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### **Romania's Failed Attempt at a Revolutionary Myth: Performances and Rituals of Degradation in Ceausescu's Trial\***

*Abstract:* The regime change in Romania is one of the most debatable events of the Central and Eastern European Revolutions of 1989. Its central episode was the trial and execution of the communist leaders, Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu. This study deals with this extremely controversial episode from the positions of the dramaturgical approach as set forth by Erving Goffman (1959; [1974] 1986). In this vein, I argue that, beyond its televised character (a *performance*), the trial also had a *performative* character: it was conceived to legitimize the "powers that be." Yet, despite the new power's intentions to make justice according to Western democratic standards, the result was a copycat Stalinist show trial. To account for this, I investigate how prior macro cultural features of the communist regime (e.g., understandings of power, authority, justice etc.) were reproduced in, and influenced this particular encounter. One of the results of the trial was that neither the old power nor the new one succeeded to have a legitimate claim to authority, a fact that has affected the character of the Romanian post-communist transition, especially in its first years.

Among the surprising events of the Central and Eastern European revolutions of 1989, the Romanian one is the most controversial case. At its core, Romania's escape from utopia was violent. The triggering events consisted of the

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\* Materials from the Open Society Archives, Budapest:

From *The Files Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement (1979–1991)* the series: a) *Demonstrations, protests*; b) *Revolution: echo, voices, witnesses*; c) *Timisoara '89*.

From *The Files of Vlad Socor* and *The Romanian Revolution Files*, the series: a) *Iconography: Romanian Revolution in pictures*; b) *Old establishment: Ceausescu's trial|execution*.

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violent repression of insurgents in the town of Timisoara; the “end” was also marked by violence, i.e., the trial and execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu. Many Western observers have perceived the trial as an incomprehensible, irrational, and strange mode of settling affairs. A decade later, narratives of the Romanian Revolution still place at their center this “judicial murder” (Almond 1992; Tismaneanu 1993) as a founding event for the country’s return to democratic rule.

Against this background, I approach in these pages the controversial episode of the Ceausescus’ trial. Following current trends in social theory to link macro and micro levels (Giddens 1984; 1987), I maintain that through the analysis of this unique encounter one can uncover particular features of macro cultural arrangements of the communist regime. Specifically, I show how (1) pre-existent patterns of interaction, (2) prior understandings of power, authority and justice were reproduced in and influenced this encounter. That is, despite their intentions to make justice according to Western democratic standards, the initiators of this trial ended by following the old scripts of communist justice. I also show how and to what extent the features of the immediate context, i.e., the violent character of regime change in those days, affected the unfolding of the event.

Using interaction as the main unit of analysis, I examine the controversial episode of the Ceausescus’ trial using the tools of the “dramaturgical approach” of Erving Goffman (1959; [1974] 1986). The narration of the trial via television lends itself to employ Goffman’s ideas. It was a “performance” played by its “actors” for various “audiences,” which often had an abstract character such as “History,” “future generations,” the “World” (understood especially as Western democracies). Moreover, I view the trial as being also a *performative* act, i.e., aiming at legitimizing the new government.<sup>1</sup>

My approach has a descriptive character, emphasizing the *hows* rather than the *whys*. Provided a theoretical perspective, I attempt to describe in its terms a specific and debatable event. The raw material of my endeavor consists of a personally co-authored transcription and translation of Ceausescus’ trial (Ely & Stoica, 1995). In the first section, I present some elements related to the events of December 1989, in Romania. The second section “Is This a Real Play?” contains the body of analysis. I start by presenting the setting and the participants, and I then turn to the trial’s interpretation in terms of “performances,” “team interaction” (Goffman 1959; [1974] 1986), “rituals of degradation” (Garfinkel 1956), and “dramatization of evil” (Tannenbaum 1938). The conclusions are presented in the third section.

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<sup>1</sup> This does not answer the question “pre-planned assassination or judicial mistake.” None of the pages of this work has the goal of offering responses to the above dilemma or to other doubts such as “Revolution?,” “Coup d’etat?,” “Plot of the nomenklatura?,” “Foreign involvement?” etc.

### I. December 1989: Uncertainty and Tribulation

With Glasnost and Perestroika, the Soviet Bloc started moving towards more openness, liberalization and reform. The exception to this movement was Romania. Once again Ceausescu drew on the themes of independence and internal political autonomy to not only preserve his monopoly of power but to further re-entrench his personal dictatorship. In response to the changes going on in the region, he stated that Romania had already gone through this phase in the late 1960s. At the last Romanian Communist Party's Congress in November 1989, he reiterated his dogmatic stance by stating "Romania will oppose by all means the questioning of scientific Socialism."

So while the rest of Central and Eastern Europe was going through a gradual or at least non-violent change, Romania was becoming further and further entrenched in a frozen neo-Stalinist reality. For Romania, there was no option to bend, but only to break. As much as Ceausescu tried to isolate Romania from the changes going on around it, news was coming into Romania about the regime changes in Hungary, former Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany. This fact led to an increasing perception of tension within the country.

The triggering event of what resulted in the fall of Ceausescu occurred in the Western city of Timisoara, starting with December, 15 1989. The regime had become unhappy with the open criticisms being made of the regime by a Reformed Hungarian-Romanian priest named Laszlo Tokes. To quiet him, the regime attempted to move him to another parish. Tokes refused to leave Timisoara and was supported in his refusal by his congregation. On December 15, the government attempted to forcefully remove him from his church. At this time, his followers came and encircled the church and his residence in order to prevent his removal. This led to a spontaneous demonstration against the regime, which brought in people who were not members of his church starting December 16. This growing mass demonstration led Ceausescu to order a "state of emergency" claiming that Hungary was threatening to invade Romania.

After giving orders to suppress the uprising in Timisoara leading to approximately 40 fatalities, Ceausescu left on a pre-planned trip to Iran. Upon his return, on December 21, he arranged for a public address to show his position of power and to condemn the "Hooligans' actions in Timisoara." Rather than reinforcing his position, this address in Bucharest at the Palace Square – in the front of the Romanian Communist Party's headquarters – became disrupted by shouts of "Timisoara!" and jeering of Ceausescu. On television screens, Romania saw a surprised and disoriented *Conducator* (Leader), facing the reality of discontent, after many years of denying it.

After the public address a relatively small group of people, especially young people, continued the anti-regime demonstration in the University Square and Roman Square during the night of December 21–22. In spite of

the violent efforts to repress these actions, the protesters resisted and in the morning of the 22nd were joined by large masses of sympathizers – especially workers of the largest industrial plants in Bucharest – who had been informed of the Bucharest massacre by Radio Free Europe and/or other international news agencies. In the same morning a final, official communiqué, signed by Ceausescu, was issued announcing that General Vasile Milea (former Minister of National Defense) “betrayed the country and committed suicide.” Domestic and foreign publics interpreted this event as the psychological turning point of the Romanian Revolution, when the army decided to switch to the anti-government side. Most people believed that Ceausescu ordered General Milea to be killed because of his refusal to fire upon the protesters. A few hours after this communiqué, while the people were regrouping in the Palace Square, Ceausescu and his wife fled the building by helicopter. They were soon captured near Tirgoviste and held prisoners within a military camp, the same camp in which their trial and execution would take place.

On December 22, after the Palace Square and the University Square, a third sight of demonstrations and violence in Bucharest were the television and radio stations. Realizing that a main source of power in the country was the ability to control the mediums of information, large groups of people, led by well-known dissidents, moved on to these media stations and, after brief and non-violent confrontations, took them over.

During this time, a number of groups of people vied for power. One, led by Ilie Verdet, a former communist Prime Minister, was quite unsuccessful and is now known as the “20 minutes Government.” Another, which eventually became known as the National Salvation Front, was the group that was able to fill the so-called political void left by the fall of Ceausescu and formed a new government. This group was led by Ion Iliescu – Ceausescu’s successor – and also included former high ranks of the Romanian Communist Party who allegedly expressed in the past dissident views on Ceausescu and were persecuted by him. They were able to get the support of the people that had taken over the television station. During the day of December, 22, they began broadcasting that Ceausescu and his government had been dismissed, that they had taken over as the new governing body, and for the citizens to be aware of dangerous factions (as they stated: “fanatical terrorists”) that still supported Ceausescu.

Beyond the content of the messages being broadcast, a few things about its context should be mentioned. During the final years of Ceausescu, the television transmissions had been limited to only two hours a day and its over-all theme was pure propaganda. Common contents were the Ceausescus’ activities, mass demonstrations of adulation, patriotic and folklore music. With the take-over of the National Television Station, there was immediately 24-hour/day broadcasting that followed the events of the revolution throughout the country. The television also provided the Romanian people with a sense of shared experience. The use of television (and of radio) in the revolution not only allowed people to

witness the events, but also to vicariously participate. For those who were unable to immediately participate in the revolution, television was a mediated experience that was brought into their living rooms.

Before presenting the theory and analysis, there is one other factor that is important to address regarding the Ceausescu trial: the decision to kill the Ceausescu was made before the trial had even started. Although this is a commonly accepted fact now in Romania, there are different lay theories for why this may have been so. The two most dominant ones are, one, that only with the death of Ceausescu would the fighting in the streets stop, and, two, that the December events were truly a coup d'etat and that Ceausescu had to be killed off because he knew too much about the plotters.

The point of this study is not to say why Ceausescu was killed. My assumption is that the trial was not an attempt to find a "truth" and then a punishment, but it was mainly a performative act aiming at bringing legitimacy to the new government by destroying the previous symbol of power, i.e., Nicolae Ceausescu. Underlying this is the understanding that the Ceausescu's execution was a foregone conclusion. Probably, the greatest empirical support of this interpretation is the fact that there was a pre-determined time limit for the trial. According to an interview with Dan Voinea, the prosecuting attorney in the trial,

We arrived there [at Tirgoviste – my note] at 1:35 p.m. Stanculescu [the General who helped the Ceausescu to flee, but also avoided participating in the army's actions in Timisoara and, for the trial, was a representative of National Salvation Front – my note] told us that he can not give us more than one hour...

*Reporter:* For the whole trial?

*Voinea:* For the whole trial, yes (Stan, 1995:9).

#### Methodological Specifications

In the late afternoon of December 25, after reading the communiqué of the National Salvation Front regarding the judgment and execution of the Ceausescu, the speaker of Romanian state television started to announce the immediate presentation of the video-tape with the "Trial of the Two Tyrants." Yet the viewers all over the country had to hold their breath until around 2.00 a.m., December 26, when the promised "show" finally went on air. Note that, at that time, Ceausescu's alleged loyalists were still attacking the headquarters of the National Television.

What the exhausted and impatient Romanian public finally saw was an extremely short, confusing, and poor quality video recording of the long-dreamt trial. This first presentation was an edited version of the process, filmed with an amateur video camera by a certain Major Ion Baiu, from the Institute for Scientific Research of the Ministry for National Defense. This version actually consisted of images of Nicoale and his wife answering questions asked by unidentifiable persons, allegedly a prosecutor, a judge, and two defense attorneys. The faces of the latter were not shown; instead, a photo of

the two defendants covered the images of the court. The rationale given for this was the need to protect the characters involved in the trial from a possible revenge at the hands of Ceausescus' loyalists.

Since December 26, 1989, several versions of this video have been put on air by Romanian State Television and by private television stations. The version on which I rely contains the entire trial, except for the moments when the Court adjourned for deliberation. This does not affect the analysis since the dialogues between the Ceausescus, the prosecutor and one of the defense attorneys were off the record in this short break. This version was broadcast by the Romanian State Television on April 22, 1990, when the choir of Western criticism of the trial reached a peak point. The personally co-authored transcription from the trial's videotape represents the raw material for my analysis. As regards the trial, the primary methodology is a content analysis of the trial transcripts and of the video tape itself in order to identify repeated patterns of performance, team interaction, conflicting definitions of the situation, degradation rituals, and dramatization of evil.

## II. "*Is this a Real Play?*"

### Application of the Dramaturgical Model

This section contains the analysis of the Ceausescus' trial, and it highlights how 1) pre-existent pattern of interactions and 2) prior understandings of authority, power and justice influenced this particular encounter. One underlying assumption is that its initiators conceived the trial as a performative act, aiming to bring legitimacy to the new government, self-defined as a democratic one. But despite the intentions to observe the standards of Western legal-rationality, the result was a copycat Stalinistic show trial. However, it should not be overlooked that the features of the general context of those days also influenced the unfolding of the event. I start by addressing both these features and those of the setting. I then turn to the issues of performances and of various definitions of the situation. I discuss in more detail one of these prevalent definitions, i.e., making justice in the name of the people. In connection with this, I analyze two important patterns of the encounter, i.e., rituals of degradation and team interactions.

#### The Setting: Media Manufactured Reality

As previously stated, the general background was one of a highly tense situation. Besides the real fights on the streets of the major cities, there was extensive and confusing media coverage of the events. What resulted from this combination was *a media manufactured definition of the situation of what was actually going on*. And, following W.I. Thomas' theorem, this manufactured situation would nonetheless become real in its consequences.

“It’s true because they said it on television or radio” would represent a guiding principle to those days. Evidence for this paradoxical situation is the figure of 64,000 victims of Romanian uprisings. Initially advanced by various media – especially by the then Yugoslavian one – this number would be ad litteram taken by the President of the Panel of Judges to back-up the genocide indictment. To paraphrase Goffman (1959:28) some of the participants in given moments would be fully taken by their own acts; they would become fully entrapped in the image they would foster, i.e., justice makers in the name of 64,000 freedom-thirsty, innocent victims.

Besides the parameters of the general context, the actual cadres of the encounter also influenced the unfolding of the event. These cadres are those furnished by the general regulations of an exceptional military court, i.e., a military court operating in times of crisis. As regards the physical components of the setting, they consisted of a court-hall improvised in one of the rooms of the Tirgoviste garrison, where the Ceausescus were being kept prisoners. Overall, 15 participants – the cameraman included – and the two Ceausescus would be involved in the “play.” The Panel of Judges – which judges and sentences defendants in the Romanian legal system – would consist of 5 persons, headed by the President of the Panel of Judges (the “Judge” here and thereafter). The latter, Colonel in the Military Justice Gica Popa would commit suicide one year after the trial against the backdrop of rising domestic and international criticism on the fairness of the trial.

The Judge, as well as the panel and the prosecutor attorneys would have “dramatic dominance” in this trial. According to Goffman (1959), an individual with dramatic dominance might not have the real power of deciding the actual course of a staging. However, the audience(s) will and must think of him/her as the leader. The actual “mind” is the individual holding a directive dominance, *the director*, who ensures the coherence and standards of the performance, gives clues on aspects to be emphasized, draws attention to the false notes etc.

The representatives of the new power would have “directive dominance” (Goffman, 1959). They would present themselves during the trial as *by-standers*, guaranteeing through their very presence that the will of the People would be fulfilled in a correct manner.<sup>2</sup> The most evident signs of their actual power were gestures like passing notes with questions (and, perhaps, directives) to the Panel of Judges or, at the end of the trial, the indications given to the cameraman. There were also the court clerk, the prosecutor attorney, two defense attorneys provided for the defendants by the new government,

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<sup>2</sup> This team included figures like the General Victor A Stanculescu – who played an ambiguous role by actually helping the Ceausescus to leave Bucharest, but also took charge and gave the legal representatives only one hour for the whole trial; Virgil Magureanu – deemed as belonging to Ion Iliescu’s plotters group, and former officer of the Securitate (Secret Police); Mugurel Florescu – Major in Military Justice, someone close to the new authorities; and Gelu Voican-Voiculescu, anonymous and not previously politically involved character who was present at the take-over of the National Television Station, and who would arrange the secret burial of the Ceausescus.

and an officer guarding the door, the commander of the paratroopers who ensured the security of the representatives of the new power.

Having briefly stated these mere physical parameters, let me now turn to some of the requirements of the decorum in the Romanian courts, requirements that provide the highly formalized frameworks of this particular interaction, and, definitely, influenced its course.<sup>3</sup> Firstly, it should be noticed the power differentials. By this I refer to the extremely unbalanced positions the legal team and defendant(s) have in a Romanian court, by comparison with other Western systems, particularly the United States.

In a Romanian court, all the questions are asked via the President of the Panel of Judges. Another important feature is the lack of direct transcriptions of defendants', witnesses' and defense attorneys' statements. Rather, the judge will summarize these statements and have the court clerk record the judge's interpretations. This practice is very important for the analysis of this trial because it provides a large room for a judge's subjectivity to interfere. For, instance, at the repeated questions on who gave the orders to fire in demonstrators at Palace Square in Bucharest, Ceausescu replies that nobody has given such orders, and, therefore, nobody fired.

[N. Ceausescu]: *I shall answer* only in the front of Grand National Assembly [GNA here and in what follows, the former Communist Parliament – my note] These are all lies, falsehoods, provocation!

[The Judge summarizing for the court clerk]: Record: *'I do not recognize* that I with my accomplices have given orders to fire into the crowd gathered at Palace Hall' (Ely and Stoica 1995; italics added)

Or, to the question on the extremely poor situation of food supplies, Ceausescu replies that it is another lie and provocation. The Judge would interpret and dictate this to the court clerk as "*I do not recognize* that I starved the people." Overall, during the whole trial, the Judge would re-word 7 times Nicolae Ceausescu's answers, as well as his non-answers as "I do not recognize that..."

Let me now turn to the role of prescriptions associated to the positions of the President of the Panel of Judges, and to those of the defense attorneys. As he regards the President of the Panel of Judges, he must observe that defendants, witnesses and legal representatives behave in an appropriate manner. Also, the President of the Panel of Judges must balance the actions of the prosecutor(s) and of the defense attorney(s). Yet the actual behavior of the Judge in this trial could hardly be thought of as matching the above prescriptions. Although the Judge's *appearance* suited somehow the generic image associated with his position, his actual *manner* (as defined by Goffman 1959)

<sup>3</sup> Decorum refers to "the way in which the performer comports himself while in the visual and aural range of the audience but not necessarily engaged in talk with them" (Goffman, 1959: 110). He further distinguishes between "moral requirements" – like the rules regarding the respect of certain places – and "instrumental requirements."

was highly discrepant. Instead of adopting a neutral position, in certain moments, over-taken by his important position of power, the Judge would scold these very reluctant and impolite criminals:

[Judge towards Ceausescus]: We understood from this debate, because you refuse to have a dialogue with the people and only carry out a monologue and after that applause... Only in African rituals people applaud like this! Even today you behave in the same way! *You have not learned anything!* [You behave] *Like megalomanics!* (Ely & Stoica, 1995; italics added)

In the Romanian Justice System the attributions of defense attorney(s) are extremely similar to those of defense attorneys in the Western systems. Yet with some of their actions the defense attorneys in this trial would shame even the prosecution. Instead of at least refraining himself from advancing any unfavorable comments towards his client, the Defense Attorney II would directly step in prosecutor's shoes. And he would do this better than the prosecutor himself:

[The Defense Attorney II] (...) But the most horrid crime was to shackle the Romanian spirit, the soul of the people! As compared with the horrid crimes [you] committed at Timisoara, where innocent children and students have been trampled by the tanks...where you performed a horrid act of diversion in order to set the Army and the Securitate against each other! (...) You brag that you have paid the [external] debts...You may have paid the debts but you also exhausted us and pocketed money for yourself! [With reference to Ceausescu's visit to Iran, a few days earlier] You went to pay to the Ayatollah a final homage... You were exactly like him, the same type of tyrannical person who would kill his own people! (Ely & Stoica, 1995)

### Performances

If one addresses the trial as a performance, then it is crucial to define for whom it was performed. Was it just one audience or it is better to speak of multiple audiences? I maintain that the latter alternative is more appropriate for discussing the Ceausescus' trial. Although the Romanian people were deemed as the most important public, there were also several other publics that the performers took into consideration in their evolution, e.g., the West, History etc.

According to Goffman, a performance is defined as

[the entire] activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers. (1959:32)

The essential elements of a performance are related to: (1) its temporal limitations, fully acknowledged by participants – an *opening*, and a *closing*; (2) the particular strategies employed by the performers in their fostering of a certain *definition of the situation* (e.g., idealization, dramatic realization, maintenance of expressive control); and (3) the strategies used by the audience while witnessing a given staging (Goffman 1959; Giddens 1987). These strategies may vary from supporting performers' efforts to refusing to believe in the part that is being played.

Another important aspect is the intentional element embedded by the notion of performance, i.e., it serves to influence others. This is what Goffman calls “impression management,” i.e., eliciting a particular response from the audience such as approval, appreciation, willingness to further co-operate etc. Maintaining *some front image*, and *fostering a credible, coherent definition of the situation* before a particular audience are crucial for the success of any performance. The Ceausescu would try to promote and impose a front image as defined by their regime, and by their propaganda. For instance, Nicolae Ceausescu would claim he still is the President of Socialist Romania, the representative of the working class, and the leader of a country that is experiencing, according to him, “one of the happiest periods of its existence.” The judge, the prosecutor, and even the defense attorneys would continuously attack the Ceausescu’s previous front by uncovering information from their back-stage (e.g., their luxurious mode of life), and from the crude reality, (e.g., the country’s extremely poor economic situation, the contempt that people have for both them etc.).

This trial, as any other real life performances, does not fit exactly every element of Goffman’s conception regarding various types of performances, as set forth in his “Frame Analysis” ([1974] 1986). For instance, for some of the performers, i.e., the revolutionaries, it was a scripted event: *they already knew its outcome*. By contrast, the Ceausescu’s team had a very different and poorer *information state*, i.e., “the knowledge an individual has of why events have happened as they have, what the current forces are, what the properties and intents of the relevant persons are, and what the outcome is likely to be” (Goffman, [1974] 1986: 134). The troubles of classifying this trial also arise from the fact that the different types of performances,

refer to the official face of activity, not to its underlying character and intent. A political trial may be presented as a straight contest when, in fact, it is a scripted dramatic fabrication [...] (Goffman 1986: 126)

One possible way to exit this dead-end is to appeal to the notion of fabrication, which deals with the latent, intended elements of a performance. As in the case of keyings, fabrications serve to transform the primary frameworks of an interaction into something different. A fabrication is

the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more individuals will be induced to have a false belief about what is going on (Goffman, [1974] 1986: 85)

There are two parts involved in a fabrication: the fabricators (or deceivers), and the deceived, i.e., those “taken in or contained in a fabrication” (ibid., 83). The latter are those who will end as victims. Goffman further distinguishes between benign fabrications (with six sub-types) and exploitative ones (with three sub-types). Benign fabrications are done in the interest of those contained in the fabrication; at the very least these fabrications are not against

the interest of the deceived, and certainly, “not injurious to certain fundamental rights” (Goffman, [1974] 1986 : 103).<sup>4</sup> By contrast, exploitative fabrications primarily and ultimately serve the scopes of those who engineer them.

As regards the Ceausescus' trial, one can easily identify the fabricators. Yet who were the dupes? First and foremost those deceived were the Ceausescus. But taking into account the performative character of the trial (i.e., served to legitimize the new power), one might also designate as the dupes the larger public. However, in the category of the victims of the fabrication may enter some of the fabricators too. Before committing suicide, the President of the Panel of Judges in the trial allegedly stated he had the feeling the new government used him. Thus, it might be appropriate to classify the trial as an exploitative fabrication. However, Goffman's ([1974] 1986) sub-types are less refined so as to also include this particular situation. Moreover, the emotionality underlying the trial makes out of it an impure type of exploitative fabrication; although scripted, the trial would often go beyond the control of its scriptwriters.

Bearing in mind these difficulties in employing directly all aspects of Goffman's scheme, I propose a detour in order to render comprehensible the unfolding of this encounter. I begin by examining the various definitions of the situation shared by various participants at the trial. For purposes of clarification, I distinguish for the time being between two major teams of participants: on the one hand, there is the defendants' team and, on the other, the other participants.<sup>5</sup> Each of these teams would share specific definitions of the situation. Moreover, in the revolutionaries' team, we will encounter not one but several definitions of the situation as a result of this team's social heterogeneity. In particular moments the understandings that different participants had on “what actually was going on” would seriously damage the general image that the new authorities tried to foster (see, for instance, the strange acting of the Judge and of the Defense Attorney II).

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<sup>4</sup> One example of a benign fabrication is at the take over of the television station. Before going on air with the words “Brothers! Thanks to God we are here...” Ion Caramitru – a famous Romanian actor – gave staging cues to the dissident poet Mircea Dinescu: “Mircea, pretend that you are working [on the communiqué to the Romanian people – my note]!” Indeed, Dinescu acted as if he was very preoccupied with writing something. It was a benign fabrication done in the interest of those who were on the streets so as to ensure them that the situation is under control, that somebody already took charge of the country's businesses. Cameras also recorded the images with Caramitru (the actor) directing the Dinescu (the poet) but these images would become known to the larger public one-year later.

<sup>5</sup> A “team” refers to “any set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine” (1959:85). A performance is as an interaction between two teams, generally constituting the “performers” and the “audience.” As Goffman argues (1959), a team is not reducible to formal or informal groups. Despite hierarchical and functional divisions within a team, *each member of the team has the power to show away and disrupt it by inappropriate conduct*. Each team-mate is forced to rely on the good conduct and behavior of his fellows, and they, in their turn, are forced to rely on him” (Goffman, 1959:88; italics mine). Thus, maintaining *dramaturgical loyalty* is crucial to the success of any performances. In so doing, various mechanisms and strategies are employed such as staging cues, realigning etc.

Strictly focusing on the *prevailing definitions of the situation*, I trace some of the views that, very likely, the revolutionaries' group shared. First, the revolutionaries knew that they were there *to make justice in the name of the People*, members of which they claimed to be. Second, they knew that they *would be watched and judged by the People according to how they would serve justice*. Physically absent, the Romanian People were nonetheless present via the video camera. Third, given that the outcome of *the trial was taken-for-granted, the trial would be deemed as the last possible encounter with the Sultan*. For many participants, it also constituted a never before imagined chance to see from such a close distance the *Conducator (Leader)* in the flesh. The human curiosity, the temptation to glimpse "what lay behind the mask" or "what they were really like" would also influence the course and the tone of the interaction. Moreover, since the once all-mighty Tyrant was now reduced to harmless proportions, *it was also a unique chance for voicing one's deep frustrations* – portrayed as the People's reproaches – *without fear anymore*.

One definition of the situation that would be assiduously fostered was "making justice in the name of the Romanian People" and according to (imagined) Western democratic standards. For Ceausescu's team the proposed image of itself would be the one of reigning leaders whose positions were threatened by a plot. It is, however, a matter of speculation and of unanswerable dilemmas to what extent the Ceausescu actually believed or had been fully taken by the image they pictured. At least in the last part of the trial and especially short before the execution, the Ceausescu also performed for the People and History, remote and ambiguous audience(s). See for instance the following dialogue between Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu at the end of the trial:

[N. Ceausescu – while the Court was exiting]: [I say this] to those who performed the coup d'etat... Romania will live ever after and all the traitors, no matter how many they are ... Romania will live and also the free Romanian people, without traitors!

[After the exiting of court, the two are left in the room only with the cameraman and an officer guarding the door]

[N. Ceausescu – shortly glancing at the camera, and then turning to his wife]: Better to die in battle with full glory than as slaves! What an injustice!

[Elena Ceausescu]: And we had them in our hands! [Probably referring to the plotters – my note]

[N. Ceausescu]: We had them in our hands. That is the way in which it happens!

[Elena Ceausescu]: That is the way in which it happens!

[When the soldiers are trying to separate them before the execution]

[Elena Ceausescu]: No! We fought together we will die together!

(Ely & Stoica, 1995)

### **Making Justice in the Name of the People**

At this point it is worth noting the various connotations of making justice in the context of the Ceausescu's trial. A first connotation was to appeal to the rule of law, and to have them tried strictly "by the book." Appealing to nothing but the law also meant affirming the People's moral superiority by

comparison to the immorality of the Sultan, as expressed by his previous arbitrary abuses of power and law. However, the people on the streets would come to know only months later that both the duration of trial and its end had been pre-established by the representatives of the incoming power. Thus, the major task of the legal team (including here also the defense attorneys) was to fabricate – in Goffman's understanding – the trial. Such a fabrication by appealing to the rule of law also had the function of bringing legitimacy to the newly-installed authorities because, ultimately, as Hannah Arendt puts it:

those who get together to constitute a new government are themselves unconstitutional, that is, they have no authority to do what they set out to achieve (1963:183–184)<sup>6</sup>

But these repeated appeals to the rule of law proved to be ineffective in managing an otherwise already scripted event. Nicolae Ceausescu would also appeal to the rule of law, and to the Constitution. According to the latter, as the President, he could be dismissed and tried only by the Grand National Assembly (GNA):

[Judge]: We are judging according to the new law adopted by the Council of National Salvation Front (...)

[N. Ceausescu]: Read the Constitution!

[Judge]: We read it and we know it... And you are not in the position to chatter! We know it better than you, who didn't respected it!

[N. Ceausescu]: I am the President of the Socialist Republic of Romania, and the Supreme Commander of the Army Forces of the Socialist Republic of Romania and I answer according to my oath made before the Grand National Assembly and to the people and not in the front of those who have organized the coup d'etat with the help of foreign agencies. (Ely & Stoica, 1995)

Faced with such a denial, the legal team would employ various strategies to trap Ceausescu into the "court's reality."

[Defense Attorney I]: *Stand up*, whether you agree or not!

[Judge]: Also, the court is asking you to *stand up*!

Nevertheless, the Ceausescus would avoid being trapped into this reality:

[Judge]: Rise!

[Elena Ceausescu]: No, dear, *we are elderly people*!

[N. Ceausescu]: On one hand, I do not recognize you in any way, but *only as simple citizens, to all of you as simple citizens*

[Court clerk – reading from the record]: "I don't recognize the charges against me"

[N. Ceausescu]: No! *I have given no declaration!*

[N. Ceausescu]: I shall not answer! I shall not answer and, please, *do not consider this as an answer* to the question... (Ely & Stoica, 1995; italics added)

<sup>6</sup> I am again extremely grateful to John F. Ely for his suggestions on this possible use of Hannah Arendt's conception here and in what follows.

In their attempt to evade from the “reality” as defined by the court, the Ceausescus would emphasize their own definition of the situation and would stress sixteen times during the trial that he and his wife do not recognize the legality of the court. According to the Ceausescus, “what is actually going on” is a masquerade. Therefore,

[N. Ceausescu]: I am not a defendant, *I am the President of Romania*, and I shall answer only before the GNA and before the representatives of working-class and this is all, I’ve finished! These are all lies, from one end to another!”

Or,

[N. Ceausescu to his lawyer]: I have not recognized you as a lawyer!

[Elena Ceausescu to her lawyer]: I did not recognize your status. How can you come here and say things like these?!

After the handing down of the sentence,

[Defense Attorney I towards the Judge]: Please, allow me to contact them once again.

[N. Ceausescu]: But I do not recognize this court!

[Defense Attorney I]: By not recognizing the court, I am not allowed to appeal the sentence! Please do notify that in this case the sentence is definitive! (Ely & Stoica, 1995)

Probably, the most immediate and direct strategy of denying the Ceausescus’ definitions of the situation and their appeals to the rule of law was to *neutralize their performances*. One way of doing this was to re-word the former leader’s declarations, a practice in which the Judge would distinguish himself. For instance, the declarations of Nicolae Ceausescu were rephrased by the Judge and recorded by the court clerk as follows:

[The Court Clerk reading to N. Ceausescu “his” declaration]: “I do not recognize the charges against me. I refuse to answer to the question of who was responsible for the genocide in Timisoara. *I do not recognize* to have given, myself or my accomplices, orders to fire on the people in the Palace Square. No one has fired because I gave the order not to fire. I refuse to answer to the question ‘who recruited and directed the foreign mercenaries who are killing, even now, the peaceful population’. I refuse to answer to the questions of the Court. I do not recognize the new body of state power nor the organs that ‘*usurped*’ the power. The ‘*usurpation*’ of power has been made with the aid of foreign agencies. I do not recognize the new authorities, legally constituted authorities of state power, and I still am the President of the country and the Supreme Commander of the army. *I do not recognize that* I made the people to starve, on the contrary I’ve taken measures to give [ratios of] 200 kg of grain to the peasants.

“*I did not intend to destroy villages, I intended to modernize them. I do not recognize that* I have deposited, myself or in someone else’s name, a single dollar in foreign banks.” (Ely & Stoica 1995; italics added)

Yet each side’s appeals to the rule of law would often fall on deaf ears. At this point it is worthy of noting that – irony of fate! – the legality of the Exceptional Court originated in the decree by which Ceausescu instituted the state of emergency in the country. The legitimate front of the revolutionaries was thus difficult to impose or, at the very least, its credibility was threatened. Thus, there was the need to invoke supplementary and ultimate grounds for legitimacy. And, as in the case of other revolutionary movements, one such

ultimate ground was the People. Indeed, the People would represent the major source of legitimization for the revolutionaries. The term was invoked 37 times by the judge, the prosecutor and the defense attorneys, while Nicolae Ceausescu appealed to it only 4 times, and his wife 5 times. The sentence would be given in the name of the law and of the Romanian people. For the Ceausescus team the major pillars of their legitimacy were the Grand National Assembly, the working class and the workers.

There are nevertheless the questions of "Who the 'People' are?" and of "Who represents the 'People'?" In referring to the line "We hold these truths to be self-evident" in the Declaration of Independence, Hannah Arendt states that these famous words,

combine in a historically unique manner the basis of agreement between those who have embarked upon revolution, an agreement necessarily relative because related to those who enter it, with an absolute, namely with a truth that needs no agreement since, because of its self-evidence, it compels without argumentative demonstration or political persuasion (1963: 192–193)

Following Arendt's understanding, the use of the "People" – that is "We" – can be deemed as a performative act. But in the Romanian case it was not simply about an *ex nihilo* creation of the People, as in the case of the Declaration of Independence. Rather, it must be remembered that a prevailing vision in the Romanian communist regime was the one of " 'us' (the People) versus 'them' (rulers)." This pre-existent vision would acquire explicit expressions and would constitute a major pillar of the fabrication of the trial as "making justice in the name of the People."

#### **Dramatization of Evil and Rituals of Degradation**

So far I have discussed the Ceausescus' trial as a performance and as a performative act within the frameworks of "making justice in the name of the law and of the People." Yet it is hard to sustain that everything that happens in a courtroom is guided only by the Weberian principles of legal rationality. Although prevalent, the restitutive logic of punishment in modern societies is far from being the sole logic that interferes in making justice. As Frank Tannenbaum (1938) argued, there still is a great deal of emotionality involved in contemporary modes of administering justice. Such elements of irrationality usually gain expression as "dramatization of evil" in courtroom procedures. It is not only about identifying and sentencing a wrong-doer but also about picturing his/her acts as indicators of an evil character which must be expelled, both physically and spiritually, from the community.

In a quite Goffmanesque early writing, Harold Garfinkel (1956) also stated that in every society there are ceremonies in which an individual is chosen from the community, for whatever reason, to undergo a process that will replace his/her previous identity with a new, degraded one. Linking the ideas of Tannenbaum (1938) and Garfinkel (1956), it can be said that the courtroom

represents the ideal setting for a successful degradation ceremony via the dramatization of evil.

As I previously emphasized, in the Ceausescus' trial the justice makers shared several definitions of the situation. One dealt with processing the two defendants strictly by the book or, whenever the situation required it, by appealing to the will of the People. But, given its predetermined time and resolution, the trial was also an unique occasion to tell to the "beloved *Conducator* (Leader)" how the same People – as incarnated by the revolutionaries – really felt about him. Moreover, it was the last chance to find out what laid behind his and her masks. All these dilemmas and definitions of the situation would become translated into pursuing the logic of degradation rituals, and dramatization of evil that would often take the form of quarreling, cursing and mocking.

As Garfinkel puts it, the degradation ceremonies upon which courtrooms could claim a monopoly are to be read within the frames of sociology of moral indignation.

The paradigm of moral indignation is public denunciation. We publicly deliver the curse: 'I call upon all men to bear witness that he is not as he appears to be but is other wise and *in essence* of a lower species.' (Garfinkel, 1956: 241; italics in original)

There are several conditions to be fulfilled in order to have a successful degradation ceremony, i.e., to have one's identity not only changed but reconstituted into a degraded one (Garfinkel 1956:241). One condition refers to removing the "perpetrator" from the usual, previous frameworks and have him/her and his/her acts portrayed as "out of the ordinary," thus calling on moral indignation. In the Ceausescu's trial this condition would be more than fulfilled. Everything that Ceausescu and his wife would say would be hold against this backdrop of current violent actions against the People. Ironically, even when Ceausescu declared that he did not order to have the former Head of National Defense killed, nobody within the court, and, probably, in the larger internal audience would believe him. Yet the autopsy and the several investigations conducted after the Revolution confirmed that, indeed, the former head of the Romanian army committed suicide. But, when this was announced by Ceausescu's infamous communiqué, the prevalent vision was that the Tyrant eliminated the head of the army (General Milea) due to latter's alleged opposition to fire upon demonstrators. And, as I previously stated, this was allegedly the psychological turning point for the army's decision to switch to the side of the people.

Another mode of picturing the two perpetrators as out of ordinary was *to attack their previous fronts and actions*. This often meant relying on information from the back-stage of the leaders, such as their luxurious life style as opposed to the gray, poor conditions of life of the ruled:

[Judge]: All the figures [about their wealth and luxurious life – my note] are known...The holidays were true *feasts* when this defendant and her, they brought around them thugs and [they were

wearing] the *most luxurious dresses*. Even if the monarchy were around today, they would not dress with such decadence...

[Judge]: A last question, defendant: You were speaking about equality, that we are all equal and that everybody should receive what he deserves for his work. We saw on TV your daughter's *villa*. She had a *golden scale* with which she was weighing *meat brought from abroad*... *Our meat was not good enough for her?* [Meat and many other basic products, even medicines, were in extremely short supply in that time due to Ceausescu's decision to export them in order to pay external debts, and to balance the country's budget against the background of systemic economic crisis – my note]

[Elena Ceausescu]: Incredible! How can you say things like this?! She lives in an apartment as every citizen does...

[Judge]: Yeah, it was grandmother's villa!

[Elena Ceausescu]: Villa? What villa?! Nobody has villas! We stated this by law, by law! [that nobody can own a villa – my note]

[Judge]: You had palaces, you stole palaces and lived in them! (Ely & Stoica 1995; italics added)

As regards the attacks upon their actions as leaders of the country, the following examples are illustrative for the strategy of denouncing – in Garfinkel's (1956) terms – how the two behave “after all”:

[Judge]: All of us know the situation: *lack of medicines*, which *by your order* has caused people to die, children in hospitals without medicines, without food, without heat, without electricity! You didn't think about this?

[Judge]: *Why have you taken these actions to defile the people, to humiliate them, to bring them to such a state of humiliation?* Why have you exported all these products that peasants worked for? And the peasants came to Bucharest from all over the country to buy bread; those who produced the bread; those to whom you went and advised them [how to increase the production levels – my note].... *Why did you starve the people?* [Bread was also a rarity especially in rural areas – my note]

[Judge]: ...*The systematization of the villages* [the Ceausescu's plan to demolish villages in order to increase the area of cultivable land – my note] *has been the equivalent of destroying the Romanian peasant class*, destroying our old land! Did you ever think of this? “(Ely & Stoica, 1995 – italics added)

As Garfinkel (1956) states, another condition for a successful degradation ceremony is the total identification of the denouncer(s) with those who will witness the event. Moreover, the denouncer(s) or – to paraphrase Howard Becker (1963) – *the-moral-entrepreneur(s)-at-work* must be perceived as motivated in his/her actions by impersonal, public (not private) imperatives.

What the denouncer says must be regarded by the witnesses as true on the grounds of a socially employed metaphysics whereby witnesses assume that witness and denouncer are alike in essence (Garfinkel 1959:422)

As we have already seen, the Defense Attorney II fully impersonated such a *likeness* with the People. When faced with the Ceausescu's refusal to answer *to the court*, the Judge would also state that “[Ceausescu] refuses in fact to have a *dialogue with the People*.” Yet this profound identification of the legal

team with the remote witnesses, i.e., the People, would lead to the use of specific techniques of degradation.

One technique at hand was the common at that time practice in the Romanian justice system to address the defendants and even the witnesses by the impolite form of the second person personal pronoun “tu” (you). *To employ it in a courtroom meant to implicitly assign a lower status to the individual(s) appearing before the tribunal. It also had the significance of stressing the seriousness, solemnity of the business that happens in a courtroom; that is to say, it re-stated that in such a setting one is dealing with a “palpable” and powerful authority.* The Ceausescus would be also addressed by this impolite form as to make them understand, among many other things, that their power had vanished.

However, rather than following the line of gravity as presumed by a courtroom, the interaction would often transform into a quarrel, in a pure Balkan style. Thus, another technique that the legal team would abuse in degrading the two was common mocking:

[N. Ceausescu]: ... everything that has been said here is *false* [bad pronunciation – my note]

[Judge – mocking]: “It’s false...” *This is the way in which our President speaks!*

[Judge]: ...in all of the “*municipalities*” as you pronounced them, in all the “*municipalities*” that you have bragged that you built up yourself!

[N. Ceausescu]: ...*as simple citizens*

[Judge]: We are simple citizens and you are a simple president! What are you? (Ely & Stoica 1995; italics added)

But often, this mocking would be replaced by act of insulting, a much more direct form of expressing the real “boundless gratitude of the People”:

[Judge]: ...He is a *coward!* Both literary and figuratively! All the figures [about their wealth and actions – my note] are known to us. Her actions as well as his!

[Prosecutor attorney]: ...these two *tyrants*...

[Judge]: Here she is talkative but as I’ve seen her before, she was always reading. The academician, the scientist, the engineer... *the illiterate has become an academician!* [Elena Ceausescu allegedly was a famous chemist; the works published by her received international awards, and she received numerous titles of Doctor Honoris Causa for these works from prestigious foreign universities. The truth of the matter is that she barely graduated from primary school – my note].

[Judge]: ...All these books by the academic Elena Ceausescu, the so-called “*academic*”! (Ely and Stoica 1995; italics added)

All these degradation strategies, i.e., insulting, mocking, attacking previous front and actions, had the purpose (and the effect) of dramatizing the evil. In another light, it can also be stated that it was a concentrated effort to destroy the power as represented by the Ceausescus and, in this way, to bring legitimacy to the new authorities, legitimacy achieved mainly, if not only, by repeated negations. As Campeanu (1994 : 172) also stresses,

the entire Romanian Revolution of 1989 was more active in the *invalidation* of the symbols of the former regime, and [it] was less concerned with *the creation* of alternative, functional symbols, that is, durable symbols, widely embraced and socially recognized [my translation; italics added].

This was also the case with the Ceausescu's trial. Those who engineered the trial employed – more or less consciously – a wide arsenal of ritualistic actions in order to have the Ceausescu (the Evil) expelled from the body of the community.

#### Team Interactions

I have thus far discussed the trial as an interaction between two major teams, i.e., the Ceausescu's team vs. the revolutionaries' team. Yet the legal team was not in the same degree dramaturgically disciplined as the Ceausescu's team was. The attempts of the revolutionaries' team to maintain a unified front and a coherent definition of the situation were less successful. One explanation for this would be the pre-existent heterogeneity of the components, with – as its constituents declared – no previous involvement in staging out a similar single routine. Yet such a low quality performance of the legal team could signify something else, namely that we might be dealing with more than one team in the revolutionaries' group.

What were these, let me call them, sub-teams? One consisted of the new government's representatives. This team, as I have stressed, had a *directive dominance*, i.e., being *the director* of “making justice in the name of the People.” A second sub-team consisted of the legal representatives (i.e., the panel of judges, the defense attorneys, and the court clerk), who had *dramatic dominance*, and impersonated the authority for the audience. With the President of the Panel of Judges at its core, the performance of this sub-team evolution was fragmented, ambiguous, and contradictory. The definition of the situation it supposed to maintain was one of a legal-rational authority, immune to emotional arguments, deciding only on the basis of available evidence, and following the rule of law.

The most undisciplined members of this team were the defense attorneys. In particular moments, they would fail to sustain the intended image of impartiality (see, for instance, the statements of the defense attorneys I cited). Moreover, they would really endanger the set-forth “representation” because they seemed to know nothing about the public. For the defense attorneys, even the question “who are the new masters of the day?” seemed difficult to answer. As an illustration of this extreme ambiguity in *defining what is actually going on*, see below the faulty speech in the statement of the Defense Attorney I:

[Defense Attorney I towards N. Ceausescu]: In regard to your claimed status of a still-in-office President of Romania, from the moment when the... the Front of ... [DAI puts on his glasses and takes a paper] ... the Front of ... [reads from the paper with relief] the National Salvation Front. (Ely & Stoica 1995)

To all these one might add other parameters as to further discuss how difficult it was for the legal to maintain a unified front. The components of the legal team did not quite exactly belong to the category of the people in the name of whom they were making justice. The judges and the lawyers, in terms of their social positions, were not the “starved workers” or “poor peasants” they were invoking for picturing the profound inhumane character of the defendants. On the contrary, some of them, especially those from the Romanian Justice System, might have had important positions of power and privileges. They might have collaborated with the regime they were now stigmatizing. Hence, a quite crucial fact for the patterns of the performances in the trial: besides playing for the “camera” – thus for History, the People and the West – *the legal team overall and especially the lawyers were simultaneously performing for the new power, trying to ensure it that despite any possible counter-evidence, they are on the People’s side too.*

This may also explain to a certain degree why the legal team was so *zealous in degrading the Ceausescus*. In this respect, I cite below the repeated specifications of the Defense Attorney I, on the ingrate task he must accomplish by assisting these defendants. What one can read below is an example of *role distancing*:

[Defense Attorney I takes the stand]: Before discussing the legal problems that arise from the defendant’s resistance, *defendants that we are trying to assist in spite of their obstructionist position... I want to state that we honored them by coming from Bucharest to defend them, a legal defense that has been denied for the last 25–30 years... That we, as lawyers, understand the need to defend any person, regardless of what they have done, but within the legal limits and available evidence. I, even with their obstructionist position, have defended them (...)* Although *I have honored them* by defending them, they still adopt the position, which they have held from the start, that this is a provocation. (Ely & Stoica 1995; italics added)

By contrast, during the entire trial, the Ceausescus’ team fostered much more coherent and consistent definitions of the situation, and impressions of itself. In Goffman’s (1959) terms, the Ceausescus team proved to be dramaturgically disciplined, with less communication out of character, and more successful than the opposite team(s) in controlling crucial items of information that would have otherwise contrived the image they fostered (e.g. the official leaders of Romania, victims of a plot etc.) Yet the major problem the Ceausescus faced was the total distrust of the audience(s) in the same old part they were playing. For instance, at the present time there are many Romanians who see the 1989 Revolution as a second-level nomenklatura’s plot. But, at that very time, Nicolae Ceausescu’s repetition “it is a coup d’etat” was interpreted as another sign of his paranoia.

However, in the Ceausescus’ team, apparently Nicoale had both a dramatic dominance and a directive one. He would openly give staging cues to his wife to protect her and to ensure the success of their presentation (e.g., “Don’t speak!,” “Don’t answer!” etc.) As eyewitnesses declared, the Ceausescus would maintain their front even on the way to the execution place and before

the firing squad. Yet History and the West, i.e., camera, would record just the intense firing, two fallen bodies and a voice repeatedly shouting "Stop! Stop! Everybody ceases fire!"

### III. "Look Back in Anger?": Conclusions

If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction.  
Shakespeare

In December 1994, a national survey found that 51% of Romanians saw "December 1989 as a revolution." Another 30% of those interviewed thought that it was an "internal plot," while 16% deemed it as "an external plot" (Campeanu, 1994). However, thus far none of the public opinion polls asked Romanians about the Ceausescus' trial. Yet, as I mentioned, the trial continues to be a matter of debates in Romania.

Although the outcome of the trial was pre-established, its major directors and participants intended to offer to the larger public the image of a fair trial, conducted in accordance with what they thought of as Western legal-rationality. But the expertise of the legal teams was a result of their previous practices within the communist system of making justice. Thus, during the trial, the representatives of the legal system followed scripts and patterns of interaction similar to those of the "glorious" days of show trials back in early 1950s. This fact is visible especially through the degradation techniques the legal team employed (e.g., quarrelling, insulting, mocking etc.).

As I argued, these degradation practices also served to bring legitimacy to the incoming authorities. This is why the trial – a performance – also had a *performative character*. Moreover, I maintain that the trial was more than an encounter in which a particular Evil was named and expelled from the body of the community. One latent function of the trial was to identify the Good, i.e., the oppressed Romanian people and, especially, their new representatives. The judges of the Ceausescus were more than We-through-mandate incarnations of the People. These judges also performed so as to show and stress the moral right that "We, the People" had to treat the two Tyrants this way.

Another underlying assumption was that this unique encounter allows one to highlight and understand some of the essential features of the communist regime in Romania. Despite its forgone conclusion, it would be wrong to assume that the members of the legal team, although fabricating the event, were over-conscious, Machiavellian or that they strictly and successfully followed the "scripting" of the event. The zeal these people displayed in symbolically eliminating the Ceausescu couple had genuine, sincere roots. One vision that was prior to, and prevailed in the trial was "'us' (innocent ruled) versus 'them' (the crude rulers)." One may argue that in Poland, former Czechoslovakia or in Hungary a similar view prevailed. *Yet in the last years of the*

*communist regime, the sphere of “them” (i.e., the rulers) for Romanians was reduced to two persons: Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu. All the possible hardships, all the evil was perceived as deeply rooted in the thoughts and actions of the two. At this point, Linz and Stepan’s (1996) notion of Totalitarianism-cum-Sultanism is appropriate for describing the extreme personalized and arbitrary rule of Ceausescu in the late 1980s.*

Hence, one can read the Romanian Revolution of 1989, and the Ceausescu’s trial as a moment of rage, first and the foremost directed against two persons, i.e., Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife (Jowitt 1992; Verdery and Kligman 1992). It is, however, true that in the evening of December 22, 1989, when the incoming leader Iliescu attempted to read a list with the new government, people in the Palace Square were shouting “Without communists anymore!” and “Down with communism!” But, nevertheless, what the crowds all over the country primary wanted was to expel, to eliminate the Evil, i.e., the Ceausescus. Given that any coherent opposition groups were virtually absent, as Linz and Stepan stress,

it was exactly the sultanistic component of Nicolae Ceausescu’s regime that enabled Iliescu to present Ceausescu as the embodiment of the system and to imply that he, Iliescu [Ceausescu’s successor – my note], *had changed the political and economic system completely by decapitating the ‘hydra-headed monster’* (1996: 358; italics added)

Yet, as post-revolutionary events in Romania have shown, this has not exactly been the case. The physical elimination of the Conducator (Leader) did not suddenly change the Romanian realities. On the contrary, there are many of the Ceausescu’s legacies, such as those in the sphere of mentalities that Romania has to overcome. Probably the most severe legacy has been the lack of legitimacy. I have shown in these pages how prior patterns of interactions and understandings of authority dramatically influenced the unfolding of the trial. But, in its turn, this particular encounter has nevertheless affected Romania’s post-socialist transition. Ultimately, I maintain that in this trial no one succeeded to have a legitimate claim to authority. It is exactly this failure to create a legitimate new power that has troubled Romania’s democratization process; the violent events of Romania’s transition in 1990–1991 could be seen within the frameworks of this lack of legitimacy. Examples of such events are: the students’ marathon demonstration against the new government which began in April 23, 1990 and was violently ended by the Police and the miners from Jiu Valley, called by Ion Iliescu in June 13–15, 1990; the overthrow of the first democratically elected government by – again – the miners from Jiu Valley in the fall of 1991; the numerous anti-Iliescu demonstrations (1990–1992) organized by the then democratic opposition, which accused the new leader of confiscating and betraying the Revolution.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For an extremely insightful approach on Romania’s first eleven months of tumultuous transition, see Verdery and Kligman 1992.

However, there still is the question of how much Romanianness was involved in the making of this trial. Such a question asks "is there something specific about Romanians, which impeded them to have a decent, honorable trial, as did Germans with Honecker?" To answer this, I quote the following headlines from the daily *Ziua (The Day)*, July, 30, 1997: "The Cambodians re-make the Ceausescu scenario: The ABC television broadcasts the video with the trial of Pol Pot." On the same topic, The International Herald Tribune, July 30, 1997 states that "The Khmer Rouge guerrillas who tried Mr. Pol Pot had debated beforehand whether to execute him – the usual fate of his opponents" (p.4). *Deja vu?*

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