) and to use the prestige and talent of famous artists to make its discourse convincing.

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)



Scientists, artists and writers, bring your knowledge, talent, and creative power in the service of the working people, in the service of building socialism!, Flacăra (1948)

As already stated, the most widely accepted explanation of totalitarian attitudes toward ideas is that there is a system of beliefs, or a "doctrine," which covers the most important aspects of human existence and which is completely accepted by those who have the power within the totalitarian regime.

When speaking of a legitimising discourse, the function of culture as an instrument for the propaganda is dominant especially during the first years subsequent to the installation of the totalitarian regime (which is the case of Romania in the late 1940s – early 1950s). This conclusion is easily drawn when analysing the features of culture during this period, the degree of political interference being maximal if compared to the following decades. The stake of this appropriation of culture is therefore high when speaking of the mechanism of legitimising totalitarian regimes. "Totalitarian doctrines are also supposed to supply the foundations for totalitarian beliefs and practices regarding science, history, and art" (Cassinelli, 73).

The political system was dominating - through the almighty "ideology", the simplified yet effective set of rules - all cultural discourse, which *lost completely its independence* or, as Arendt argues "self and worlds, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time" (1953, 325).

Communism uses this system of legitimising power trough culture more than extreme right regimes: "The Communists, much more than the Nazis, control the method and content of science, *history, and art* [emphasis added]. The hypothesis under consideration says that the doctrine implies an orthodox 'culture', which the Communists try to bring into existence. One possibility is that this established set of fundamental beliefs is Marxism or some modern version of Marxism" (Cassinelli, 79).

Therefore, Ideology (with a capital "I", functioning, as stated above, as a religious doctrine) did itself legitimise all measures applied to culture and all the other areas of public and private life. It was meant to cover all problems and dilemmas and

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)

explain in a schematic, wooden language, all levels of reality. Culture was meaningless – within this system – unless it had a function (*The* function – to legitimise and "serve" power). It was meant just to "show" the communist reality (usually a stereotypical description of utopian characters and facts – constructed and legitimated themselves by the purpose of "building" a new society and the "new man") and embody ideological principle (class struggle and so on), following a Marxist background. "Marx uses a three-factor notion of ideology, as falsity, role, and isomorphism. For him an *ideology* is not a new object or symbol, but a *way of examining cultural creations along specific dimensions and an attempt to relate these creations to a specific social base.*" (Huaco, 421-422)



*Flacăra (1948) on the appropriation of culture by the political ideologies: "Culture **in service** of peace and progress".*

4. The Romanian Case. Romanian Culture between 1949-1964

Cultures in the Communist block, diverse due to their basis of their languages (for instance Romanian is a language of Latin origin while others are Slavic), religions, ethnic backgrounds and history were forced to enter one unique, monolithic pattern, which explicitly followed the same Soviet cultural model. The main idea (proclaimed trough media, theoretical or critical writings as if it were the ideal and most natural feature of art) referred to instrumentalising culture, which was openly described as "serving" a (political) cause and therefore being no longer independent or preoccupied of the aesthetic level. "*Soviet literature and the arts exist to serve political ends* and must spurn the Western notion of 'art for art's sake' [emphasis added]." (Bolsover, 170)

The Romanian culture experienced this trauma in the late 1940s and 1950s, when it was forced to enter a path which had not been anticipated in any way by its previous (and especially interwar) evolution towards Western modernism. This meant an artificial and dramatic shift for any culture as the natural aesthetic orientation was replaced by functionality and sub-ordination to politics.

However, Romanian culture was left no option but to become a propaganda instrument, legitimising trough a complex mechanism of both explicit and implicit expressions a power which experienced no public support. As it had ascended to power in an illegitimate manner, the (then newly installed) regime had to activate a process of persuasion through propaganda by a *post-factum* appropriation of culture which had to appear as natural and legitimate. "«In order to conquer political power, any class must conquer first the area of art » [Buharin]. In Sovietised Romania, as well as in other «popular democracies» it happened in the exactly reversed order, meaning that socialist realist art, replacing the genuine

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)

one, was imposed after the conquering of power. *It served not to ascending to power, but for consolidating and legitimising it"* (Osman, 48).

The "surviving" cultural elite (by which we mean a category which – in literature, for instance - was still allowed to write and publish, although in the only acceptable official manner) was forced to adopt a double *role*, "military" and "proletarian", by no means typical of its previous aesthetic preoccupations. We called the first role "military" because the official discourse established that these (former) cultural elites had to "serve" the regime as "fighters" (see Andronica, 219) on the "front f creation" or the "ideological front" (ideology here meaning the totalitarian doctrine mentioned before). The second - "proletarian" - role, meant that artists were now "workers with the mind", just another economical category which had to *plan its production* and follow it. These roles were complementary and they were both meant to construct a new identity typology. The "fighting" feature is related to the ideology by the idea of "class struggle", but was also connecting, trough vocabulary, to the previous atmosphere of military conflict.

This propaganda discourse, entering culture, was meant to mobilise people in this "legitimate" *war* which had a complex of economical, social and, of course, cultural features and stakes. "The writers should stand *in the first line of the ideological front,* fighting for Marxist-Leninist ideas, contributing to the transformation of men. […] In theory, none of the writers in our country deny the importance of the assimilation of dialectic materialism. […] In practice though, many of the works which are being published show that there is a contradiction between what they *say* and what they *achieve.* […] This contradiction comes from the formal assimilation of Marxism, from ignoring the spirit of Marxism, in an insufficient effort to understand his learning on the role of art as a form of social consciousness.[emphases added]" (*Probleme actuale*…, 196).

More than other categories, cultural elites were exposed to a non-mediated relation to ideology, as it was understood by the regime.

Therefore, especially writers, whose ways of expression, *words,* were considered able to express directly *ideology (*literature being a discourse manifestation of ideology) were expected (as a major task, maybe the most important) to be specialists in the official doctrine: **"**assimilating the Marxist-Leninist learning is a task belonging to writers. Enlarging their theoretical knowledge, which will help them observe life in its essence, working with a gardener's passion to perfecting their artistic craft, our writers will create the great work the people is expecting from them. To create the sincere work […] expressing through literature the essential things in life: the truth of class struggle, the fight against exploiters, and the fight for socialism, for the new man" (Popescu, 232). They had not only to be familiar to this doctrine but also to actually master its intimate mechanisms in order to make it the basis of their work and, moreover, to be able to convince and educate others according to it. Cultural elites had to become „*fighters of the front of building socialism, and not simple witnesses*, the writers are connected to the people's work. […] from the same feeling of brotherhood between the poet and the worker, both in the same class position, emerges, of course, the depiction in our literature of the Plan […] which became a comrade of the working men [emphasis added]" (Popescu, 219).

I have mentioned the role of educators that writers had to play in relation to their readers. But, first of all, they were themselves being "re-educated" through Soviet theoretical materials ("reflecting and strengthening the new socialist order, Soviet art and literature teach all working people to assimilate genuine human ethics, the Communist ethics.") (Trofimov, 20).

The Soviet materials were strengthened

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)

by their local imitations - articles or books explicitly copying the ideas and wooden language of the Eastern model: "there is no doubt that by constantly learning from the works of the classics of Marxism-Leninism and their great followers, being inspired by the example of Soviet literature […] and fighting until the end against any outburst of the rotten bourgeois *ideology***,** our writers will have increasing successes on the way of developing literary creation, filled of the spirit of the Party, a weapon of mass struggles" (****Probleme actuale*…, 212).

The second function played (or at least they prended to play) by writers – complementary to the "fighting", militating and mobilising role – was that of (another category of) proletarians, as this wooden language speech shows: "workers work […], peasants work […] and progressionist intellectuals work and the same do the writers, animated by their great mission to contribute to the education of working people in the spirit of socialism, to depict the new reality in valuable artistic achievements, the working class struggle, the victories of the people, the moral beauty of the free man" (Popescu, 217). The distance between intellectual and physical work had to be eliminated (as it was explicitly shown in images or articles as well as through an entire "campaign" of sending writers on "the field" to find "real" topics and characters in plants and agriculture). Therefore, their independence is one of the first features to be eliminated and they become simple subordinates, reciting stereotypical lines and being given assignments. "The metamorphosis of the intellectuals into «workers with the mind» […] served the demonstration that they were not in fact different from the masses. […] The writer remains a privileged individual only to the extent that he assumes the role of a docile instrument in the propaganda mechanism. […] Entering the general production process, he has, as any worker, an amount of work to achieve" (Osman, 50).

Their *projects* disappear and are replaced by *plans*, actually parts of the State Plan, as the quantity of work (number of books or poems, etc.) becomes more important than the quality, while the ideological message is the only thing that mattered with respect to the content. Especially during the first economic plan (1949), cultural press witnesses a national obsession for this idea of being part of the *Plan*. The following ones are samples in this respect from interviews with artists published in the 1949 Romanian cultural press: "It is wonderful to say out loud: *Yes, comrade Party, I am ready to receive comrade Plan "*(Gică Iureş). "*Previously, the writer had projects*. Now, following the example given by the working class led by its party, our party, he has *a plan*. […] My plan? Four books. It's not much. But socialist competitions shall also start within literature. I'll try to exceed my plan and exceed myself. […] The field activity, in the living core of things, in plants, mines, building sites, in villages will be of course one of the main preoccupations of the Writers' Association[ii] in the Popular Republic of Romania" (Eugen Jebeleanu). "This year I'll try, through efforts, to improve my craft" (Lucian Bratu). "I also plan at least four works on the subject of the work of conscious peasants" (Gh.Vida)".

Thus, if on one hand, writers were enrolled on the "fighting front" of creation and on the other hand as "workers with the mind", they were also controlled and subordinated through an entire complex of structures and institutions, minutely organised and centralised (such as the Writers' Union and others) and through their legal framework. The ideological control was therefore very well organised in these institutional structures, which supervised the entire "work" process - from the famous "plan" to its actual accomplishment, followed by the censorship which filtered the manuscript, then the centralised publishing house system and finally, after publication,

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)

criticism (which was no longer performed by specialists but also involved proletarian readers), which led many times to the rewriting of a work *according to ideological standards*. These institutional structures exercised both a negative control (on the basis of restrictions, decrees, laws, meetings, putting to practice the Soviet model, Selejan, 14) and a positive one (through privileges). The "fabrication" of writers or their transformation into clerks (Macrea, 30 sqq.) was part of an official policy which was applied immediately after the ascension to power of the communist regime (in 1949). This happened because gaining full state control over culture was extremely significant for legitimating the new regime (as stated above) and therefore it was treated as "a State and Party issue". Victims of the ideological control, which imposed serious limitations to creation, the "surviving" writers (the term here suggesting the acceptance of the political compromise) were clerks within these restrictive institutions. However, the control structures also involved positive - pecuniary – motivation and those who were both talented and obedient "educators", supporting ideological propaganda were enjoying privileges. The writer was "given" an important role in the "education of masses", however his independence, as already shown, was completely annulled. The system constantly controlled his plans and "efforts" (also a cliché of the period) and nothing, not even the finished work (which passed through censorship mechanisms), could escape this control. Criticism at all levels (professionalized or not, also including self-criticism) was considered the only way to progress so, even the published work was analysed (on ideological grounds, of course) and required modifications and corrections, which involved, of course, the publication of new editions. The only attitude accepted was this obedient one: the writer (and implicitly, literature itself) *obeyed* an entire list of authorities (Marxist ideology, Zhdanov's works and the Party's directions, the guidelines served by ideological departments in the universities or local Party representatives, all sorts of authorities representing Power) and even the "voice" of the proletarians.

In the meetings writers regularly had with their proletarian "readers" in the factories where the latter worked (or following the critical letters these workers sent to cultural magazines[iii]), the authors had to listen and obey these critics, "In my *first version* of the play, one of the characters, Ianco, died. 'Why kill him, comrade', somebody asked, 'he is one of us, after all. Don't you think he can change with our help?' I confess, this question troubled me and I realized I had made a serious mistake. *Of course, I changed the plot* [emphasis added]" (Davidoglu, qtd. in Selejan, I, 100). Criticism therefore usually refers to the ideological or factual accuracy (although the "reality" they are expected to reflect to the expense of banned "fantasy" is usually utopian, the boundaries between reality and fiction being erased and sometimes they reverse places).

These simple people "had been taken their lands, were confiscated their fortunes, were haunted and imprisoned but, for the first time, they saw they could understand Poetry […]. They were transformed into literary critics, fascinated by the feeling that they had something to say in the process of literary creation. […] In fact, *exactly because of the lack of a genuine public support,* communist propaganda was attributing its own critics and wishes to the masses, *offering them the illusion that propaganda itself is the one assimilating their opinions, which are finally taken into consideration. The communist system would always use, in a perfidious and cynical manner, this alibi to justify any abuse.* […] By creating for the simple man the illusion that he has access to the structures of decision, the Party escapes responsibility, mimicking unconditioned subordination to the

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)

«working class' interests». […] *Thus, state terrorism finds the perfect cover."* (Osman, 54).

However, this freedom and importance associated both to writers and proletarian readers is part of a complex manipulating system as the message reaching the (especially uneducated) public could be both dangerous and helpful, legitimising all dark areas of the system's practices. Therefore, all this filtering (through this control over the writers' performance) by an entire system of censorship and criticism of the (ideological) message reaching the public and the models or values they transmit was focused on education (*i.e.* manipulation). The message, transmitted through culture (and legitimising the system's practices as good), had to be pure and reflect the official perspective on social typologies, on the *past* (which had to be criticised) and "new" values. Propaganda was based on this game of models and anti-models presented to the public (in a Manichean formula), who had just to copy their behaviour (very stereotypical, a copy of the Soviet cliché). Literature had to offer schematic heroes based on Soviet literature, their behaviour (based on political "struggle" and "efforts") being part of a policy of constructing new – stereotypical – identities (the "new" man, the "new" woman, and so on). Therefore, literature was required to serve a cause (the great one, of "building socialism" as well as all other measures and policies of the moment). Writers were expected not only to write (massively and enthusiastically, in the "right" manner) but also to support (through their works as well as in interviews, enquiries and articles) absurd economical or political measures and policies. They wrote about collective farms, nationalising of properties and so on, emphasising the role the Party played in the great transformation society was undergoing. Thus, during this period of the totalitarian regime, cultural elites were more than ever transformed into paid or threaten puppets of the regime, especially because of the important legitimising role culture had to play in order to support power.

5. Conclusions



Illegally (and therefore illegitimately) installed in Romania in the late 1940s, consolidating its position through repression and legal abuses especially during the 1950s, the communist regime tried to legitimise through propaganda, based mainly on ideology (Marxism converted in a schematic and dogmatic totalitarian ideology) and culture. More than being simple "crutches" of the system, culture and especially literature were important factors to control (a "State and Party issue"), as the intellectual discourse could both threaten political legitimacy and artificially built it. Propaganda needed to silent any potential opposing discourse, while using the obedient one to manipulate and "educate" in the direction Power wanted to. Transformed into mere "clerks", rewarded but controlled, fighting and working for socialism, the obedient writers had to simply and enthusiastically "recite" clichés and leave the impression they speak in "one voice" – the proletarians'.

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)

Considering it attractive yet educative, the regime used the language of culture (or of what was left of it) to legitimise its existence and measures. The care for ideological accuracy (*ideology* itself having a specific meaning within totalitarianism) led to a specific cultural discourse – stereotypical, artificial, monochrome, yet having the monopoly in all media. As discursive manifestations of the communist ideology, culture in general and literature in particular legitimise (or rather try to do it, sometimes just with a mimicking or simulating effect) totalitarian power.

Similarly to culture, which was subordinated to them, the ideologies, "enchanting" the 20th century, crossed the limits of philosophy and intellectual debates, being transformed into instruments for founding and legitimising totalitarian regimes. Therefore, the same 20th century was the background of the emergence and domination but also of the "end of ideology" (Knight 622), the latter losing its fascination and, eventually, its power in all respects.

Notes

i The idea of making domination „attractive" can be associated with the third category in Max Weber's approach: "There are three pure types of legitimate domination – he writes - The validity of the claims to legitimacy may be based on: 1. Rational grounds – resting on the belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands (legal authority). 2. Traditional grounds – resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial tradition and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them (traditional authority); or, finally, 3. Charismatic grounds – resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him (charismatic authority) [emphasis added]". (Weber, 215)

ii In original: "Societății Scriitorilor din R.P.R."

iii "We were very glad that the book narrates the story of a working woman, who were not given credit during the former regime and their work was not mentioned in a book. We believe that comrade Preda's short story is useful. […] Comrade, it is true that in our popular democracy regime there are still some weak working women, […], especially where not enough convincing work is performed or when there are workers recently involved in production. […] If the author would have chosen […] one of our evolved workers, it would have been more useful for the entire country. For instance, our working women, who entered the union and some the Party since 1945, have entered on a healthy path, working thoroughly both for production and the development of the cultural and political level." (Selejan, I, 214).

References

1. "Probleme actuale ale literaturii din R.P.R. în lumina lucrărilor lui A.A. Jdanov", *Viața românească,* an IV, nr. 9, 1951: 182-216.
2. Arendt, Hannah: "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government". *Review of Politics,* XV (3), Jul. 1953.
3. Arendt, Hannah: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968.
4. Bolsover, George H.: "Soviet Ideology and Propaganda", *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-),* Vol. 24, No. 2(Apr., 1948), pp. 170-180.
5. Borbély, Ştefan (ed.), *Caietele* Echinox, Literatură şi totalitarism, *7/2004*.
6. *Caietele* Echinox. Restricții şi cenzură, *vol.4/2003.*
7. *Caietele* Echinox. Teoria şi practica imaginarului imaginii. 2. Imaginar social*, Vol. 3/2002.*
8. Cassinelli, C. W.: "Totalitarianism, Ideology, and Propaganda", *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Feb., 1960), pp. 68-95.

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)

9. *Contemporanul. Săptămânal politic-social-cultural,* jan.-dec./1949.
10. Heller, Agnes: "Fundamentalism without Fundaments or Fundamentalism as Ideology", Gerhard Besier, Katarzyna Stoklosa, Andrew Wisely (eds.), *Totalitarianism and Liberty. Hannah Arendt in 21st Century.* Krakow: Ksiegarnia Akademicka, 2008.
11. Huaco, George A.: "Ideology and Literature". *New Literary History*, Vol. 4, No. 3, *Ideology and Literature* (Spring, 1973), pp. 421-436.
12. Iacob, Andreea: "Mijloace de manipulare în masă şi cenzura gândirii, *Caietele Echinox. Restricţii şi cenzură,* vol. 4/2003: 100-108.
13. *Jackall, Robert (ed.)*: Propaganda*, Macmillan,* 1995.
14. Knight, Kathleen: "Transformations of the Concept of Ideology in the Twentieth Century". *The American Political Science Review,* Vol. 100, No. 4, *Thematic Issue on the Evolution of Political Science, in Recognition of the Centennial of the Review* (Nov., 2006), pp. 619-626.
15. Lasswell, Harold D.: "Propaganda". *In* Jackall, Robert (ed.), *Propaganda,* Macmillan, 1995, 13-25.
16. Macrea-Toma, Ioana: *Privilighenţia. Instituţii literare în comunismul românesc.* Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2009.
17. Morar-Vulcu, Călin: *Republica îşi făureşte oamenii*. Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2007.
18. Negrici, Eugen: *Literatura română sub comunism*: *Proza.* Bucureşti: Editura Fundaţiei PRO, 2002.
19. Osman, Fernanda Emanuela: "Note despre poezia agitatorică a anilor '50", *Caietele Echinox,* 7/2004*, Literatură şi totalitarism,* 48-64.
20. Plesu, Andrei: "Intellectual Life Under Dictatorship". *Representations*, No. 49, Special Issue: *Identifying Histories: Eastern Europe Before and After 1989* (Winter, 1995), pp. 61-71.
21. Popescu, Andronica: „Planul de Stat în literatură", *Viaţa românească,* an III, nr. 1, 1950, 217-233.
22. *Scânteia tineretului*. Organ central al tineretului muncitor, Seria II, Anul II (1950), ian.-dec.
23. *Scânteia.* Organ central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român, Seria II, Anul XVIII (1949), ian.-dec. 1949.
24. Selejan, Ana: *Literatura în totalitarism. 1949-1951*. Bucureşti: Editura Cartea Românească, 2007.
25. Selejan, Ana: *Literatura în totalitarism. 1952-1953*. Bucureşti: Editura Cartea Românească, 2008.
26. Selejan, Ana. *Literatura în totalitarism. 1955-1956*. Bucureşti: Editura Cartea Românească, 1998;
27. Thom, Françoise: *Limba de lemn.* Traducere de Mona Antohi, Studiu introductiv de Sorin Antohi, Ed. a II-a. Bucureşti: Editura Humanitas, 2005.
28. Thompson, John B: *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*. California: Stanford University Press, 1990.
29. Toma, Sorin: *Privind înapoi. Amintirile unui fost ziarist communist*. Editura Compania, Bucureşti, 2004.
30. Trofimov, P. "Unitatea de principii etice şi estetice în arta sovietică". *** *Pentru realismul socialist.* Bucureşti: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură şi Artă, 1951.
31. Weber, Max: *Economy and Society*. Guenther Roth,Claus Wittich (eds.). Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1978.

BDD-A20152 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:31 UTC)