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Published in the collection “Routledge Histories of Central and Eastern Europe,” Dennis Deletant’s book *Romania under Communism: Paradox and Degeneration* is an exhaustive and diligently researched account of Romania’s history of the twentieth century, as well as a detailed chronicle of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s descent from utopia into dystopia. Although it is organized chronologically, in the second part the author arranges the arguments around compliance and dissent vis-à-vis the regime. In his profound analysis, he often brings up the same events and details in more than one context to illustrate more vividly various historical interpretations. The richness of detail and factual information makes it hard to select points that may be more noteworthy than others, and thus, it is up to the careful reader to discover and appreciate fully the experience offered by Deletant’s book *Romania under Communism*.

From the first part of the book, the reader learns important facts about the period before the installation of communism. It is largely known that the Romanian Communist Party was in fact on the fringes of Romanian politics before the end of the Second World War, lacked popularity, and was seen as a tool of the Soviet Union. The Party became part of the Moscow-based Communist International (Comintern) after internal struggles between minimalist and maximalist factions in May 1921 and was banned on April 11, 1924 for twenty years (5). While many people may know about the events of the time, Deletant’s analyses of the various twentieth century regimes engender a better understanding of the flow of history.

For the generations born in Romania under totalitarianism, as well as people in countries that have never experienced such a regime, chapter 2 explains King Michael’s coup and the circumstances surrounding this important historical moment. The young king acted with patriotism, at a time when Marshal Antonescu’s regime had narrow popular support but was loyal to Germany. King Michael knew that the lack of Allied presence in the Balkans left Romania undefended in case of German occupation, as shown in a letter by French Minister Henri Spitzmuller to Sir Hughes Knatchbull-Hugessen, the British Ambassador to Turkey (29). In general, the Communist Party’s role in the *coup* was exaggerated, and the Communists denied any credit to the King and the major historical parties for it. Deletant explains that the real events surrounding “the King’s crucial act in ordering the arrest of Marshal Antonescu on 23 August 1944, was largely unknown in Romania before the overthrow of the Communist regime” (42). This demystification is possible today due to accounts by contemporaries of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and Gheorghe Gheorgiu-Dej.

Romania missed a number of opportunities to avoid the totalitarianism implemented by Soviet Russia. Chapter 3, “The Application of the Totalitarian Blueprint,” offers the necessary insight into the gradual yet violent installation of communism in post-war Romania. The author documents the moments when governments were formed and dissolved, when the King was forced by M. Vyshinsky to accept the Petru Groza government of March 6, 1945. Clark Kerr, the

British ambassador to Moscow, decried the Soviet politics in Romania as it was “out of harmony” with the Crimea declaration (58). The purge of the justice system started with the dismissal of 1,000 magistrates in April 1945, and by May, Groza told British journalist Archie Gibson that 90,000 Romanians had been arrested (a figure Deletant admits could not be verified) (59). Romania’s young King Michael was worried and asked Britain and the United States for help, but after the Moscow Conference of December 1945, Soviet Russia’s dominance over Romania was clear, with the tacit, passive approval of Britain and the United States.

What followed in the aftermath of the Second World War equates with another coup that aimed at taking over the country. After King Michael’s forced abdication on December 30, 1947, the Soviets blatantly disrespected the terms of the Crimea declaration, and with the fusion of the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party, by the following year, the Stalinist model of annihilation became the rule. In April 1948, a new constitution that followed the 1936 Russian constitution was established, and a series of legislative decrees and amendments, modeled after Soviet ones, were implemented in 1948 to help with the repression of any resistance (64). The parliament comprised a single chamber, called the Grand National Assembly; however, the Communist Party ruled over all the governmental bodies. Chapter 3 also depicts, in great detail, the changes in and control over religious institutions and the overall takeover of society at large.

In chapter 4, “The *Securitate* as an Instrument of Coercion,” Deletant shows how Communist Romania was coerced to turn its face eastwards, which meant adopting “the Stalinist practice of mass arrests and imprisonment without trial” (105). Deletant describes the composition of the *Securitate* and explains how it became the feared yet effective instrument in Communist Romania over the following decades. Apart from surveilling the population, the *Securitate* had a section called the “Office for Issuing Entry-Exit Visas and Passports to Romanian Citizens” through which a passport was conditioned on collaboration with the secret service—a practice that remained effective until the fall of Ceaușescu in 1989.

In the same chapter, Deletant also briefly discusses an important piece of right wing propaganda: as early as 1991, known extremist and Ceaușescu sycophant Corneliu Vadim Tudor claimed, in a *România Libera* article, that the *Securitate* was mostly comprised of Hungarians and Russian Jews (93); this indeed remains to this day an often cited misinformed argument of the right. In this sense, Deletant provides figures that demonstrate the inaccuracy of this claim: out of 3,379 *Securitate* employees in 1950, 247 were Hungarians (mostly in Transylvanian areas) and 338 were Jews. Deletant’s explanation about the reasons for more minorities in the *Securitate* is essential for understanding the *zeitgeist* and for deconstructing this still prominent argument of the right-wing propaganda claims that communism was brought to Romania by Russian Jews. In fact, the two main reasons contributing to large numbers of minorities and blue collar workers in the Communist structures of the time are as follows: first, the Soviets distrusted the educated Romanians because of “Antonescu regime’s alliance with Germany,” and second, Romanians had shown little interest in the Romanian Communist Party before it came to power (93).

Consequently, the historical context surrounding cold statistics should not be conveniently neglected for political expediency.

Chapters 5 and 6 are about Gheorghiu-Dej's struggle for dominance in the Party and his success by showing loyalty to Moscow, his instrumental role in the removal of Ștefan Foriș ("murdered"), Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu ("executed after a cursory trial"), and Ana Pauker ("reduced to a state of political corpse") (114). Gheorghiu-Dej intended to have Gheorghe Apostu as his successor. Apostu had written a letter for publication in *Scânteia*, in which he criticized censorship and the politicization of the entire society; however, the letter was never published. Ceaușescu acceded to power and continued the de-Stalinization and the foreign policy that made him appreciated by the West in the first years.

The book continues by depicting the actions the *Securitate* enforced, namely arrests without warrants, the purging of "enemies of the people," mass deportations from various areas of the country (105), but also the acts of resistance by peasants opposing collectivization. These are widely known by now and discussed in the post-communist public spheres, as are the resistance efforts. However, Deletant offers an important chronicle of the repression in chapter 7, "The Romanian Gulag," where he discusses the many places of detention and the Pitești experiment in great detail. At Pitești, the goal was the "re-education" of the prisoners by cruel torture, often inflicted by fellow prisoners. Deletant fittingly calls the Pitești experiment an "enormity," "of grotesque originality," and "the nadir of deliberate degradation;" it started on December 6, 1949 under Alexandru Nicolski of the *Securitate* and lasted until August 1952 (184). The Pitești experiment remains largely unknown to the West to this day, as the author acknowledges.

Deletant dedicates chapter 8 to the resistance and begins with a necessary reprisal of the common opinion that Romanians offered little resistance to Communism: "to accuse Romanians, as many commentators did, of being 'weak' and 'timorous,' showed an ignorance of internal realities in their country. Such accusations were based on a *seemingly* complete absence of challenge to the Communist regime in Romania in comparison with the events in Poland and East Germany in the early 1950s, the uprising in Hungary in 1956, or with the workers' union in Poland in the 1980s. The unchallenged acceptance of these accusations is precisely a measure of the success of the *Securitate* in preventing information about resistance to the regime from leaking out to the West. Virtually nothing was known in the West of the defiant struggle in the Carpathian Mountains of small bands of partisans led by Gheorghe Arnesescu, Toma Arnăoțiu and Ion Gavrilă-Ogoreanu" (205).

In chapter 9, Deletant discusses the decade of autonomy between 1956 and 1965. According to a U.S. army intelligence report of 1950, two divisions of Soviet troops were stationed in Romania, "totaling 30,000 troops, supplemented by a 2,000-strong security force" (216). Then, when Ceaușescu came to power, he also removed the *Securitate* from the Ministry of the Interior and put it under the Party—a move that greatly contributed to the society's politicization. The years that followed after Ceaușescu's ascend to power saw some economic revival due to the middle

class of technocrats resulted from the years of industrialization, as shown in chapter 10. Unfortunately, Ceaușescu failed to reform the country or to allow its move toward market socialism, and instead opted for keeping a monopolized central planning (251).

In chapter 11, “Ceaușescu’s Development of Autonomy,” Deletant describes the Party leader’s continuation of “national communist” policies started by his predecessor, Gheorgiu-Dej, namely a “rapid industrialization accompanied by an autonomous line in foreign policy” manifested in a neutral position between the Soviet Union and China. Ceaușescu also led the West to believe there was an “apparent breach in the Communist Bloc” when Romania exchanged ambassadors with West Germany did not discontinue diplomatic relations with Israel after the Six-Day War. He also criticized the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia—a bold move that gained him respect around the world (255) and which also made many intellectuals support him. For instance, as explained later in the book, dissident Paul Goma enrolled in the Communist Party after Ceaușescu’s defiance towards Russia at the time.

Romania also sought to develop its nuclear capability, but the United States restricted any nuclear trade because of Romania’s open criticism regarding the Vietnam war at the United Nations, until U.S. president Richard Nixon visited Romania in 1969 and subsequently approved “Romania’s bid for a heavy water plant” (256). Ceaușescu, however, adopted Canadian technology for building a five-unit power plant at Cernavoda, on the Danube, which started in 1980. In the aftermath of the Prague invasion, Ceaușescu created the Patriotic Guards trained to defend the country, and the Council for State Security (CSS) developed a plan for a nationwide armed resistance and for his possible escape, in extremis, to a foreign country. In this must-read chapter, Deletant provides remarkable details about the various plans the CSS established in case the Soviets wanted to remove Ceaușescu from power, and which were allegedly followed even during the 1989 Revolution. At the same time, the Soviets had a plan called *Dnestr* to “replace Ceaușescu with a senior member of the RCP faithful to Moscow” (263). The chapter also dedicates a section for details on the psychiatric treatments applied to dissidents in mental institutions as a repressive method.

Chapter 12, “The Paradox of Foreign Policy,” details the successes of Ceaușescu’s foreign policy by securing the greatest number of visits to the United States among the members of the Warsaw Pact and a much discussed visit to the United Kingdom in 1978. It also provides extraordinary statistics on the numbers of Jews and Germans exchanged for hard currency with Israel and Germany, respectively, as well as the situation of minorities throughout the years, including the Roma minority. Deletant rightly argues that Ceaușescu mismanaged the domestic policy by neglecting the needs of the people and by falling prey to a cult of personality he came to admire during his visits to China and North Korea in 1971. As prosperous as the country was in the 1960s and 1970s, it became impoverished by growing trade deficits after that. The USSR seemingly punished Romania by according it the smallest number of subsidies and by refusing to grant Romania similar ruble trade credits during 1975–84, as it did to other countries of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). At the same time, the USSR refused to give

Romania the same favorable terms in purchasing oil as it did the other countries of the CMEA. Deletant posits that what contributed to Ceaușescu's failure to "live up to the promise he showed in the late 1960s" was a worsening economic situation compounded with the practice of surrounding himself with "yes-men" and "pliant cardboard characters" (286).

In chapter 13, "Promoting National Identity: Transylvania and Bessarabia," Deletant explains that these two regions were always used to "counterbalance" each other in the "triangular relationship between Romania, Hungary and the Soviet Union" (295). Ceaușescu continued the line of strengthening the "national consciousness" and, as Deletant points out, if Gheorghiu-Dej had an integration policy toward minorities, Ceaușescu's was closer to assimilation (300). The parallel between these regions remains an open question today, when Moldova is independent and when Budapest can invoke its interest in Transylvania as soon as Romania shows interest in a possible reunification with Moldova/Bessarabia (301). Deletant rightly observes that these subjects remain "emotive in contemporary Romanian politics" (318). The avid reader of history will find in this chapter fascinating details about the rhetoric between Ceaușescu and the Soviets on the issue of Bessarabia. The chapter details how the Communist Party chased to Amsterdam a newly discovered manuscript by Karl Marx. We find out that historian Constantin Giurescu wrote a pamphlet article under the pseudonym Petre Moldoveanu. Deletant also explains the reasons behind Marin Preda's depiction of Marshal Ion Antonescu as a "tragic figure."

In chapter 14, "Compliance with the Regime," Deletant explains that Ceaușescu's regime was so oppressive that compliance came hand in hand with society's politicization: in the 15 years after Ceaușescu's ascent to power, the Communist Party membership almost doubled. This mainly happened because professional advancement was conditioned by Party membership. Here, the historian analyzes literary texts and lists the sycophantic epithets some writers used to describe Ceaușescu, explaining that the cult of personality was supported by many writers, who were in turn recompensed with more exposure in the school textbooks.

Chapter 15, "Dissent," starts by making a necessary distinction between dissent and non-conformism—a nuance that Deletant applies in his analysis of the intellectual resistance. It is known that the only acts of dissent comparable to those in Poland or Hungary were the 1977 miners' strike in the Jiu Valley and the 1987 factory workers' in Brașov, about which Deletant again provides detailed accounts. However, these revolts were not even mentioned in the Romanian press. Thus, when Paul Goma and Doina Cornea sent open letters to the West, they signaled that not everyone was compliant in the Communist country. The chapter ends with an Appendix containing all the letters—a valuable resource for scholars who continue to research the relationship between the totalitarian regime and the intellectual discontent with it.

In chapter 16, "Repression, Degeneration and Isolation," Deletant points out the paradox of Ceaușescu's change throughout the years from being against Brezhnev's antiquated ways in the late 1960s to embracing the "Brezhnev doctrine" by the 1980s when Gorbachev proposed the new socialism. Throughout his rule, Ceaușescu used the *Securitate* to oppress the population

while at the same time employing “shortsighted economic policies” (422), the cult of personality for himself and his wife, the systematization of Bucharest that destroyed historical buildings and churches, the destruction of villages, and the terror against the dissenters. The chapter depicts the regime’s human rights abuses and the circumstances of Ion Mihai Pacepa’s defection to the United States in July 1978, which Deletant deems as “one of the greatest blows in this sense ever delivered to an East European intelligence agency” (443). Pacepa was the “deputy head of the DIE (Departamentul de Informatii Externe) [...], the foreign intelligence agency of the *Securitate*, and a deputy minister of the Interior” as well as “one of the highest-ranking intelligence and security officials ever to defect from the Soviet bloc;” this event did a lot of damage to Ceaușescu’s image and triggered significant changes (443-448). Subsequently, Ceaușescu raised the wages for the *Securitate* lieutenants to 7,800 lei in December 1989, more than those for the military and “more than double the average,” and gave them access to shops “reserved for senior Party members” (455). Particularly chilling are details regarding the orders to suppress voices of dissent, such as the violence perpetrated against journalists at Radio Free Europe, which included a bomb attack, and even against Nobel-prize winner Herta Müller, who was a “notable target of the *Securitate*” (453). The chapter dedicates a large section to Decree 770 of 1966, which was the cause for the death of 10,000 women from “unsafe abortions . . . post-abortion hemorrhage and blood poisoning” (459). In Deletant’s words, the family planning measures show “[t]he degree of Ceaușescu’s intrusion into the lives of individuals” (458). The dictator’s “systematization plan” of halving the number of villages in the country was “seized upon with . . . alacrity by the international media.” Indeed, Deletant calls the plan to demolish almost 7,000 villages “one of the thousands of exhortations made by Ceaușescu to the Romanian people” (459).

It is no surprise that chapter 17, “Revolution,” contains extraordinary analyses on all aspects of the events of 1989. The author—who had been *persona non grata* in Romania before the fall of Ceaușescu—was a consultant to the BBC chief foreign affairs correspondent Jim Simpson in Romania when, in January, General Victor Stănculescu asked for a meeting with him. In the interviews the BBC obtained in those days, General Stănculescu gave a detailed account of those days in December 1989, including everything he knew first-hand about the escape, capture, trial, and execution of the Ceaușescu couple. Information about the tumultuous events has surfaced in the years immediately after the Revolution. To this day, however, not much is known about the so-called “terrorists” or snipers mentioned in the press and in the discourses of the new leadership of the time. As Deletant mentions more than once in the book, of the 800 suspected “terrorists” arrested by the army, not one was brought to justice and were in fact all freed during 1990 (505). At the time of the Revolution, in Bucharest, apart from the over 1,000 security forces and the elite forces of the presidential Protection Group, there were units of “USLA troops based at the provincial airports and who were “trained in urban warfare” (456).

In the “Epilog” and the “Conclusion,” Deletant analyzes the consequences of the Revolution and some answers to the question asked by many in the West regarding Romanians’ lack of

resistance to Communism. He gives four answers that all weigh in differently: no focal point for opposition, consequences of the former “foreign imperial rule” over a timid population, Orthodox faith and fatalism, and the efficiency of the *Securitate* (526). He ends the “Conclusion” by praising Doina Cornea’s resistance when she countered the regime’s materialistic ideology with spirituality, and when she called on teachers to “accustom [students] to thinking more freely, more courageously, more conscientiously, and more generously” (529). The author expresses hope when he ends the chapter by saying that Ceaușescu’s downfall made room for Cornea’s wishes to come true for the new generations.

Particularly for people who had never learned in school about the truths surrounding the circumstances of the installation of Communism in Romania, or for those who learned a censored version of history before 1990, Deletant’s book brings an abundance of details to fill the gaps. This fascinating book contains in the first part a section called “Biographies of Key Figures” with details about important figures, and in the last part, 9 appendices. Certainly, researchers, historians, academics, scholars, and experts in various fields, as well as the public at large—both in Romania and elsewhere—will find this book a seminal one. A formidable addition to public, private, and personal libraries, *Romania under Communism* sheds light on the country’s history and political issues during the dark period of what the author calls “a political experiment” that the USSR imposed in the region in a coercive manner (xxxii). The avid reader of history will read this book maybe more than once. I certainly will.

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