



ROMANIAN ACADEMY

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„Nicolae Iorga” Institute of History**

DOCTORAL THESIS

SUMMARY

Marginals and deviants

**A social history of the excluded in communist Romania,
during the period 1965-1989**

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The central theme of this doctoral research is marginality, its causes and effects during the Ceaușescu regime (1965–1989). Our analysis focuses on a recent past: the structural marginality established through the new political, economic, and social organization after 1965. Marginality, together with deviance and exclusion, became the three main attributes of the Ceaușescu regime.

This thesis analyzes marginality during the Ceaușescu period from the perspective of social history, arguing that it did not represent an accidental phenomenon or a collateral consequence of economic dysfunctions, but rather a structural mechanism integrated into the regime's logic of governance. The study aims to demonstrate that marginality was produced, administered, and politically instrumentalized through economic, social, and cultural policies, legislation, institutional practices, and ideological discourse.

The central figure of this research is the ordinary individual, the citizen, imprisoned in a „multilaterally developed” society and forced to become the „New Man”, the perfect individual meant to embody the distinctive and defining features of totalitarian ideologies.

The topic aligns with the reconfiguration of Romanian communist historiography, shifting from a predominantly political analysis toward a social history of everyday life, exclusion, and mechanisms of control. In the context of contemporary debates on memory, nostalgia, and radicalization, this research contributes to understanding how the regime shaped the relationship between the state and the individual through the systematic production of social vulnerabilities.

Our research starts from the hypothesis that the economic and social policies of the Ceaușescu regime generated, sustained, and instrumentalized various forms of marginalization, transforming society into one of marginalities used as tools of control, discipline, and social exclusion. Marginality was no longer a deviation from the norm; it became part of the governing program itself and, alongside deviance, was politically redefined as a screen for corruption and repression.

From a theoretical perspective, the research integrates concepts such as the Foucauldian analysis of discipline and social normalization, the interpretation of the shortage economy formulated by the Hungarian economist János Kornai, and the concept of simulated change developed by political scientist Michael Shafir, in order to identify and present the measures of political „democratization” and the „facade” corrections introduced into the economy. An interdisciplinary approach has been adopted, viewing marginality as an instrument of governance situated at the intersection of economic constraint, administrative classification, and the production of deviance.

Methodologically, the thesis is based on the analysis of archival documents. The primary sources derive largely from the Romanian National Archives, particularly from the archival funds of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (Chancellery, Economic, Organizational, and Administrative-Political Sections), as well as from the archives of the former Securitate held by the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS). Some of the files had not previously been used historiographically, especially those from the funds of the Academy of Social and Political Sciences and the Archive of the Ministry of Health. The archive of the former Securitate, under the custody of CNSAS, constituted another essential primary source without which this research could not have taken shape.

Aware that many of the records of the former political police were formulated according to its institutional interests, we relied primarily on quantitative information extracted from confidential notes and reports sent to the leadership. These statistics revealed not only the falsified reporting of the economy, but more importantly the real problems it faced, highlighting the enormous discrepancies between the quantities established by planners and the economy's actual production capacity.

In addition to archival research, the press of the period helped us understand the double discourse the regime maintained toward its citizens. Through articles published in specialized journals, especially in the economic field, and through socialist legislation, we were able to decode the regime's concepts and public policies. Finally, memoir literature - written by political figures or witnesses of that time - allowed us, as far as possible, to grasp the spirit of that era. We employed methods of discourse analysis, institutional analysis, and microhistory in order to capture both the normative level of exclusion and the concrete social experience of marginality.

In its debut, the thesis presents the first measures taken by the head of state aimed at providing him with popular support and, through it, a wider room for maneuver for the reconfiguration of the command structures. The promises of the IX Congress (1965), in tangent with the dialectic of Khrushchevite de-Stalinization, based on changing the relations between the state, the party and society, were never respected. Ceaușescu was aware of the fact that the party and the state cannot be shared equitably with the „entire people” without this meaning the loss of the monopoly of power. After removing the technocrats from decision-making positions, marginalizing and wasting their technical skills, Ceaușescu forever brought back managerial decision-making within the party, gradually isolating it at the level of the political dome. The next step was the disconnection of the national culture from the Western one and the imposition of the ideological canon. In cultural terms, marginality was expressed primarily

through the „July Theses”, which marked the turn towards proto-chronism and Ceaușescu nationalism, with culture becoming an exclusive vehicle for legitimizing the head of state. Its deprofessionalization followed, through the politicization of tutelary institutions and a cultural production that responded to its own image, displayed especially through grandiose festive events. Then, its instrumentalization through the position of messenger of the results of governance and the image of the presidential couple emptied Romanian artistic creation of content.

The paper highlights several structural forms of marginality:

Economic marginality, produced by the economy of scarcity and the arbitrary distribution of resources , by restrictive wage policies , by overtaxation through self-governance and financial self-management, a so-called measure of decentralization of local administration that did not create more flexible mechanisms, autonomy and efficiency in the management of its own resources, but represented a lever of discipline and camouflage of the failures of the centralized economy. Not least, by the plundering of state agricultural enterprises, agricultural production cooperatives and private peasant households.

Austerity and the imperatives of subsistence forced the entire population to navigate a parallel economy, resorting to subversive practices, attitudes and behaviors in conflict with official interests and socialist legislation. The population's dependence on private sources of supply made the procurement of essential goods an informal criterion of power and social hierarchy. Speculation, overpricing, theft from public property, taxi, transport, rental services, various repairs, interior design, meditations, the production of alcohol and food products in the household and their untaxed marketing, barter represented the informal and illegal forms of „survival” and supplementing incomes patronized by the black market and the underground economy.

In social terms, marginality was also manifested through stigmatization, exclusion, forms of reaction of the regime towards its undesirables, of any nature. The maintenance of the political - institutional balance and, implicitly, of the social one, was guarded by a set of its own and obligatory social norms of a moral, legal-criminal, religious, mystical or customary nature. Through its laws, the regime redefined social normality. The law of „social parasitism” was the main legislative instrument both in terms of efficiency, and especially of the facts falling under its scope.

Another lever in the instrumentalization of the regime's abuses, another form of economic and social marginalization was the anti-emigration legislation. Ideological control and generalized shortages determined a large part of the Romanian population to choose emigration or illegal flight across the borders. The real, inconvenient reasons that justified legal emigration or flight across the borders were overcome by the regime through all kinds of ideological connotations, adherence to mysticism, Western propaganda, treason, social uselessness, parasitic life, criminality, etc.

Another facet of marginality related to the social and economic one was represented by **biopolitical marginality**, in this case, by the communist state's relationship to the categories of people with disabilities, more precisely, to irretrievably deficient minors. The need for rapid industrialization implied the forced increase in the birth rate through reproduction control and the disappearance of contraceptive means. It was another experiment in repressive biopolitics through which the regime "nationalized" reproduction, causing a collective tragedy through the huge number of clandestine abortions and the abandonment, for various reasons, of newborns. Considered „unproductive” and excluded from society for their inability to work, having as their only connection to this, the completely conspired statistical evidence, these outcasts of the state were deprived of the most basic living conditions.

Despite formal and informal supervision and control mechanisms, in the „multilaterally developed socialist society” various forms of maladaptation, refusal, opposition, resistance and non-acceptance of reality and social constraints found their place, classified by the regime as deviant behavior, a danger to the socialist order, which it severely sanctioned through legislation.

A key finding of the research is that scarcity was not just an economic dysfunction, but a disciplinary mechanism. Differential access to goods, services and mobility produced a profound social fragmentation, which weakened collective solidarity and reinforced dependence on the state. By classifying the population into „working people”, „deviants, antisocial elements” and „parasites”, the regime transformed social vulnerability into moral and legal guilt.

The thesis argues that the Ceaușescu regime governed not despite marginality, but through it. Marginality became an auxiliary instrument of power, contributing to maintaining conformism and preventing social solidarity. Thus, the multilaterally developed socialist society was

configured, in practice, as a stratified and fragmented society, in which the citizen was maintained in a state of vulnerability administered by the communist state.