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Adrian Teodor Popan

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The ABC of Sycophancy. Structural Conditions for the Emergence of Dictators' Cults of Personality

Committee:

Michael Young, Supervisor

Mounira Charrad

Alexander Weinreb

Ari Adut

Zoltan Barany

The ABC of Sycophancy; Structural Conditions for the Emergence of Dictators'

Cults of Personality

By

Adrian Teodor Popan, B. Philology, M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Texas at Austin

August 2015

The ABC of Sycophancy. Structural Conditions for the Emergence of Dictators' Cults of
Personality

Abstract

Adrian Teodor Popan, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Michael Young

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify the structural conditions necessary for a cult of personality of state leaders to develop. I define the cult of personality of state leaders as quantitatively exaggerated and qualitatively extravagant public demonstration of praise of the leader. Although the subject has interested several disciplines, which produced a vast literature, bringing valuable insight for the study of the phenomenon, the causal explanations proposed so far are unsatisfactory, either because they cannot be generalized to all known cases, or because they cannot explain the lack of personality cults in otherwise similar dictatorships. Integrating the literature and further exploring the phenomenon from a historical comparative sociology perspective, I outline a causal explanation which avoids both pitfalls identified in the literature. Thus, I am confident that my theory is reliable, explaining all known cases of personality cults, and valid, as I test it against negative cases. The explanation presupposes a combination of necessary, but not sufficient, structural condition, and a path dependent chain of events which, together, lead to the cult formation. As stated, the present dissertation focuses only on the structural conditions. Starting from a thick description of the personality cult of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, and testing the theory by comparing it with other cases of personality cults, I identify three necessary conditions: a particular combination of patrimonialism and clientelism, lack of dissidence, and systematic falsification pervading the society's culture. Personality cults of state leaders depend on the presence of all three stated conditions.

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Abbreviations

ARLUS – Asociația Română pentru Strângerea Legăturilor cu Uniunea Sovietică (Romanian Association for Strengthening the Ties with Soviet Union), cultural and propagandistic pro-communist association founded on 20 October 1944, and active until 1964.

CC – The Central Committee of any communist party, its highest collective ruling echelon

Cominform – Communist Information Bureau, the information agency of the Communist and Worker's Parties, an international communist organization created in the aftermath of the dissolution of Comintern, with the purpose of coordinating the activities between communist parties, under Soviet direction. The headquarters were in Belgrade between its foundation, in 1947, and 1948, then in Bucharest until it dissolved in 1956.

Comintern – The Third Communist International, an international communist organization with headquarters in Moscow, with the stated goal to fight against the international bourgeoisie, and the instauration of worldwide socialism; active between 1919 and 1943.

CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union

GDR – German Democratic Republic (1949 – 1990)

GNP – Gross National Product, an economic statistic measuring the net income of a country's residents in a given year

Gulag – acronym for Главное Управление Исправительно-трудовых Лагерьей (Russian for Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps), designating the system of labor camps and political prisons in the Soviet Union

Komsomol – the youth division of the CPSU, active between 1918 and 1991.

Komsomolist – member of the Komsomol

MGB – Ministry of State Security, the Soviet Intelligence Agency (see NKVD)

NEP – New Economic Policy, an economic policy instituted by V. I. Lenin in 1921, allowing small private enterprises, while the state controlled the banks, foreign trade, and large industries. It was halted by Stalin and substituted with the Five-Year Plans in 1928

NKVD – People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the Soviet Secret Police (1934-1943). Throughout history, it is known under the following abbreviations, marking various changes in its institutional form: VCHEKA (or CHEKA) 1917-1922, GPU (1922-1926), OGPU 1926-1934, NKVD (1934-1943), NKGB (1941-1946), MGB (1943-1954), and KGB (1954-1991)

NSDAP - Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, the German Nazi Party (1920 – 1945), led by Adolf Hitler between 1921 and 1945

RCP – Romanian Communist Party; I use the same abbreviation throughout the dissertation to emphasize the de facto continuity, despite the following changes in denomination: Communist Party of Romania (1921-1948), Romanian Workers’ Party (1948-1965), Romanian Communist Party (1965-1989)

SA – Sturmabteilung, the paramilitary wing of the NSDAP, played an important role in Hitler's rise to power between 1921 and 1934, when it was superseded by SS, formerly a faction of SA

UTC – Uniunea Tineretului Comunist (The Union of the Communist Youth): the youth organization of the RCP, active between 1922 and 1989. Between 1949 and 1965 it functioned under the title Union of Working Youth;

Zek – political prisoner in Soviet Union; originally as з/к, an abbreviation for заключённый каналоармеец, meaning inmate worker at the White Sea – Baltic Canal

1. Introduction

In his famous *Secret Speech* held in February 25, 1956 at the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev denounced the cult of personality that surrounded Stalin, placing the blame solely on the dictator himself: “the cult of the individual acquired such monstrous size chiefly because Stalin himself, using all conceivable methods, supported the glorification of his own person” (Khrushchev 1976:67). Khrushchev’s interpretation is symptomatic not only of the view of the cult of personality in popular culture, but also in academic literature. I argue that, on the contrary, the dictator is not the most important actor; rather, the creation of a cult of personality is a bottom-up process, allowed by structural conditions and triggered by individual members of a pseudo elite, unable to challenge the dictator’s position, but willing to secure powerful positions for themselves.

Like Stalin, many of the 20th century dictators were surrounded by praise, seemingly in a direct correlation: the unhappier they made their own subjects by their dictatorial rules, the more shameless the odes raised to them in the mass-media and the bigger the festivities in their honor. Examples such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Enver Hoxha, François Duvalier, Rafael Trujillo or Jean-Bédél Bokassa– to name just a few – show the seriousness of the phenomenon, and its wide geographical spread. The problem becomes even more intriguing when one keeps in mind that other dictators, or state leaders in totalitarian societies, like Pol Pot and János Kádár, did not have cults of personality.

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify the necessary structural conditions for the formation of personality cults of state leaders. While personality cults have only been recorded in authoritarian societies, as the concise enumeration in the previous paragraph shows, the personality cult is not the product of any one type of dictatorship alone. Some of the communist, fascist, and post-colonial dictatorships developed personality cults of their leaders, while others did not, thus revealing no correlation between the ideology of the dictatorship and the probability of a cult to rise. Unlike previous study on personality cults, I employ the historical-comparative method in sociology in order to uncover the structural similarities across regime types. This strategy increases the generalizability of the findings, and strengthens the confidence that I identify the real causes of the phenomenon, and avoid being derailed by ideological considerations.

Is the cult of personality of state leaders worth studying? Is it still relevant, or was it a characteristic of the 20th century politics that will not likely be repeated in the 21st century? To answer this question, I would point to a September 2009 Fox news report that children of an elementary school in New Jersey were taught songs in praise of the president Barack Obama. Was this really a sign of the initiation of a personality cult, or just a mistake of an overenthusiastic teacher? Are we witnessing the creation of personality cults right now in Putin's Russia?

Unfortunately, the cult of personality of state leaders is often recognized too late. Scholarly research on the subject has brought valuable insight, but it has been largely limited to single-case studies evaluated for short periods of time, which have limited

generalizability and have not addressed the structural conditions that permit the formation of personality cults.

I will outline my causal argument in the next chapter. In Chapter 3, I will present a review of literature and an overview of the problem. Chapter 4 is devoted to a description of the method suited to this study. Throughout the findings section of this dissertation (chapters 5 to 7), I will closely describe the three necessary conditions for the formation of personality cults, focusing on Ceaușescu's case, and tested with evidence from other cases. Finally, in the conclusions section I will assess the potential for generalizability of my argument.

* * *

For me, researching this topic has a personal stake. As I grew up in Romania, during Ceaușescu's cult, I vividly recollect my attitude about the events I witnessed. And, honestly, the adult I am today cannot understand the kid I was back then. For instance, from my recollection of conversations with my classmates in the secondary school it is apparent that not only myself, but all of us considered the cult as normal, since we believed that all countries – socialist and capitalist alike – had a “supreme commander” who was celebrated through parades and encomiastic literature, and in the same time subject to malicious jokes in the everyday conversations of their citizens. I feel even more uneasy about another memory: in the first days following the 1989 Revolution, the Romanian Television, now free, switched from its previous broadcast of about two hours a day, almost entirely dedicated to “the most beloved son of the fatherland” and his family, to a more diverse broadcast, alternating news with entertainment. Petre Magdin,

then a presenter for the Romanian Television, introduced a video-clip of the song *The Cult of Personality* by American band *Living Colour*, by stating that we should fight to prevent any future instance of a personality cult in Romania. His statement took me by surprise, simply because I did not know what the phrase “cult of personality” meant. This seems pretty strange for somebody who spent his entire life in an environment dominated by such a phenomenon. Much like the head of the personnel department of the Ryazan Province Education Department, from *The Gulag Archipelago*, who “was seriously under the impression that the cult of personality had been proclaimed only in 1956, [so it couldn’t] have been there in 1945” (Solzhenitsyn 1974, vol. II:345). Because I feel – obviously – uneasy with these memories, the research for the present dissertation has also a cathartic function at the personal level.

2. The Argument

The beauty and the challenge of the comparative-historical method in sociology is that it does not prescribe a certain mode of causal argumentation (explanation or interpretation), neither a certain type of argument (structural, cultural, or individual), nor a certain level of inquiry (micro, mezzo, or macro). By contrary, in order to thoroughly compare the positive and the negative cases, the researcher has to put aside any known preconception, and carefully select those elements common only to the positive cases, prior to formulating any causal statement. More than any other method, comparative-historical sociology has to follow the logic of discovering grounded theory. In fact, the grounded theory approach, initially devised five decades ago (Glaser and Strauss 1965; Glaser and Strauss 1967) is only effective when systematic comparison of multiple cases enables the researcher to structure rough data and sediment it into a causal statement. Furthermore, starting from in-depth study of one case, followed by comparisons with other positive and negative cases, requires a thick description of the focal case (Geertz 1973). Prior to identifying the causal mechanisms, the researcher needs to devote attention to understanding the context, capturing all relevant structural, cultural, and political mechanisms and their meanings for the relevant actors, even those that do not look related to the dependent variable from the surface.

For a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon I study, in this section I will outline the complete causal argument. Nonetheless, in order for the dissertation to be manageable, in what follows I will only focus on the structural conditions necessary for

the cult of personality to develop. While none of the conditions identified in this dissertation is sufficient to create a personality cult, the right combination, when all three conditions are present, constitute the fundament of any personality cult of a state leader. Moreover, if a personality cult is to be prevented, it is critical to recognize the structural conditions. When the path-dependent mechanism has been set in motion, it is already too late.

My argument begins with the structural/cultural conditions which permit the cult of personality to rise, and follows the development of the cult in four moments, possibly, yet not necessarily, aided by a powerful catalyst. Thus, the structural conditions I consider important for the creation of a cult are:

C1: patrimonial and clientelar exercise of power is traditionally accepted by the members of the society;

C2: the leader's position is not challenged; there is virtually no dissidence, the legitimacy of the ruling group cannot be challenged;

C3: the society susceptible to creating a cult of personality is already dominated by a systematic web of lies, known as *tukhta*, a term borrowed from the argot of the early Soviet Union's political prisoners (Solzhenitsyn 1974).

Catalyst: the leader has a charismatic moment, which garners him popular support for a short time;

The path dependent chain of creation of the cult of personality can be represented as follows:

M1: self-interested individuals – the immoral innovators – attempt to gain his sympathy, which comes accompanied by a share of power over other individuals; in order to do so, they perform the comedy of adulating the leader;

M2: other individuals – the professional sycophants – follow the steps of the innovators;

M3: due to the accumulation of professional sycophants, the rewards for publicly praising the leader decreases, and at the same time the punishment for not doing so increases; eventually, everybody will be forced to join the chorus of sycophancy;

M4: the leader internalizes the cult of personality, and requires for himself more and more extravagant praise, using the state apparatus to enforce it.

The moment at which the cult of personality originates is M1, and it occurs at the level of individual agents. Some individuals sense that the only opportunity for upward mobility consists in being rewarded by the leader, and attempt to seize it. Due to the balance of power already established, their front stage performance – no matter how phony – cannot be openly challenged by other individuals without major risks. As soon as they are rewarded by an infatuated or credulous leader, they will have followers, who, as their number increases, will race among themselves for bigger shares of the leaders' benevolence, whether the correlation between the amount and extravagancy of praises and the rewards is real or imagined. In the end, adulation for the leader becomes a mandatory front-stage performance, displayed even in official interactions, for fear of being punished if true feelings are discovered.

The causal chain can be represented graphically as in figure 1. Note that the Catalyst can be bypassed: at least two cases of personality cults, those of Stalin and of the Polish Communist leader Bolesław Bierut, did not have charismatic individuals as their foci. Also, the four moments are not discrete events, but they build upon each other. Thus, M_n creates the conditions for M_{n+1} to happen, but the events encompassed under M_n continue to unfold, whether M_{n+1} happens or not. This is why I represented the moments with a semicircle, meaning that the beginning of a moment does not imply the end of those preceding it. If M_{n+1} does not happen, than M_{n+2} will not happen either, and the formation of a personality cult will stagnate. However, the chances for a moment to produce the next one are higher as we advance toward the right side of the graph. Moments M3 and M4 happen in the same time, conditioned by M2 but without conditioning each other.

----- Figure 1 about here -----

As it can be seen, my causal mechanism is integrative on three different axes, without favoring any approach in the detriment of other. It may look like a broth for an unsympathetic critic, however, it is a data-driven broth, boiled with the goal to capture reality, not to preserve some theoretical or methodological purity.

First, I do not favor a macro, micro, or mezzo level analysis. The dependent variable, as well as the three preconditions are situated at the macro level concerning the entire society. However, they are linked through intricate mezzo processes, while micro-

processes related to everyday communication are also important. In fact, although this is a sociology project, I admit that M4 should be studied more effectively by psychologists. It is, nonetheless, an important stage in the formation of personality cults, and so it cannot be overlooked.

Second, I consider structure, culture, and individual agency as independent variables, while the dependent variable, the cult of personality, is in the same time a political/structural phenomenon and a cultural one. Borrowing from recent studies of revolutions (Goldstone 2014; Ritter 2015), I acknowledge that structural conditions, although critical, are not sufficient for explaining processes and outcomes. If the structural conditions are present, a process is set in motion, but its outcome depends of a series of unpredictable events. Personality cults can only appear in societies defined by certain structures: patrimonial and clientelar relations between its members, and suppression of dissent. A third precondition is cultural: the communication between society members is defined by a certain form of insincerity, originated in the economic processes, but pervading the culture. The stages of the cult formation follow, in general, the structural and cultural changes suffered by the society which constitute the path of the creation of the cult; but there are notable exceptions: M1, the key moment in the cult formation, originates at the level of individual agency, M2 explains how individual choices in M1 are generalized to the level of society, until the point, M3, when they cease to be choices, and M4 is concerned with the changes that occur in the personality of the leader.

Recognizing that social processes are never simple nor straight-forward, my argument integrates different modes of making sense of our social reality. This is the

natural choice, derived from the integration of structural, cultural, and individual processes. Structural and individual processes have to be explained, while cultural processes, as carriers of meaning, need to be interpreted. For the most part, I approached the subject matter with a multidimensional interpretive explanation, suggested by Reed (2011) who considers it more adequate to producing social knowledge than either interpretation or explanation. There are also multiple causal mechanism to be considered in the making of personality cults. Direct causation can be established between the initial conditions and the subsequent development, which is, however, a causal chain, where the outcome depends of a series of non-recurring events, each being linked to the preceding and the following through causal relations. The relation between M1 (the action of a few innovators) and the subsequent moments is nonetheless different, as it follows a path-dependency logic, in that an apparently insignificant event, prompting a small change in the originating variables, causes big and irreversible changes at all levels, and in fact is critical for the dependent variable (Patterson 2004).

3. Literature review

3.1. What is a cult of personality?

As it is often the case in social sciences, using a term already established in the common speech is not unproblematic. As Emile Durkheim ([1895] 1982) observes, the “common term” provides the researcher with indications as to what the phenomena is about, but it usually lacks clarity, making it difficult to know which group of phenomena can be summed up under a certain concept, and which phenomena should be excluded. I will, therefore, follow his advice: “The sociologist's first step must therefore be to define the things he treats, so that we may know - he as well - exactly what his subject matter is” (Durkheim [1895] 1982:74). To do so is necessary because the cult of personality – in the common parlance and many times in academia – is a “you know it when you see it” type of concept, sometimes misused, accidentally or not, to denote dictatorship, i.e. the concentration of decisional power in the hands of one individual.

The cult of the leader has been already defined by scholars in various ways. Only two characteristics of the cult have been identified by all scholars who deal with the phenomenon: first, it is defined by a quasi-ubiquitous praise, manifested through eulogistic articles in mass-media and adulatory public parades, and, second, the adulation of the leader is not entirely sincere, but largely coerced through employing the state apparatus in the organization of the named parades (Paltiel 1983; Nelson 1984; Chirot 1994; Wedeen 1999; Petrone 2004; Vassilev 2008; Rutland 2011). However, there are

also divergences. Many of the sources include the assumed causes in the definition, considering the cult the exclusive creation of the leader and/or of the ruling elite (Chirot 1994; Vassilev 2008; Rutland 2011), going as far as to consider the cult of the leader an intentional strategy of the ruler(s) (Nelson 1984). Others admit the possibility of a spontaneous origin of the cult (Petrone 2004). In the most comprehensive monographic study of a cult of personality, Manuela Marin (2008), although considering the leader's intentionality behind the creation of the cult, avoids this idea in her choice of vocabulary, and prudently notes that the leader accepted the cult. Some definitions (Paltiel 1983; Nelson 1984; Wedeen 1999) consider the cult a subsidiary mechanism of enforcing or legitimizing personal control of the leader over the state apparatus, while others link the cult with the Weberian concept of charisma (Nelson 1984; Chirot 1994), and another one with religious symbolism (Rutland 2011).

Synthesizing the existing definitions, and following Durkheim's ([1895] 1982) advice, I will ignore those elements which can hint to possible causes of the cult, and only focus on the external manifestations of the phenomenon. Thus, in agreement with the other scholars, I consider the exaggerated praise of the leader as the defining element of his cult. An important observation made by Lisa Wedeen (1999) helps distinguish personality cults from other – occasional – demonstrations of admiration toward a political leader: in the case of a cult of personality, the praise is not related to a specific quality of the leader, nor to named events when his qualities were employed to further the good of his country. To be sure, the content of the cult is underscored by rather specific themes, which evolve over time: some themes are strengthened, others fade away, and still others are added to the original thematic set (Kershaw 1987; Marin 2008). What is

striking, however, is that the thematic set is not constructed based on the observable qualities of the leader. The opposite is true, in the sense that the leader's figure is constructed according to an abstract image of an ideal leader. Furthermore, his biography is adapted to the ideal model: history is falsified, past events are reinterpreted, changed, or even invented in order to superimpose the actual leader's figure over the ideal type (Marin 2008). Finally, recognizing James C. Scott's (1990) distinction between two layers of communication existent in any system of domination – the public transcript, which includes the official discourse, and the hidden transcript, which designates an unofficial critique of the system, going on offstage – I consider a critical characteristic of the cult of the leader the presence of praise exclusively in the public, official, communication. Although I believe, in accordance with other scholars, that coercion is a characteristic element of personality cults, I don't retain it for the definition, because it is not related to its external manifestation, rather it hints to a possible cause, and thus potentially biases the research.

Therefore, I define the cult of personality of state leaders as quantitatively exaggerated and qualitatively extravagant public demonstration of praise of the leader.

The central element of a personality cult is the overwhelming praise to the leader, which tends to occupy all communication channels in a society. The other two elements (that praise is unspecific and goes on exclusively in the public transcript) are useful for isolating the personality cult from other phenomenon centered on praise of a leader. Election campaigns, although going on exclusively in the public sphere, are generally based on specific praise, dictated by the alleged traits of a candidate which recommend her for the position, and by her political agenda. The "hero worship", a central concept

for Thomas Carlyle (1841), includes specific and extravagant praise of the leader, yet it is not confined exclusively to the public transcript.

Keeping the definition simple is not only dictated by the commandment to avoid a definition bias, but also good way of ensuring its all-inclusiveness. The danger from the other end is to formulate a too vague definition, which fails to establish the borders of the phenomenon, and the traits that make it distinct from its neighbors. Thus, by defining the cult as “the symbolic elevation of one person much above others”, Jan Plamper (Plamper 2012:xiv) makes it unclear if the public celebrations of Stalin in 1929, on his 50th birthday, and of other members of the Central Committee, such as Voroshilov two years earlier, on their respective round anniversaries, were instances of personality cults. I argue that neither were cases of personality cults, because the praise was focused, centered around congratulating the individual on the occasion, a common practice not only in Russia, but in most of the modern societies. This point is strengthened by the conspicuous lack of adulatory demonstrations in the following two years, also noted by Plamper, and other analysts of Stalinism (Tucker 1979).

3.2. A Brief History of the Concept

The term “cult of personality” was coined by Karl Marx, in a letter to W. Blos in 1877 (Tucker, Marx et al. 1978), against Ferdinand Lasalle, one of the leaders of the German workers’ movement, and Marx’s rival inside the Communist League. Here, Marx

outlines very clearly the meaning of the personality cult, but also prompts a first important clarification.

The cult of personality is evidenced by excessive public appreciation. Marx makes it explicit that appreciation for an individual is not unnatural, nor is it to be condemned. It becomes a problem only when it dominates the public discourse, and through this can influence the debates, constituting itself an argument. After declaring himself not concerned with popularity, and an adversary of public appreciation for himself, Marx writes: “When Engels and I first joined the secret Communist Society we made it a condition that everything tending to encourages superstitious belief in authority was to be removed from the statuses” (Tucker, Marx et al. 1978:521).

However, this letter was written more than a decade after Lassalle’s death in 1864. Although vanity was indeed characterizing Lassalle’s personality (Wilson 1940), Marx’s 1877 letter was directed rather against the annoying (to Marx) prominence of Lassalle in the party folklore after his death, despite the supremacy of Marxism as the party ideology, and which continued after the unification of the “Lassallean” with the “Eisenacher” social democratic groups at the Gotha Congress of 1875, under the auspices of the latter group (Bonnell 1989).

A clarification is needed at this point: although personality cults regarding artists, religious leaders, politicians, athletes, etc. form themselves a widespread and very interesting phenomenon, it is not the object of this dissertation, concerned exclusively with the cult of the leader, which is qualitatively different due to the complex relationship between the cult and the mechanisms of authority (Rees 2004). Nor am I concerned with posthumous cults of leaders. The post-mortem recognition (and even over-recognition) of

a person's qualities and achievements is constructed differently and has different meanings, related to the effervescence of community engagement around symbols of his or her absence, such as the corpse or memorial artifacts like shrines, monuments, or even commercial memorabilia (Hecht 2004). Furthermore, it leads to a different dynamic than when the object of the cult is alive and holding the power, since in the former case no reaction of the person is possible. This distinction excludes from my sample one of the most discussed cases of personality cults, that of Lenin, whose cult was projected to the masses after his death, although he was popular only among a small group of revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks, while still living (Tucker 1979; Nelson 1984; Plamper 2012).

Not central for Marxist theory, the notion of a cult of personality passed into a prolonged cone of shadow, and it resurfaced in the official discourse only in the 1950s, when it became useful in the internal power struggles of the Soviet leaders. The merit for rediscovering the concept belongs to Pyotr Pospelov, then chief editor of *Pravda* newspaper, the officious of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – CPSU. One of the most laborious Stalin's servants, he was also quick in adapting to the new realities and joined Khrushchev's ship as early as 1953. He made the first references to Marx's letter in conjunction with Lavrentiy Beria, former chief of the Soviet secret police (NKVD, MGB), hastily ousted from the Communist Party in June 1953, and executed in secrecy in December the same year, only a few month after Stalin's death. Without pointing to Stalin's cult, a campaign initiated in July 1953, on the Beria case, centered on "the well-known statements of Marx on the harm and impermissibility of the cult of personality" (10 July 1953), which he considered "alien to Marxism and clearly at variance with the

principle of collective leadership” (22 January 1954) (both cited in Towster 1954:492-493).

It was in 1956, at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, when the term cult of personality gained the spotlight. During the night of 24/25 February, after the formal conclusion of the Congress, Nikita Khrushchev, then the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, elected in 1953, delivered a four hour long address in a closed session. In front of a stunned audience, Khrushchev’s speech was an unexpected attack to his predecessor. Known as *The Secret Speech*, and officially titled *On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences*, the text was prepared by a commission led by Pyotr Pospelov. The speech dealt with Stalin’s dictatorship within the party bureaucracy, and with his crimes against high level party members during the Great Purge (the millions of crimes committed against non-party members Soviet citizens were not mentioned), and only referred to the personality cult en passant. In fact, the cult of personality is only the starting point of the speech, thus providing a dogmatic justification for denouncing the patrimonial power acquired by Stalin inside the party apparatus (Medvedev and Medvedev 2004). Moreover, as foreign analysts were quick to observe by comparing the media coverage of the last congress presided by Stalin with the first congress presided by Khrushchev, the denunciation of the former’s personality cult was in fact a strategy used by the latter in his attempt to shake off the collective leadership and build his own personal dictatorship, if not his own personality cult, as well (Wolfe 1957). In his attempt to secure patrimonial power, he was fighting Georgy Malenkov (former prime minister, demoted in 1955, but still a prominent member of the Politburo – the Executive Committee of the CPSU), Vyacheslav Molotov

(one of Stalin's protégées, Minister of Foreign Affairs since 1939, also having other top responsibilities in the Party apparatus) and Nikolai Bulganin (Prime Minister since 1955). Although all of them, including Khrushchev, had been among the closest Stalin's collaborators, a frontal attack on Stalin alone was also an oblique attack to Khrushchev's rivals, as well as a means to deal with the ghost of Lavrentiy Beria. By blaming Stalin alone, Khrushchev eschewed his own responsibility, and paved the way for implementing his own policies, which had a populist taint, and were designed to erode Molotov's and Malenkov's strong footholds in foreign policy and heavy industry, respectively (Taubman 2004). The *Secret Speech* spilled fast not only in the Soviet Union and the Socialist Camp, but to the West as well, with opposite results with respect to the term "cult of personality". While in the socialist discourse it quickly penetrated the "wooden language", providing a vague, if not semantically void, term employed in denunciation rituals (Apor 2010), in the West it gained the spotlight not only among political analysts and journalists, but it quickly caught the attention of scholars of various disciplines as well (Strunsky 1956; Tucker 1957; Wolfe 1957; Alexander 1958; Harjan 1958; Macridis 1958) etc.

Two misconceptions stemming from Khrushchev's speech have partially undermined research on personality cults. The first misconception is to conflate the object of the cult and its causes (i.e. to assume that, because the cult is centered on a person, the leader, the same person necessarily originated the cult). It served Khrushchev's purposes to state that Stalin is the only one responsible for the creation of a cult surrounding his person. By doing so, Khrushchev sought a legitimacy based not on continuity but on breaking up with the recent past, and in the same time absolved himself

from any guilt, although he was one of the closest Stalin's collaborators. Fortunately, scholars dealing with the cult of personality rarely assumed that the leader was able to impose his own cult without any contribution from those surrounding him, and, ultimately, from those who – forcibly or not – raised the praises.

The second misconception stems from the insufficient conceptual distinction between dictatorship or autarchy and a cult of personality. In fact, in his speech, Khrushchev denounced the autarchic powers Stalin acquired within the Party, escaping the control of the Politburo, and, in part, the crimes made possible by the accumulation of power in the hands of one person. The cult per se is of secondary importance in Khrushchev's address. Subsequently, scholars tended to pay little attention to the necessary distinction between autarchy and a cult of personality, and to place the origins of the cult in moments that announce, in fact, patrimonial leadership. They were only partly right, as personality cults developed only in dictatorships, therefore the origins of dictatorships are relevant causes for the study of personality cults, too. On the other hand, the fact that not all dictatorships have been accompanied by personality cults should not be overlooked; therefore there must also be another set of causes which explain personality cults. This being considered, it is likely that personality cults originate at different moments in time, normally after autarchies have been already established.

Nonetheless, Khrushchev and his speech have the important merit of bringing the term cult of personality in the spotlight, offering political analysts a tool for interpreting a phenomenon that could be retrospectively applied to Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, could be observed in contemporary dictatorships of Rafael Trujillo and François Duvalier, but whose most astonishing incidences were yet to come. Scholars became interested in the

phenomenon as well, and a rich scientific literature has been produced since 1956, albeit scattered through time and across disciplines. Different approaches, specific to the disciplines interested in the phenomenon, prompted to a variety of casual explanations.

3.3. Psychological, Psychiatric and Psychoanalytical Explanations

Psychologists were the first to attempt to understand dictatorship, not only for its theoretical value, but for strategic reasons during World War II. Building on the work of the wartime psychoanalysts, subsequent psychological research diversified, and asked questions related to the personality cults, as well. This line of thought starts with the assumption that personality cults, and/or dictatorships are attributable solely to the dictators themselves, and attempted to explain the phenomena through the personalities of the leaders.

In this view, Stalin initiated his own cult, as an attempt to become the only authorized interpreter of Marxist-Leninist ideology (Tucker 1979). Moreover, Stalin's cult has been explained through his personality traits: thirst for power, vanity, and intolerance toward criticism, backed by inferiority complexes due to his unfinished education and low intellectual abilities (Medvedev 1979; Medvedev and Medvedev 2004). One often cited evidence of these traits is his insistence of demanding his close friends to call him Koba, the name of a Robin Hood-like hero from the novel *The Patricide* by Georgian writer Alexander Kazbegi, perhaps as a compensatory mechanism for the lack of a father figure he could admire during his childhood (Service 2005).

Psychological analysis of dictators was probably on the scholars' tables for the longest time, attempting to explain their thirst for power, cruelty, and, later, their desire to be adulated. As early as 1938, prominent psychoanalyst C. G. Jung attempted – and, at least partially, succeeded – to predict the near future of Europe through analyzing the minds of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin (McGuire and Hull 1977). A few years later, following United States' entry in the war, several British and US agencies commissioned psychological reports on the mind of Adolf Hitler. Although the reports did not influence the conduct of war, reports by E Erikson, H Murray, W Langer, and others, conquered new land for psychology and psychoanalysis (Hoffman 1992). Psychoanalytical and psychiatric analysis of dictators constituted an important trend in scholarly literature in the postwar period, peaking in the 1970s but continuing into the 2000s (Pick 2012).

Hitler was diagnosed with more than fifteen mental illnesses and personality disorders, among which malignant narcissism, hubris-nemesis complex, and borderline personality disorder seem the most useful in explaining the cult of personality (for an extensive list of Hitler's diagnoses see Oakley 2007). Stalin was diagnosed with paranoia (Birt 1993; Rhodes 1997), and his behavioral manifestations also fit the description of several pathological personality types (Shakhireva 2007; Stal 2013). His cult is explained psychologically through the shame he suffered not only as a child, but also later in life, and his resolve by dissociating his ego from his shamed self, but also from his praised self (Ihanus 2007). Mao Zedong carried schizophrenia, which he transmitted to his heirs, and suffered, like Hitler, from narcissistic personality disorder (Sheng 2001). The list can continue, with different diagnostics for different dictators, however, individual case studies need to be linked together in order to offer a more general explanation, a task

accomplished by a few recent studies. Slobodan Milošević, Adolf Hitler and Mao Zedong share the symptomatology of borderline personality disorder, which explains in large part their cruelty, and is linked with narcissism (Oakley 2007), yet only Hitler and Mao were surrounded by personality cults.

Dictators' childhood experiences have been the focus of psychologists and psycho-analysts trying to find early signs and causes of their cruelty and/or vanity. Hitler was born out of wedlock, he adored his submissive mother, but had a tensed relation with his domineering father. His agitated childhood and adolescence, and the failure of his dreams to become a painter or an architect are responsible for his temper and ultimately for his decisions as a leader (Langer, Langer and Waite 1972; Fest 1974; Kren 1978). Stalin grew up in poverty, trapped between an alcoholic and violent father and an abusive mother. He became a rebellious adolescent, unable to adapt to the disciplinary rigors of a theologian seminar, and never finished his studies (Tucker 1973; Ulam 1977; Sebag Montefiore 2008; Radzinsky 2011). Little Mao Zedong had an uneasy relationship with his father, mainly due to Mao's show of disrespect; he had outbursts of rage, and, like Stalin, difficulties in pursuing formal education, although, unlike Stalin, Mao graduated from University (Terrill 1999; Chang and Halliday 2006). Saddam Hussein was raised in extreme poverty, and also beaten by his stepfather (Miller and Mylroie 1990).

However useful this literature may be for understanding each dictator's behavior, it explains in fact little about the formation of personality cults. Not only dictators suffered of different personality disorders, but in many cases they had different personalities altogether, as pointed by Carl Gustav Jung, who associated Stalin and Mussolini with tribal chiefs, and Hitler with the medicine men (McGuire and Hull 1977).

Besides, as tormented the childhoods of some of the dictators, or as serious their mental disorders, they are in fact unexceptional. Perhaps millions of not so famous individuals worldwide share with the dictators uneasy relationships with their parents, or a certain psychopathology. Moreover, there is no evidence neither that Pol Pot (one of the most destructive tyrants, but who did not have a personality cult), or François Duvalier (who, instead, enjoyed a fully developed cult of himself), suffered any mental disturbances, nor that any of them had anything but perfectly normal childhoods (Chirot 1994; Oakley 2007).

3.4. Psychosocial Explanations

A distinct approach, although rooted as well in the Freudian analysis, was pioneered by the psychoanalytic sociology of Eli Sagan, and explains the personality as an expression of the collective psyche. Sagan's perspective assumes a direction in the evolution of humanity, from oppressive societies dominated by cruel and aggressive father figures, to individualism, best expressed in modern democracies. However, this evolution is not linear, but leaps and temporary reversals occur. As the modern states gradually develop, there is a tension in the collective subconscious between the need for an authoritarian father figure, which characterized the earlier types of society, and the desire for freedom, which tends to prevail in democracy. Modern tyrannies represent regressions to the general direction, albeit severe ones. The personality cults accompanying many of them evidence the still strong Freudian need for identification with an autarchic father (Sagan 1985). The tension between democracy and a

subconscious search for a father figure was most evident in the interwar period, and, not surprisingly, the subconscious longing for authority was more powerful in Germany and Italy, the two countries which experienced the deepest crisis of pluralistic democracy (Kershaw 1999). Thus, from this perspective, the dictators only fulfill the need of their peoples for an authoritarian figure to be adulated.

Terror Management Theory offers an important tool for explaining personality cults in dictatorships, taking into account the time lag between the dictator taking the power and the apparition of the cult. In dictatorships, constant threats of repression and death make the masses acutely aware of their own mortality. As a means to ignore the inevitability of death, and make sense of their lives, individuals living under terror would embrace the official ideology, including considering the supreme leader as semi divine (Pyszczynski, Solomon et al. 2003; Moghaddam 2013).

The presence of personality cult in certain places, and its absence in others, has been explained through the existence of a collective psychology, which individualizes a nation from the other. Certain features of the nation's psyche find surprising explanations and evidence in other manifestations of social life. By the time when, in 1866, the German prince Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen was elected Ruling Prince of Romania (thus Romanians searched for a father outside the country), Romanian literature displayed a conspicuous absence of fathers, while the children depicted were "mostly nasty, bad, annoyingly loud and clothed like adults" (Borbély 1996:43). This indicates an unfulfilled need of a father figure, which translated later in repeated attempts of Romanian rulers, culminating with Ceaușescu, to present themselves as fathers of the nation, and created a structural propensity for mass adulation of the leaders (Borbély 1996). Another suggested

causal chain starts from the observation that Russian children are customarily swaddled. This marks the social psychology of Russians, who are more passive, and ready to accept oppressive leaders like Stalin, and more recently Putin, rather than venture in democracy (Shakhireva 2007).

The value of this approach consists in its attempt to explain why only certain societies developed personality cults of their leaders. Its shortcoming is that, by focusing on small numbers of societies, and without a proper scrutiny of the negative cases, it cannot reach the stated goal, and in fact it cannot offer a general causal explanation. It is true, personality cults of political leaders are structurally impossible in democracies. But not all societies where pluralistic democracies have been in trouble chose to find comfort in obediently following an authoritarian father figure. Think of the Watergate scandal's impact on democracy in the United States, of South Africa in the wake of the apartheid regime (Barnard 2014), but also, for instance, of the re-emergence of far right politics in the European Union in the 2000s (Mudde 2011). Terror Management Theory cannot explain the enormous variation between similar dictatorships with respect to personality cults. Finally, analyzing the way children are cared for, or represented by a certain society, can give good insight into its culture, but is hardly generalizable.

A noteworthy attempt to explain charismatic leadership by integrating psychological and psychosocial explanations (Post 1986) also fails to address causality. According to this explanation, charismatic leadership can be traced to infants' feelings of being rejected, which elicit two types of response, causing two personality patterns later in life. One, termed the "mirror-hungry personality" is represented by individual focused on their own selves, and compelled to display themselves in order to evoke attention from

others. The other, the “ideal-hungry personality”, resolves the insecurity of early abandonment by compulsory search to idealized figures, with whom these individuals try to identify. Charismatic leadership occurs at the interaction between one “mirror-hungry” individual, with an “ideal-hungry” group of individuals. However, it is not exactly clear what combination of factors leads to a whole society of adults who felt rejected during infancy, and, moreover, display a highly skewed distribution of responses to rejection in favor of the “ideal-hungry” personality type.

3.5. The Role of Institutions in Creating Personality Cults

Sociologists and political scientists lean toward other types of explanation, rooted in the major paradigms of the disciplines. The earliest attempts focused on the institutions that made the cult of personality possible. In an early commentary on Khrushchev’s secret speech, Bertram Wolfe correctly points out that Marxist-Leninist theory is in fact not preventing, but rather making personality cults possible in societies guided by its principles. Indeed, the *dictatorship of proletariat* “in practice means the dictatorship of a single party, the dictatorship over that party of its leaders, and ultimately the dictatorship of a single leader, based on the leader's being the authoritative expounder of doctrine and the man in control of the party machine” (1957:93-95). Ultimately, Wolfe adds, this personal dictatorship relies on two weapons: the cult of the person, and terror. More detailed analyses of socialist institutions reveal two parallel hierarchies, namely the state and the party apparatuses, both controlled ultimately by the party (Kabele and Hájek 2002). Moreover, the institutions of both hierarchies have unclear responsibilities, which

make them easy to manipulate by skillful individuals who wish to gain patrimonial control over the society and/or to promote celebrations of the leader. Thus, for instance, Nicolae Ceaușescu secured patrimonial power for himself using the same strategies as his predecessor, Gheorghe Gheorgiu-Dej: dissolving certain institutions and creating new ones, and increasing the number of members in the central organisms of the party. These changes enabled them to bring in their faithful followers in positions of decision and control in the newly created institutions. The highest institutions of the party, in theory guarantors of collective leadership, could not be dissolved, but membership was increased to the point where the leader's political supporters were able to outvote his rivals, while they were still too powerful to be displaced (King 1980; Fischer 1989; Marin 2008). After the initial challengers were swept out the political scene, Ceaușescu secured power through implementing the principle of cadres rotation, announced on February 1971, and motivated by the need to offer the party activists a broader experience in both party and status apparatuses. In fact, this created uncertainty, since they were transferred randomly from party to state positions, and from Bucharest to the provinces, and vice versa, without any guiding rule but Ceaușescu's personal decision (Fischer 1989; Marin 2008). This also allowed Ceaușescu to surround himself by slavish and toady individuals, and this may explain why not all the cadres have been rotated, but there was a "hard nucleus" who maintained high positions in the party hierarchy for longer periods of time (Cioroianu 2007). Similarly, Burma's socialist dictator Ne Win manipulated the state's institutions to promote yes-men and brutal, corrupt enforcers to keep him in power, (Chirot 1994), and Mao Zedong used the same strategy to assure himself continual adulation (Li and Thurston 1994).

A more thorough analysis of the institutions responsible for state propaganda, with their functions and dysfunctions, identifies the mechanisms of dispersion of the cult of the leader. Thus, all important public parades had been organized in detail (including the placards and portraits to be displayed, the slogans to be chanted and in what order, etc.) by the Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee, and approved by the CC's secretary, and therefore have been under Nicolae Ceaușescu's direct control. Moreover, Elena Ceaușescu, the dictator's wife, was able to bypass the central propaganda institutions, and organize laudatory parades using institutions situated at the level of the local government (Chelaru and Burtică 2001).

On the other hand, proponents of the institutional approach show how certain institutions had been created, re-created, or modified in order to facilitate the propagation of the personality cult. Ceaușescu's investiture as President of the Socialist Republic of Romania – an office newly created for himself – in March 1974 is considered the beginning of the personality cult (Shafir 1985), an opinion supported by memoirs of the era (Cornea and Liiceanu 2006). The commemoration of Romanian historical leaders (Drăgușanu 2003) and the national festival *Song for Romania* (Oancea 2011) have also been identified as channels of the enforcement of the cult from above. Also, one of the earliest regulation after Nicolae Ceaușescu became first secretary of the RCP was made in regard to the display of the portraits of members of the Executive Committee of the RCP in offices and during the parades. A decision of the Political Bureau of the Executive Committee of April 1965 stipulated that portraits of the members of the Executive Committee have to be displayed in a pre-established order, together with portraits of the classics of Marxism-Leninism, and the portrait of the recently deceased

comrade Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. The rationale behind this was to emphasize collective work, quintessential to RCP's principles. However, this decision ceased to be observed in short time, and it was officially modified in 1972, on stated grounds of esthetics and more rational use of space. According to the new regulation, only the portrait of the General Secretary of the RCP was to be displayed, in all official buildings (Marin 2008).

Institutional analysis brings important insight about the mechanisms of dispersion of the cult of personality, and its incontestable achievements will constitute building blocks to my own argument. It solved the difficult task of separating the mechanisms responsible for personality cults from those which led to the concentration of decisional power in the hands of one person. It also identified the channels of dispersion that enabled the cult to flood all areas of the society. However, there are inherent limitations to this approach. Focusing exclusively on institutions it is difficult to specify a direction in the causal chain. Did the institutions create the personality cult, or were they only responding to, and strengthening, processes that were already manifest in the society? Also, this approach falls short on generalizability. Leaders' cults were present in three different settings throughout the twentieth century, namely fascist societies, socialist countries, and countries from the former colonies which recently gained their independence. It is, therefore, likely that other causes can be identified, which led to the same phenomenon in settings which share some similarities, but are built upon different sets of institutions.

3.6. The Interplay between Patrimonialism and Bureaucracy as Structural Explanation

More compelling is the search for the roots of personality cults in the real distribution of power, going beyond – while paying due attention to – the formalized rules investigated by the proponents of the institutional approach. Starting with the correct assumption that cults of political leaders are specific to authoritarian and totalitarian societies, and drawing on Weber’s ideal types of exercising power, scholars investigate the specific power structure of those societies which glorified their leaders.

For Weber, patrimonialism, as an ideal type of exercising power, is defined by the concentration of power in one person or small group, usually bypassing the middle or upper classes. As societies advance toward modernity, patrimonialism tends to be replaced by bureaucracy, where power is exercised impersonally, based on written rules and regulations (Weber 1968). Contrary to Weber’s predictions, patrimonialism has never disappeared from sight, becoming rather a pervasive aspect of modern societies, which intermingles with bureaucratic rules in various ways (Charrad and Adams 2011; Adams and Charrad 2015). In advanced democracies, patrimonialism is still prevalent in those “grey” areas where the state is either unwilling or unable to intervene (Collins 2011). Moreover, the very institutions of bureaucracy can be employed to enforce a flow of power patrimonial in kind (Ermakoff 2011). It can be concluded that, as societies advance toward democracy, patrimonial practices retreat from the mainstream social relation, but do not leave the scene entirely, rather adapt to an imperfect bureaucracy. The actors engaged in patrimonial relations usually take advantage of the bureaucracy’s

weaknesses and gaps to further their interests through patron-client relationships reminiscent of patrimony.

Three different pictures are presented in the types of societies (post-colonial, fascist, and communists), where personality cults of political leaders are possible. Despite the differences, which will be briefly discussed below, one general proposition is valid in all three cases: the cult of the leader fills a void created at the fracture between patrimonialism and bureaucracy.

In postcolonial societies, as it is the case in the Arabic-speaking world in Middle East and North Africa, the victorious liberating movements needed to secure the seemingly fragile independence through reorganizing the colonies – generally ruled by a distant center through essentially patrimonial practices of the local representatives – into modern states, able to self-sustain politically. The codification of the societal norms into bureaucratic laws was in this respect an urgency. However, it turned out that bureaucracy had to respond to preexistent structural conditions which emphasized either central patrimonialism or local patrimonialism, based on the customary relations governing the kin-based groups which constitute an important portion of those societies. The relative power of central authority to local groups shaped the orientation of the modern states in Tunisia and Morocco. A more hesitant path, characterized by shifts between yielding to local and central patrimonialism characterized cases like Algeria (Charrad 2001) and Iraq (Charrad 2011), where local and central patrimonialism were more balanced. Eventually, albeit through three different paths, central patrimonialism is strengthened, and, of more relevant for the formation of personality cults, the formal bureaucracy underlying the

modern states is serving from the beginning either type of traditional patrimonialism, or sometimes both (Charrad 2011).

A more direct relationship between bureaucracy and patrimonialism existed in fascism. In this case, ideology legitimized the patrimonial control over society of a leader with absolute powers, while bureaucracy was merely encoding the specific ways of submitting the society to the leader's will. In appearance, fascist bureaucracy looked similar to the democratic bureaucracy, if not more advanced, with the only exception that the leader was placed above any bureaucratic constraint. The titles used by the fascist leaders are symptomatic for their position above society and beyond its means of control: semantically, the terms *führer*, *duce*, or *conducător* (used by Romania's military dictator and Hitler's ally Ion Antonescu) share the idea of a guide, somebody who advises or shows the way to others. Fascist ideology considered the state, and by consequence its leader, as superhuman, placed "beyond moral limitations, for it was the *only* producer of morality" (Tismăneanu 2012:103, italics in original). Below the level of the state, incarnated in its supreme leader and moral guide, the flow of command was organized along the lines of modern bureaucracy. Individual emotions were replaced by position-specific demands, and thus morality did not consist anymore in making independent judgments about the rightness of the society as a whole, but in performing the specific tasks required by the position one individual occupied (Bauman 1989).

It seems counterintuitive to talk about patrimonial leadership in socialist societies, since their ideological basis emphasizes, at least declaratively, collective leadership and egalitarianism. In reality, the very pretension that a party can speak in the name of a whole class leads logically to a small group taking decisions in the name of a party, and

further, to a single person accumulating the power within the group (Wolfe 1957). Moreover, the discourse legitimizing those types of societies, always centered on a few recurring themes – the promise of a utopian future, the danger posed by the real or alleged enemies – legitimizes the patrimonial domination of a ruling elite, and eventually of one person at the top of the elite. The righteousness of the doctrine, or of a particular interpretation, is the ultimate legitimacy of the ruler, and thus it excludes any alternative opinion. Consequently, advocates against the “party line” are framed as “class enemies”, and so discipline is enforced. Members of the ruling apparatus at all levels become mere executors of the orders of the leader, in a situation “represented so as to produce, and reproduce, continuously, the fear of being against” (Bourdieu 1991:202).

It is noteworthy that Marxism ceased to represent the workers – in fact the doctrine was directed against their interests – no later than Karl Marx’s own involvement with the International Communist Movement. He regarded other revolutionaries, especially those of working class origins, with contempt, and occasionally with rage, using the doctrine as a tool for imposing his personal will over the Communist League, and later over the International (Johnson 1990; Tismăneanu 2012). The same disregard for truth and for the needs of those who they claimed to represent was typical of the most important Communist rulers. While Lenin continuously zigzagged between contradictory directives to his party, he was only consistent in refuting any criticism, either in the name of “scientific Marxism”, or of “historical conditions” (Wolfe 1957). And so, the scientific, therefore infallible, doctrines were in fact relevant only at the meta-textual level, as weapons used by parties, groups within parties, and individuals of the elites, to secure power. The self-proclaimed, and widely celebrated, collective leadership, when it

formed, reflected the temporary equilibrium of several pretenders to the position of patrimonial power.

So far, the analysis of the relations between patrimonialism and bureaucracy highlighted specific structures of the post-colonial, fascist, and communist societies. What they all have in common is the propensity toward glorifying the leader. From this perspective, personality cults should be seen not as raising the leaders above society, but recognizing and reinforcing their god-like positions.

This explanation is essentially correct, in that personality cults of political leaders are only possible in societies whose power structure is dominated by patrimonial practices. Nonetheless, a more detailed analysis of how patrimonialism works, and through what mechanisms does it elicit the glorification of the leader is needed, and it has been provided by historians and art historians of Soviet and Eastern European Socialism.

Scholars who analyzed in more detail the exercise of power and the system of loyalties in socialist societies agree on its specificity as a bureaucracy paralleled by personal relationships of a clientelar nature (Marin 2008). This particular political system, labeled “pyramidal” (Shafir 1985; Marin 2008) or “orbital” (Cioroianu 2007), has been aptly described as a system of vertical interest aggregation and articulation, oriented exclusively toward the higher hierarchical level, and ignoring the local needs of the population (Volgyes 1995). Thus, the leader was the absolute center of the political power. Around him, gravitated his immediate “family” of clients (in Romania and a few other socialist countries this partly overlapped with the leader’s actual family, see (Shafir 1985), whose survival in the second circle of power is dependent on the loyalty to the leader, and on how convincingly were they able to signal this loyalty. Each of the

leader's clients develops in turn his or her own "family" of clients, further reproducing the orbital model in the subsequent concentric circles of power. In response, the clients express publicly their symbolic loyalty to the leader, and also use their own clients to this end. Thus, the personality cult emerges as an expression of political pragmatism of the subordinates, also serving as an indicator of who is the political leader who can offer the biggest advantages if chosen as a patron (Cioroianu 2007).

This model applies not only to political representatives of the state (party activists), but incorporates artists, academics, and members of the scientific and cultural communities (Marin 2008). Jan Pampler (2012), for instance, demonstrates how Stalin's cult in visual arts emerged from the artists' wise use of the imperfect interplay between the modern bureaucratic apparatus and the more traditional institution of patronage.

If taking this model literally, we should wonder whether quasi-cults have also developed on the outside circles of power, signaling the importance of a patron for his or her clients. In fact, there were indeed few such cults of secondary power centers, in the shadow of the leaders' cults. The objects of these cults were individuals who demonstrated their ability to secure their positions for a longer time, and thus were able to reassure their pool of clients and would-be clients that publicly declaring their loyalty is a safe investment. The sycophants of individuals other than the leader needed to be sure that their enterprise will generate the expected rewards, and so depended on their ability to secure their positions. On the other hand, this very condition could be threatened by the adulatory demonstrations had they not been kept under an acceptable limit. If a secondary cult would awake the leader's jealousy, both its patron and its clients could lose their privileged positions. This explains the quasi-absence of adulatory

demonstrations toward other individuals than the leader. The few exceptions include cults of dictators' wives – Elena Ceaușescu (Gabanyi 2000; Cioroianu 2007), Imelda Marcos (Slater 2010) and, to a lesser extent, Mirjana Milošević (Dobson 2013) – and other individuals, themselves clients and sycophants of the leaders, who demonstrated endurance in the leaders' proximity, such as the old Bolshevik and Central Committee member Kliment Voroshilov, one of the few of his generation who survived the purges (Plamper 2012), or Romanian court poet Adrian Păunescu, an intimate of Ceaușescu, who was, nonetheless, ousted in 1985, when his popularity became uncomfortable for the dictator (Cioroianu 2007). In the early 1930s, paralleling the building of Stalin's cult, elements of sycophancy surrounded virtually any potential patron of any kind, going down to party leaders of major cities, and even directors of major enterprises (Rees 2004). However, since 1937, Stalin was less tolerant with these mini-cults (Davies 2004).

Although this explanation was tailored for socialist societies, structures with similar functions can be observed in the post-colonial and fascist societies. While the age-old practice of political clientelism is still widespread in developing countries, concurred only by corruption (Brun and Diamond 2014), it is less evident in fascist societies, and perhaps its contribution to the development of personality cults is less important, but definitely not absent. It is worth citing in this context the typical patron-client relationship between Hitler and Heinrich Hoffmann, his personal photographer, and its unquestionable contribution to the creation of the former's cult (Nardo 2014).

To conclude, this explanation is correct, and it demonstrates a necessary structural precondition for personality cults to emerge. I will discuss it in more detail in chapter 5, where I will show its theoretical importance and its particular avatars in Romania's case.

Its only shortcoming is that, if considered isolated from other structural conditions and from individuals' actions, it does not address the negative cases. Bulgaria, for instance, displayed a similar structural distribution of patrimonial practices, socialist bureaucracy, and clientelism, which, however, did not lead to a cult of their communist leader, Todor Zhivkov, although he was in power for 35 years, longer than Ceaușescu was in Romania.

3.7. The Cult of Personality as the Result of Routinization of Charisma

Another type of explanations draws on Weber's theory of charismatic authority as locating the source primarily in the leader's personal characteristics, charisma, meaning literally "gift of grace". Weber (1991) insists that charisma:

“... should be understood to refer to an *extraordinary* quality of a person, regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed. 'Charismatic authority', hence, shall refer to a rule over men, whether predominantly external or predominantly internal, to which the governed submit because of their belief in the extraordinary quality of the specific *person*.” (295, italics in original).

This particular phrase is a key to understanding research on charismatic authority. However, the italics are misleading, placing the emphasis almost exclusively on the leader, although Weber is “aware of the fact that social dynamics result from many social forces” (Gerth and Mills 1991:52). Weber's subsequent discussion on charismatic leadership makes it clear that charisma is not a constant, and its variance depends on three factors: the leader, the followers, and the social organization. Charisma is not a quality in itself, but the result of the existence of a certain quality, considered as critical by the followers, and necessary in certain times. The charismatic qualities considered by Weber are bravery and religious-type illumination. Despite the great dissimilarity

between them, both can sustain charismatic leadership, given the right audience and the right structural conditions. Weber points that charismatic leadership is highly unstable, and discusses possible scenarios for losing charisma, thus showing he acknowledges the importance of three categories of independent variables: the leader loses the charismatic quality (e.g. by getting old, if the quality was physical strength), the followers are not interested anymore in that quality, or the quality simply becomes less relevant for the society (e.g. if the quality is bravery, it is no longer needed when the war is over) (Weber, 1991).

Scholars drawing on Weber stressed on different dimensions of charisma, attempting to identify the crucial factor in the rise of charismatic leader. Thus, charisma is not in the person of the leader, but in the interaction between the leader and its potential followers, more precisely the leader's capacity to elicit deference, devotion and awe toward himself as a source of authority (Willner and Willner 1965).

A more radical interpretation considers charisma beyond the leader's person. In this view, the dictator is a sacred carrier of meaning, defined as a symbol (i.e. a physical object which stands for an idea, value belief, or even material object, other than itself) widely accepted as representing collective identity. Examples of such symbolic carriers are The Quran, or the American flag – although in their physical materiality they are merely a book, or a piece of dyed cloth, many individuals would be willing to die to defend them. In a dictatorship, the dictator's person becomes the most important sacred carrier, and thus, the adoration cults were directed in reality toward a greater meaning, which transcended their persons (Moghaddam 2013).

Defining charisma as a tridimensional concept, to which the leader, the followers, and the situation are critical, and therefore which cannot be understood without paying attention to any of its dimensions (Post 1986; Madsen and Snow 1991; Pinto, Eatwell et al. 2006) is not a departure from Weber, but rather a return to his theory. Also, it is an acknowledgement of the difficulties posed by explaining charismatic leadership, since there is not one level of analysis to focus on, charisma being generated by the right combination between three variables, each of them with ranges hopelessly wide for the researcher.

A brief overview of the ways future dictators have been described as charismatic leaders prior to gaining absolute power is telling for the diversity existent within each of the dimensions specified above.

Hitler seems a typical case of a charismatic leader who ascended to supreme power by virtue of his personal charisma, manifested especially in his speeches. It has been attested that Hitler's speeches, even during the early 1920s, when NSDAP (the Nazi Party) was seen as insignificant, not only brought his party faithful followers, but moved to tears even foreigners who incidentally witnessed the speeches, although, obviously, they were indifferent to the content of the speeches (Kershaw 1999). Similarly, Ayatollah Khomeini was a charismatic figure of the anti-Shah revolution even in his absence, through his tape-recorded speeches smuggled into the country (Moghaddam 2013).

The situation is equally important for the rise of a charismatic leader. Hitler's speeches found a widespread audience in Germany on the background of the complex economic and political crisis faced by Germany in the aftermath of World War I. Enver

Hoxha, Josip Broz Tito and Mao Zedong emerged as leaders after successfully leading military campaigns against external enemies of their nations. Ceaușescu had his heroic moment in August 1968, when he openly opposed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. By that time many Romanians were sincerely admiring his bravery, and rallied around his figure. Ceaușescu's fame as an anti-Soviet champion quickly spread internationally, eliciting positive reactions from the Occident, and coloring the hopes of those living in socialist countries. Polish dissident Adam Michnik, in prison during the events, recalls his envy to the Romanians for having the chance of being ruled by such a wonderful man (Cioroianu 2007). Apart from the above mentioned crises situation, it is worth noting that Nazism and communism constructed themselves as continuous crises, or continuous revolutions, thus paving the way for charismatic leadership, even regardless of the leaders' personae (Tismăneanu 2012).

Less attention has been devoted to the followers of charismatic leaders. A very carefully designed quantitative study profiles the followers of Juan Peron, Argentina's charismatic president. Peron's moment of pure charisma consumed during 1945-1946, when he was arrested, liberated after successful mass demonstration is his support, and eventually won democratic elections to become Argentina's president. The group most likely to follow Peron's charisma consisted of migrant workers, disenfranchised both economically and politically (Madsen and Snow 1991). Apparently a different picture is shown by Ceaușescu's followers in August 1968, although, lacking good statistical data, we have to rely on circumstantial evidence: along with other groups, intellectuals joined massively what was a large breath popular support for the leader. Almost invariably, memoirs and interviews about that period reveal the enthusiasm stirred by Ceaușescu's

speech among intellectuals, many of them former and/or future dissidents (see, e.g. Chirot 1994; Cornea and Liiceanu 2006; Cioroianu 2007, etc.). This is not entirely inconsistent with the Argentinean case: like migrant workers in Argentina, intellectuals had been recently one of the most disenfranchised groups in Romania, suffering not only the general political terror unleashed by the communists, but also the more specific constraints of the Socialism Realism, and the related cultural oppression (Tismăneanu 2007). Moreover, the theoretical explanation suggested in Peron's case seems to be supported by Ceaușescu's case. The lack of opportunities for advancement, aggravated by the impossibility to participate in political decisions, made most Argentinean migrant workers feel they do not have control over their lives. This psychological stress made it more likely to delegate control to a leader they perceived as representing their interests. Consequently, the predisposition for resorting to proxy control from a leader made the entire group prone to form charismatic bonds with a leader having the qualities perceived as salutary for his or her followers. Thus, it can be said that the rise of a charismatic leader is determined by the existence of a group of would-be followers waiting for the right person to elicit their following (Madsen and Snow 1991). It is not difficult to apply the same theoretical scenario to intellectuals in Romania, in the complex times of uncertainty for their professional status which coincided with Ceaușescu's rise to power. By and large, the psychosocial theory cited above parallels the implications to charismatic leadership of structural strain theory, which dominated the sociological thought in the 1950s and 1960s (Andreas 2007).

Among the three ideal types of legitimate leadership proposed by Weber, charismatic authority is the most volatile, as change in any of the three variables can

break the emotional bond between the leader and the followers. For instance the leader can lose physical strength by getting old, or the society's needs can change, thus bravery and strength are not necessary anymore (Gerth and Mills 1991). However, the leader, now holding the power due to his initial charismatic appeal, tends to rely on the routinization of charisma in order to maintain authority to rule. The process is reverted, but charisma is still the mediator: initially authority given by charisma turned into power, in the routinization phase power makes itself into authority through the obsessive display of charisma, despite its increasing inactuality. Thus, the transformation of charisma into an institutionalized cult of personality seems inevitable (Rieff 2007). In dictatorial societies, where leadership is not legitimized through elections, the leader's charisma has become routine, and turned into personality cults through a consciously enforced charismatic strategy – or “cult” strategy – of the elites, in order to legitimize their rule, particularly where expertise is absent and the leaders either did not have real appeal to the masses, or their popularity vanished as a result of their apparent incompetence (Nelson 1984).

In fact leader's charisma is not a necessary condition for personality cults to rise. Stalin was not a charismatic leader. While his biographers agree upon his ill temper and excessive ambition, his only quasi-charismatic quality was his ability to charm people in face to face interactions (Sebag Montefiore 2004), yet this is not enough to establish a charismatic bond with the masses. To some extent, it was precisely his failure to sparkle which made him Lenin's successor. Stalin, although perceived as less capable, won the contest for succession against a more charismatic Trotsky, feared by the other members of the Central Committee who perceived him as over-ambitious, potentially a new

Napoleon Bonaparte. Stalin's lack of charisma was an asset in the internal struggle for power, as it made him look more malleable, promising the CC members the perspective of a soft leader, easy to manipulate in their own interest (Chirot 1994). A non-charismatic, low-profile, personality also appeared to be the right leader in the circumstances following Lenin's death, when power has already been secured by the Bolsheviks, who were anticipating a time of painstaking construction of socialism at home, while avoiding international complications which could endanger the Soviet project (Tucker 1973). Apart from Stalin, Polish leader Bolesław Bierut was a non-charismatic individual – described as rather quiet, shy and polite, and with insignificant following in the Polish communist movement – who was surrounded by a personality cult during his mandate as a General Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party (Main 2004).

Moreover, leader's charisma is neither a sufficient condition for the establishment of a personality cult. As seen in the case of Argentina's charismatic president Juan Peron, routinization of charisma can also yield two different outcomes, namely dispersion of the charismatic response to include less prominent activists of the movement, but who are in closer proximity to the individual followers, and the transfer of loyalties from the formerly charismatic leader to the organization it represents (Madsen and Snow 1991). In fact, charismatic leadership alone has little chances to cause a personality cult by the will of the leader. Attempts by the leader to perpetuate charisma necessarily face a strategic dilemma: while they need a group of disciples to project the charismatic message, this very group is the most likely to develop autonomy and challenge the leader (Robinson 1985).

All in all, the rise of a charismatic leader, given the right time and the right audience, is not sufficient to explain the formation of a personality cult. Since it cannot be considered a structural condition, I will not discuss it throughout the present dissertation. Nonetheless, it can be, as it has been in the majority of the cases, a powerful catalyst, and thus I afford it the necessary attention in my theoretical model.

3.8. Personality Cults as Invented Traditions

Invented traditions represent “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983:1). The author specifies that the term invented tradition is used in a broad, yet not an imprecise sense, and proposes several distinctions aimed at making the concept manageable. A large corpus (if not the bulk) of literature devoted to personality cults hints toward the identification of this phenomenon as an invented tradition. In general, personality cults are seen as traditions “establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority” (Hobsbawm 1983:9), and are treated as traditions devised from above.

To be sure, invented traditions are a necessary tool for legitimizing and maintaining power in authoritarian societies, not only with regard to the leader’s person. It is a prevalent practice especially in those societies whose ideology requires a marked break with the past. Here, old traditions, undesirable for the new regimes, but deeply

rooted in the popular culture, need to be replaced by new traditions, which will serve as carriers of the new official ideology. In the same time, they also recognized that new – i.e. invented – traditions need to overtake the preexisting culture, making them easy comprehensible for the masses, but in the same time subtly derailing their meanings. Specifically, in the socialist societies’ significant efforts were made to annihilate religion, and replace it in the peoples’ consciousness with the Marxist doctrine, which, “for all its scientific aspirations, from the beginning represented a secular substitute for traditional religion, offering a totalizing vocabulary in which ‘the riddle of history’ was solved, and envisioning a leap from the realm of oppression, scarcity, and necessity, to the realm of freedom” (Tismăneanu 2012:165). A large scale propaganda industry rose in response to the two purposes, to suppress the old traditions and replace them with new ones, suitable for the socialist ideology (Bonnell 1997).

Following the lead of the Soviet Union, all its satellite countries made concentrated efforts to fight the religious practices, often making it look as responding to workers’ demands. Both religious celebration of the year’s calendar and the most important life-course events were targeted. Thus, the Christmas Eve and Easter became regular work-days, and new rituals were devised for days marking the milestones of the new tradition, such as May 1st (The International Labor Day), November 7th (The Anniversary of the October Revolution), and the New Year’s Eve (in an attempt to diminish Christmas’ importance). Also, new rituals were devised for marking events such as the name giving for the newborns, the (nonreligious) wedding, the first job, and death, offering symbolic markers to replace the – banned or strongly discouraged – traditional / religious markers (Husband 2000; Cucu-Oancea 2003; Luehrmann 2011). The most

extreme case with respect to inventing traditions from above was Bulgaria, where the introduction of new rituals was regulated through a long series of official decisions issued by the government and by the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, resulting in the appointment of various committees composed of philosophers, sociologists, ethnographers and folklorist with the task of writing the scripts for the new rituals, representing the socialist transformation of everyday life (Petrov 1998; Petrov 2000), and culminating with the state's attempt to change the religiously inspired names of all members of the Bulgarian Muslim community into "secular" (i.e. Slavic-sounding) names (Bates 1994).

Religious rituals related to adoration of God, saints, or traditional leaders, like the Czar, left a void in the everyday routine when banned by the new, secular, states. Therefore, new traditions, redirecting century-old rituals to new objects of adoration (the party or his leaders), came into place. Not surprisingly most of the authors remark similarities with religious rituals in the practices associated with personality cults, as well as in the dictators' self-presentations.

Fidel Castro, for instance, was perceived as a Christ-like character, who came from the mountains, following a Revolution initiated by 12 men, to save the cities from sin and corruption. In the early years of the Revolution, he was wearing a pendant representing Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre (Coltman 2005). Moreover, in Castro's cult, Christian symbolism intermingled with references to the influential Santeria religion (Fogel and Rosenthal 1993). Mao Zedong's thinking, and the *Red Book* comprising it, were said to possess magical-supernatural powers (Meisner 2007). North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il's official biography placed his birth in a cabin in a holy site of Mount Paektu, a place

that has great significance in Korean mythology, although his real birth place was in Soviet Union, where his father, Kim Il Sung, was in exile (Moghaddam 2013). At the level of dictator's representations, it is noteworthy that the canonical image enforced in Stalin's portraits displayed non-incidental similarities with the Russian Orthodox iconography (Plamper 2012). Resorting to religious symbolism for strengthening the psychological power of the invented traditions was not exclusively the characteristic of secular societies. Similar examples can be cited in fundamentalist religious dictatorships – for instance, during the Iranian Revolution, the myth spread that Khomeini's face was visible on the image of the moon (Moghaddam 2013) – and in dictatorships justified by ideologies neutral, or indifferent, toward religious, such is the case of Haiti, where a veritable catechism of François Duvalier was published at the heights of his rule (Chirot 1994).

The second important source for legitimacy of authoritarian regimes was the past, recycled in their new traditions in many different ways. While most of the authoritarian regimes relied on a marked break with the recent past, the pattern was to overtly reject it at the level of declaration, but subtly incorporate it in the imagery of the new traditions. Stalin's cult, particularly in its visual incarnations, was an attempt to replace the image of the Czar from the population's consciousness, thus, unsurprisingly, Stalin's portraits resemble in many ways well-known portraits of the Czar (Plamper 2012). Mao Zedong's cult overtook many of the symbols associated with the cult of the emperor, sometimes with more subtlety, like using the same dominant colors in the official iconography, other times overtly using formulas associated with the emperor to refer to the communist leader, as is the case with "Long Live Chairman Mao for ten thousand years" (Lu 2004).

Legitimacy was thought through inducing the idea of continuity with a generally more distant past – real or alleged –, perceived as convenient by the new power holders. According to sociologist Daniel Chirot (1994) an ideal representation of a glorious national past, contrasted with an unfair and humiliating present, is a necessary precondition for the rise of dictatorships. The rituals of the new traditions make explicit the alleged arch between the glorious past and a not less glorious future promised by the authoritarian regimes, and in many instances personality cults of their leaders were fed from their identification with historical or mythical national heroes, such as Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great for Stalin, Jean-Jacques Dessalines – a former slave and leader of Haiti after defeating Napoleon’s armies – for François Duvalier, the Pagan Emperors for the Burmese dictator Ne Win (Chirot 1994). Examples are countless, from Mussolini’s cult evoking the lost glory of ancient Rome (Melograni 1976), to Ceaușescu being represented as the last, and largest, of a series of Romanian national heroes (Fischer 1989; Verdery 1995), to Hugo Chavez announcing a Bolivarian revolution (Gott 2005). More remarkable are the cases where the legitimacy was derived from a foreign past, instead of a national one: Rafael Trujillo, the dictator of Dominican Republic, was identified with Constantine the Great and Pepin the Short, while the semi-literate president-emperor of the Central African Republic, renamed Empire, “unable to find his own legitimizing historical myth, [...] picked one he had heard about from the French”, Napoleon Bonaparte (Chirot 1994:397).

All in all, the illustrations listed above lead to the formulation of the following causal statement. Totalitarian regimes, although resting on an abrupt break with the past, seek their legitimacy, overtly or covertly, in elements of religion, history, or mythology,

familiar to the population, and thus comprehensible and appealing. By constantly referring to traditional elements – i.e. allegories, symbols, images, etc. –, in the public discourse, the power holders institute – literally invent – traditions. Some of the elements used in these traditions, centered on the glorification of deities or heroes, constitute the bases of personality cults of authoritarian leaders.

This explanation is essentially correct, yet unsatisfactory for three reasons. First, the causality may not be unidirectional. Explaining personality cults as the result of invented traditions does not exclude the reverse, namely that fully developed personality cults are the very source of inventing traditions, as the cults themselves need to be legitimized through references to the past.

Second, only some, not all invented traditions lead to the creation of personality cults. A consistent causal explanation along these lines would identify those elements from the past which, if incorporated in invented traditions, would necessarily lead to personality cults. However, this is a task yet to be accomplished, and it seems further complicated by a third observation, that the existence or absence of certain historical or religious tradition cannot predict the formation of a personality cult. As art historian Elenea Firea pointed to me during a conference at the American Research Center in Sofia, Bulgaria, following the Byzantine imperial model, in most of the Eastern Orthodox mural iconography rulers and their families were depicted as saints, i.e. with a holy aura surrounding their heads. This was customary in all Eastern Orthodox churches in the region, except for Romania, where rulers did not have an aura (for further reference, see Musicescu 1969; Negrău 2011). However, the later distribution of personality cults (in

Romania and Yugoslavia, but not in Bulgaria), demonstrates that direct causality between tradition and invented tradition is, at best, very difficult to determine.

3.9. Functionalist Explanations

The functionalist explanation has been best summarized by political scientist Lisa Wedeen, discussing Syria's Dictator Hafez Al-Assad personality cult: "[...] why would a regime spend scarce resources on a cult whose rituals of obeisance are transparently phony? The answer is: Because it works" (Wedeen 2002:723). Indeed, personality cults can be seen as multifunctional – multipurpose tools in the hands of authoritarian regimes.

Their most obvious function is to induce legitimacy to an authoritarian ruler, and the system that allows a one person rule, by disguising dictatorship under the mask of democracy. All modern dictators pretend to rule, albeit with iron hands, in the name and on behalf of the people. However, this claim does not sustain lacking elections. Moreover, dictators' claims to represent the people are further undermined when accompanied, as it happens, by backdrops of the population's standard of living and individual liberties. Thus, unable to demonstrate neither genuine popularity through elections, nor the will or technocratic skills to enable them to effectively serve the people, dictators would claim legitimacy by faking popular support (Nelson 1984; Dobson 2013).

The quest for legitimacy through personality cults targets three distinct audiences. The first is the international public opinion, whose sympathy, or at least noninterference, is critical for the leaders' ability to rule domestically. This role was fulfilled by Ceaușescu's expansive foreign propaganda machine, materialized in more than 200

books published abroad in no less than 42 countries, including translated anthologies of Ceaușescu's own writings, homage books, and biographies by more or less well-known foreign authors (Marin 2008). The same role was taken, more or less ingenuously, by self-appointed apologists of Stalin, Fidel Castro, Mao Zedong, and other tyrants, among the Western Left intelligentsia (Amis 2002; Glazov 2009). The role of the personality cult in this equation is to prevent foreigners to interrogate the dictator's methods by demonstrating a monolithic unity between the leader and the people (Cioroianu 2007).

A second audience consists of the dictator's own people. One way the personality cults legitimized the ruler in the eyes of the oppressed, discussed in the previous section, was by inventing traditions, thus aligning the dictator's interest with the worldview for the less educated masses, who could relate to familiar rituals and images having in their center religious figures, or the powerful of the past, like the Czar (Fischer 1989; Marin 2008). Not negligible was the most intuitive purpose: to forge "the utopian image of an organized society, united, displaying an overwhelming feeling of joy, and marching orderly toward the generous ideal of communism, guided by the party leadership" (Marin 2008:14). Perhaps counterintuitive, another function targeting this audience was to divert people's attention from economic hardship and war (in Hitler's case), by entertaining the myth of the good leader betrayed – or simply misinformed – by his subordinates. Thus, people's anger was directed to scapegoats situated at the lower levels of the parties' ranks, while their confidence in the leader and in the system which he represented, remained high, at least for a while (Kershaw 1987; Gabanyi 2000).

Thirdly, personality cults were a powerful tool used by dictators to settle divergences with other members of the ruling elite. For instance, during the 1980s

Ceaușescu prepared his potentially unpopular (both among the masses and among the CC members) policy proposals ahead of time by organizing grassroots debates in factories, all of them ending automatically with resolutions in support of the General Secretary's great plans. By the time the proposal was officially raised in front of the Central Committee, it appeared backed by massive popular support, silencing possible arguments against (Gabanyi 2000). Similarly, Fidel Castro used the cult to enforce his personal rule over the collective leadership using the "direct democracy", consisting in public meetings, broadcasted on the television, where the leader presented his new policies in front of a crowd approving and applauding whenever they were asked if they agree with the respective policies (Szulc 1986).

Castro's "direct democracy" also indicates a second function of the personality cults, namely to prevent real political participation of the masses, and replace it with mandatory participation in cult rituals. A study of the cult of Mussolini showed that participation in Fascist parades instilled a feeling of being a part of the country's politics, and this feeling became accessible to many more individuals. At the same time, the real input of citizens, usually expressed through elections and ballots, was nullified, since all they were permitted to do was to show their support for Il Duce, any other opinion being suppressed (Melograni 1976).

The third function, documented by Lisa Wedeen (1999), is to control the population and prevent individuals to express dissent. The cult is used as a disciplinary device, involving the entire population in its own surveillance, and accentuating the psychotic myth of the ubiquitous secret police, another powerful tool for controlling dissent. In fact, even when the personality cult was absent, the system of repression based

on anonymous denunciations and secret surveillance prevented ordinary citizens from expressing their real feelings toward the system, and thus hindered the coagulation of dissent by isolating individuals from one another and enforced conformism and obedience (Cioroianu 2007). A leader's cult makes this device even more forceful, and grotesque in the same time, as everybody begins to be suspected not simply for what they did or might do (revolt against the social order, or simply express dissent, which is interpreted as an indication of a potential revolt), but also for what they fail to do (express devotion toward the leader). To be sure, nobody believed in the obsessively proclaimed awesomeness of the leader. Nonetheless, by abiding to the cultic rituals, everybody became its accomplice and its victim. Since personal doubts about the regime were concealed even from the closest friends, everybody was performing the comedy of adulating the leader, without having any indication of their friends (in)sincerity when doing the same. This pro-active participation in the maintenance of the myth of the ubiquitous surveillance isolated people even more, increasing mistrust between ordinary citizens to the unimaginable level of fearing family members (Wedeen 1999). Moreover, the constant performance of the cult by everybody, including one's friends and oneself, raises doubts about one's judgment in the evaluation of reality, which furthers individual obedience (Moghaddam 2013).

Probably the most effective devise of a personality cult regarding this function was the "Hitler greeting". Sporadically employed by few NSDAP members as early as 1923, the salute with the arm outstretched at a 45 degree angle was made compulsory for all public employees on July 13 1933, one day before the banning of all non-Nazi parties. Due to the simplicity and high visibility of the gesture involved, the greeting excluded

intermediary feelings from communication. One either performed it, and thus participate in the cultic ritual, or didn't at the expense of being suspected of disloyalty, a threat thinly veiled by the very decree which made the greeting mandatory (Kershaw 1987).

Like other explanations reviewed in this chapter, the functionalist one is not incorrect, yet it is unsatisfactory for several reasons. First, as Wedeen demonstrates, the cult hardly fulfilled some of its supposed functions. Specifically, Assad's cult did not prevent Syrians from communicating their true feelings relative to the regime. Instead, while the public transcript was indeed overwhelmed by praise to the leader, a thick layer of alternative communication developed, consisting of jokes and innuendoes not only in private conversations, but also in the mass media and the arts. Unflattering references to Assad and his regime passed censorship, yet everybody recognized their subversive message (Wedeen 1999). Thus, everybody was not only contributing to the cult, but also undermining it in the same time.

Second, and more important, the inferred causality is questionable due to the ambiguous temporal sequence: Assad could know that the cult of personality works as a tool for domination only after it was already in place. The possibility that dictators and/or their officials responsible with propaganda created the cult having one or more of these goals in mind cannot be overruled. However, a lot more evidence is needed to make a compelling argument that they were indeed goals, which predated the cult, and not merely side effects of a phenomenon originated from other causes. Only in later stages, once the cult is already in place, it makes more sense to believe that these observed functions compelled the ruling elite to maintain and possibly augment it.

Last, the functionalist perspective, focusing only on positive cases, does not explain the lack of personality cults in many dictatorships, although similar conditions are assumed. All dictatorships need legitimacy – in the eyes of their own people and of the foreign observers as well –, succeed in remaining in power if their citizens are diverted from real political involvement, and employ oppressive devices to prevent dissent and dissidence. If personality cults were perceived by dictators as instrumental in accomplishing any or all of these tasks, why so many dictatorships did not resort to suffocating the communication channels with lavish praise for the leader imposed from above? A complete causal explanation must also address this question, which appears even more important when considering the international connections dictatorships have with each other and with democracies, reviewed in the next subsection.

3.10. Mimetic Explanation

Another explanation, popular in Romanian commonplace knowledge, and endorsed by a few scholars (Fischer 1989; Chirot 1994; Deletant 1999,b ; Rees 2004), identifies the origins of Ceaușescu’s cult in a five-week long visit to East Asia in 1971. Impressed by the adulatory parades witnessed in Beijing and Pyongyang, Ceaușescu ordered a cult of himself, and initiated a “mini cultural revolution”, tailored upon the Chinese and North-Korean models. At surface, this explanation is limited to Ceaușescu’s case, but cannot address the original causes of the phenomenon. In other words, even if we accept that dictators copied personality cults from other dictators, there must be an original model whose causes still need to be explained. However, we need a deeper

examination of the mimetic explanation to account for its generalizability, as well as for its limitations.

Unlike democracies, dictatorships are seen as isolated systems, with few contacts with the rest of the world, except other similar dictatorships. However, relevant information often penetrates the borders, and individuals living in dictatorships learn from other dictatorships, and from the democratic worlds, at all levels, from activists opposing the system to dictators themselves, and, more important for this topic, members of the elite placed in key positions with respect to policy designing and implementing. Dictatorships often depend on maintaining good relationships with more developed or military powerful countries, but good relations depend at their turn on demonstrating they are ruling in the interest of their people. Preserving face is an important goal of the ruling elites, who are aware of developments in other parts of the world, and constantly adjust their policies, learning from accomplishments and failures of other dictatorships, as well as from democracies (Dobson 2013). In this light, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that, if the leader's cult in one country was perceived as functional by officials in another country, they took steps to implement it at home.

However, it is hard to believe that such a grand scale phenomenon is entirely the result of imitation. Rather, it seems safe to assume that a society where a cult of the leader was already on its way borrowed specific techniques, themes and motifs, or other details, from other personality cults. Moreover, sycophants of one leader do not simply mimic representations of foreign personalities, but engage in dialogues with them. For instance, Stalin's visual representations purposively contrasted his rivals on the international scene. Stalin's portraits, often smoking a pipe, conveyed through his body

language calm and the mastering of the situation, especially when juxtaposed with the agitated Hitler's gestures and rhetoric. The pipe in Stalin's hands was also used as a symbol of his alleged closeness to the people, in contrast with Churchill's "capitalist" cigar (Plamper 2012).

A closer analysis of the effects of Ceaușescu's visit to China and North Korea brings support to this second hypothesis. First, personality cults are complex phenomena, which encompass eventually the entire society, and are not limited to a single aspect, specifically the mass parades. However, the news and propagandistic reports of the visit, as well as Ceaușescu's own position, resulted from the Minutes of the Conversation of Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party's meeting of June 25, 1971, upon the return from the Asian journey (Romanian Communist Party Central Committee and Ceaușescu 1971), only refer to the cultic representations in mass spectacles (Tolnay 2002). It is improbable that the staged parades of popular admiration to the leader were the first elements of a cult that will infect later other areas of the cultural and social life, including mass-media, creative literature, fine arts, and the daily routines in schools and workplaces. In fact, isolated instances of adulatory cultural products, such as sycophantic portraits of the leader, or toady references to his wisdom could be observed before the spring of 1971 (Büchel and Carmine 2008; Merișanu and Taloș 2009). Furthermore, the personality cult did not seem to gain momentum soon after 1971. In fact, with the exception of a wave of encomiastic messages in 1973, on Ceaușescu's 55th birthday, the cult of his person was only fully visible since 1978 (Marin 2008), thus making the connection with the Korean cult less obvious.

Second, the staged mass parades of joy and support to an individual or party were not a novelty in Romania. By 1971, such celebrations were still a common sight in all the countries under the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. Associated or not with personality cults, the parades were symbolic representations of power relations, centered on the Communist Parties and its leaders (Rolf 2004). In Romania, the parades began to slide from celebrating the Communist Party toward celebrating Ceaușescu on a more personal note in August 1968, soon after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (Marin 2008). Therefore, the Asian journey of 1971 is not the origin of the cult related mass parades.

Third, it has been offered a compelling alternative explanation of the broader ideological and political-economic similarities between Romania and North Korea, including the unusual – even for the communist world – concentration of power in the hands of a single family, and, indirectly, the personality cults. According to this explanation, the neo-Stalinism practiced in the two geographically and culturally remote countries can be traced to the “inferiority complex” of the respective communist elites in relation to their counterparts in other socialist countries, due to the obvious lack of results of the early national communist movements, and the corresponding overwhelming importance of external support for imposing socialism in both countries. Specifically, the tiny and ethnic-minority dominated Romanian communist movement was much alienated from the population, and unable to elicit any popular support, which was substituted with Soviet force. The North Korean socialist regime, also installed with Soviet assistance, had seen its position among international communist parties further degraded with the rapid defeat of its army by the US troops in the Korean War, subsequently won with

massive Chinese support. The similar pariah positions in the international communist communities evolved into similar decisions of the Romanian and Korean elites to resist reforming the Marxist economic doctrine and to over impose a strong nationalist stance to the Marxist social program (Chen and Lee 2007).

However, the mass parades in Beijing and Pyongyang did leave a mark on Ceaușescu, and had consequences for Romanian propaganda, and ultimately, for his own personality cult. The effects are not of substance, but of quality and magnitude. Days after his return from the journey, Ceaușescu assessed precisely the differences between similar parades in Romania and those just witnessed in Asia:

“The population also gave us a very fine reception at the airport; afterwards, in the city, we were met by hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people, however not in thick crowds – as is the custom in our country – but in an organized manner: with schools, brass bands, sport games, and dances.” (Romanian Communist Party Central Committee and Ceaușescu 1971:1)

Further, he explicitly demands that “We have to learn something from this”, and refers to specific elements of the spectacle. Particularly, he was impressed by the slogans written with human bodies, an innovation quickly introduced in the staged parades in Romania, as Ceaușescu’s hints were rarely missed by his subalterns.

Considering the timing of the Asian journey in the development of the personality cult, it is clear that this explanation does not tackle the causes of the phenomenon, even though it appears plausible in the particular case of Ceaușescu. However, the international connections and the cultural imports resulted should not be overlooked. Just like all the other explanations reviewed here, it is incomplete and perhaps simplistic, but not entirely useless. To say the least, it points to the importance of considering exogenous independent variables when explaining any large scale phenomena.

3.11. Further clarifications

Any attempt to theorize about the origins of personality cults must rely on three broad empirical observations, also emergent from the systematic review of literature.

First, it is a large scale phenomenon, visible at all levels of a society. A fully developed cult of the leader penetrates deep into the society's fabric, modeling the power relations between the leader and the ruling elite, the relations between the authorities and the population, but also everybody's everyday interactions. For this reason, as I shall discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, the obvious units of analysis are countries. A thick description of the social relations within the units of analysis is necessary to capture their complexity and, ultimately, to distill the causal processes responsible for the cult.

Second, the dependent variable is cultural in nature, which places my inquiry in the field of cultural sociology. The theoretical framework I propose represents a response to Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith's call for a strong program in cultural sociology (Alexander and Smith 2003). Following the recommendations of the latter two authors, my framework employs hermeneutic as method of understanding social texts, considers culture autonomous, and addresses causality. The possibilities for sociological inquiry opened by employing this framework are in a way similar with Anne Kane's cultural interrogation of the formation of an Irish national identity during the Land War (Kane 2011).

Third, the phenomenon has only been present in three different types of societies, namely fascist, socialist, and newly independent former colonies. However, not all

societies belonging to any of the three types developed personality cults of their leaders. A general theory of personality cults must look for similarities, as well as for differences, across the three types, rather than within each type. However, it is important to note and keep in mind during the analysis that the three types of society rely on different legitimizing ideologies, to which leaders' cults relate in different ways. An in-depth comparison between the fascist and the socialist ideologies, although illuminating, is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It is, however, important to note that both opposed bourgeois values and liberal democracies, and both emphasized the leading role of a unique party, gaining its strength from the alleged infallibility of its elite (Tismăneanu 2012).

Yet, while fascist ideology contained the seeds of personality cults by emphasizing the spiritual connection between the leader and the nation, and thus the need for charismatic leadership and hero worship (Payne 1995), the socialist ideology's emphasis on collective leadership and equalitarianism class make the formation of personality cults seem counterintuitive. In fact, as I discussed in Chapter 3.5., the leader's cult is one (albeit not the only) logical consequence of the Marxist-Leninist principles applied to societies. At the discourse level, the obvious contradiction between class struggle and leader's cult has been resolved through complicated ideological contortions aimed at justifying (always retrospectively) the latter by reassessing the role of personality in history. For instance, Mao distinguished between "good" (his own) and "bad" (Stalin's) personality cults, whereas a leader's cult is acceptable when it relies on "the truth", "as a reflection of the objective reality" (Marin 2008), while Ceaușescu's

ideologues resolved that great personalities play indeed crucial roles in history, but only when they emerge from and represent entire social classes (Gabanyi 2000).

The newly independent former colonies did not display a unifying, coherent ideology, being in a sense neutral to recognizing their leaders as great historical personalities, and subsequently worshiping them. Neither the grand narrative of gaining and preserving national independence, nor the ideological concessions they made to the non-aligned movement or to one of the major economic and political powers (USA, USSR, or the former colonizer) did not include coherent considerations of the type of leadership, at least not across countries.

The ideological differences have their relevance, without being crucial to the formation of personality cults. Moreover, although the cult of personality is not strictly ideology, it carries ideological power, which resides in “the mobilization of values, norms, and rituals in human societies” which “surpasses experience and science alike, and so contains nontestable elements” (Mann 2005:30). Ideologies and cult of personality are diffused through specific media of communication and their characteristics may transform ideological messages, conferring autonomous ideological power (Mann 1993).

3.12. Concluding Remarks

The existent literature offers important contributions to the study of the cult of personality, yet none of the explanations attempted so far provides a cohesive, working theory. The major pitfalls can be traced to the methodology used to study the cult – the

focus on single cases without the intention to produce general statements about the cult, and the lack of historical depth. Sociologists and political scientists who have studied the cult evaluated its usefulness as a mechanism of domination *after* it was already in place, but were not concerned with its origins. Nor do all theories examined above combined successfully address the causes of personality cults. In order to understand the causes of personality cults, we need a new theory, which should go beyond the achievements of the existing explanations, without overlooking them. Through my analysis, I consider the variables already addressed by the literature, but also several previously un- or under-explored variables.

I propose an integrative approach on three different dimensions, which should incorporate the existing literature and expand it by considering new independent variables. My aim is to offer a coherent causal explanation, able to resist the test of any single case of personality cult, without oversimplifying or excluding any relevant causal factor.

First, the literature revealed the formation of personality cults in three different types of societies: fascist (Hitler, Mussolini), socialist (Stalin, Ceaușescu, Tito), and newly independent former colonies (Trujillo, Bokassa). While taking into account the differences between the three types, I am looking for independent variables that can be identified in all three types of societies, albeit with different explanatory powers.

The second dimension of my integrative approach refers to the level of analysis. Instead of reducing the explanation to one level, I will search for an explanation across levels. Thus, I will investigate the micro level, concerning the persons of the dictators

and/or the everyday interactions and psycho-social processes in the society, the macro level, concerning large social structures, and the interplay between them. Of particular concern will be the mezzo level, consisting of a heterogeneous group of individuals situated in similar positions at different intermediary levels of the power flow, which I consider critical for the formation of personality cults.

Third, rather than taking any side in the agency vs structure debate, I will consider individuals, structures, and culture as potential causes of the phenomenon. The dependent variable, the cult of personality, is cultural, but in its turn affects individuals and social structures alike. Acknowledging the autonomy of culture, I will identify individual, structural, and cultural causes. What ultimately explains the formation of a leader's cult is the right combination between different level variables.

4. Methods

I consider comparative and historical sociology to be the best method suited for the purpose of my dissertation. At the core of the method sits “a commitment to offering historically grounded explanations to large-scale and substantively important outcomes” (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003:4). It is important to note that comparative and historical scholars place emphasis on causation, and attempt to explain, not interpret, phenomena which develop through lengthy processes and pertain entire societies (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003).

The study of the cult of personality of state dictators is indeed best served by this method. One reason is that I intend to identify the causes and the mechanisms of formation of such cults, and not merely to describe a phenomenon which garners enough attention both in and out Academia (Knight 1993; Verdery 1995; Wedeen 1999; Gabanyi 2000). Also, the use of other methods, based on individual-level data such as interviews or surveys, in non-democratic societies is impaired by a lack of data, and – where it exists – by their dubious reliability. Indeed, “since many governments are inept, corrupt, and venal, especially in nondemocratic or poor countries, why would we expect their statistics departments to be substantially different?” (Herrera and Kapur 2007:325). All these make longitudinal data on a topic so sensitive for non-democratic regimes a utopian dream for the researcher. Longitudinal data are required because the formation of the cult is a long-term process, usually visible only a few years after the dictators take the power. North Korea and societies where the cult is inherited may be exceptions.

The comparative and historical method addresses large-scale phenomena encompassing entire societies, and so states are the logical units of analysis (Skocpol 1979). As we shall see, the cult of personality, in its final stages, permeates whole countries, impacting every domain of social life, and reaching to every individual, regardless of her position in the society. With this in mind, the systematic use of secondary sources allows the researcher to evaluate mechanisms and processes observable at all levels, but primarily at the macro level of society. Moreover, the use of secondary sources offers on the one hand the view of the larger picture, usually interpreted retrospectively by historians after the phenomenon under study has concluded, and the – incomplete, but sometimes more telling – insight captured by the analyses published while the process was in the making. This double perspective offers not only a better understanding of the phenomenon as revealed in the cases selected for study, but also a more cautious approach to processes that develop over time, by reducing the dangers of retrospective interpretations (Garfinkel 1967).

It is worth noting that the choice of method does not constrain the researcher to any particular choice of theoretical framework (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003). To the contrary, the recent phase of comparative and historical scholarship “offers an opportunity to [...] ask new questions in regard to culture, agency, the character of modernity, gender, colonized peoples, race, and the world beyond the West” (Charrad 2006:352). By enabling this variety of approaches, the comparative and historical method serves best the present study, where I have no intention to favor an explanation placed at the level of structure, or agency. Rather, I am interested in pointing out that, given the right structural conditions, individual agency has the power to decisively influence the

evolution of a large scale phenomenon, thus constructing a new, but not less powerful, social structure.

The case selection is shaped by a dilemma faced by researchers in social history. Should the researcher focus on a single case, present it in great detail, but sacrifice the potential for generalizability, or should general laws be emphasized, even with risk of losing focus and creating more shallow research with several cases? Since the primary purpose of this dissertation is theory building, I will focus on a single case, namely Romania under Nicolae Ceaușescu. Having one focal case as a starting point is acceptable in comparative and historical sociology, insofar it offers opportunities for theoretical elaboration (Chirot 1976; Maher 2010). I opted for Ceaușescu's case because it is an obvious case of fully developed personality cult, which benefits from a large body of literature, in English and Romanian languages. As a native speaker of Romanian, I have access to a wider range of secondary and primary sources, which allows me to identify the causes and mechanisms leading to the formation of the cult in a more intimate way than by reading only the literature existent in English.

Periodization is naturally delimited by two historical accidents in Romania's history: the Soviet invasion at the end of World War II, which imposed the communist rule, and the Revolution of December 1989, which ended communism in Romania, and with it the Ceaușescu's reign and its cult. The structural conditions for the cult will be sought in the state of the society in 1965, when Ceaușescu acquired the leading position in the Party, yet more attention will be paid to the years of his rule, where the subsequent mechanisms related to the creation of the cult should be identified. Since my intention is not to describe the cult, but to explain its inception, I will concentrate on the first part of

Ceaușescu's rule from 1965 to roughly 1980, however without losing sight of his last ten years in power. One important structural condition, the combination between patrimonial rule and clientelar flow of power, can be traced to the formation of modern Romania (Chirot 1994; Verdery 1995). When needed, I will briefly refer to its development, and thus go beyond the stated periodization in this respect only.

Although the focal case was selected on the dependent variable, a major flaw for other methods of sociological inquiry, this practice is not only acceptable, but desirable when comparative and historical method is employed. Due to the small number of cases considered by the comparative and historical scholars, careful case selection is more suited for identifying causal factors than random sampling (Ritter 2010).

The second component of my dissertation is theory testing. Because comparative and historical sociology considers, by definition, a small number of cases, the stated causation can be falsified by any exception not taken into account, which, if revealed, leads researchers to (at best) refine the hypotheses (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003). In order to address this pitfall inherent to theory building, I will bring nonsystematic evidence from other cases of personality cults (such as Albania's Enver Hoxha or Syria's Hafiz al-Assad), and also from counterfactuals – cases which display similar characteristics with Romania, but where the cult of personality is absent (e.g. Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia). Bringing evidence from other cases is important insofar as it can support or contradict the generalizability of the causal argument built on the Romanian case. Nevertheless, a complete comparative analysis is beyond the scope of a dissertation.

Finally, the replicability of this study depends on the account of the data selection. At this point, I have to make it clear that my purpose is not to describe the cult of Ceaușescu in detail, but to extract those features that relate to the cult of dictators in general, and so can be identified in other societies. As Daniel Chirot (1994) points out, the role of the researcher is neither to bring new evidence, nor to provide an exhaustive description of the case(s) under study, but to select the most correct arguments for each case, and draw general causal conclusions based on the existing literature. In other words, my job is not to redo the primary research, already done in numerous excellent studies, and so, the appropriate data consists first and foremost of secondary sources (Skocpol 1984). Primary sources will be employed only for the “fine-tuning” of the theory, to the extent that they will bring new information, unavailable in the secondary sources.

Below I will report on the data selection, using a simplified version of the STARLITE mnemonic, a tool developed in the medical studies with the purpose of providing a standard for reporting literature searches (Booth 2006). Adhering to the proposed standard makes it “easier for readers to assess the quality of such reviews and for researchers to replicate their methods” (Booth, 2006:425). Thus, the following elements are suggested to be reported by the researchers, memorable through the STARLITE mnemonic: sampling strategy (S), type of study (T), approaches (A), range of years (A), limits (L), inclusion and exclusions (I), terms used (T), and electronic sources (E). Using the full version of the mnemonic may not be best suited for comparative and historical sociology. It appears too branchy, and to some extent redundant, considering the partial overlap between sampling strategy and approaches, as well as between limits and inclusions and exclusions. For the sake of simplicity, I will only retain four elements

which I consider of importance for the replicability of a comparative-historical study, namely the sampling strategy, types of studies, range of years, and limits.

The first and most important set of secondary sources consists of academic books and journal articles, in the fields of history, sociology, political sciences, and cultural studies (such as literary critics and architecture). An initial sample was devised through a search in the data base of the University of Texas Libraries; further readings were added mainly through snowballing from the sources consulted. A second, less numerous, set of secondary sources consists of non-academic books written by journalists, identified through the same sampling technique. As I explained above, I paid special attention to achieve a balance between sources published during Ceaușescu's life and more comprehensive studies published recently. All the sources are available either in English or Romanian, however I tried to favor the readings in English, more accessible to the intended readers of this study. A first set of primary sources consists of diaries and memoirs of individuals who lived in that period; although in this case the sample is not systematic, the list includes testimonies of intellectuals, ordinary people, members of the political elite, and famous dissidents. Other primary sources consist of a survey of the Romanian press between 1965 and 1989; in this case, due to the large volume and the limited usefulness of data, a convenience sample will be drawn after the reading of secondary sources will allow me to identify key moments in the evolution of the cult. I also added a small number of reports published in the international media between 1965 and 1989, identified through Google News search engine.

I analyze the data using Atlas TI, a software for qualitative analysis, to organize my readings by applying a set of primary codes to the data. I examine the data in the

following order: academic secondary sources in English, academic secondary sources in Romanian, non-academic secondary sources, primary sources consisting of diaries and memoirs, primary sources from mass-media. I will stop examining data in each category, and move to the next, when further reading are found to only marginally add to the data already encountered (Ritter 2010).

5. A Specific Distribution of Power

Earlier in this dissertation (particularly section 3.6., but also other places), I reviewed the literature linking personality cults with a certain structural distribution of power, defined by patrimonial concentration of power at the top, combined with clientelar flows of power from the leader to his agents. There, I defined patrimonialism, in accordance with Max Weber (1968), as an ideal type of exercising power, where power is concentrated in the hands of one person or small group, usually bypassing the middle or upper classes. Clientelism is the exchange of goods and services for political support, thus establishing flows of power based on personal relations, rather than on bureaucratic regulations (Roniger and Güneş-Ayata 1994). Patrimonialism partly overlaps with sultanism, the latter term describing discretionary rule of one individual heading a state (Weber 1968). Although personality cults form in sultanistic regimes, I prefer the term patrimonialism, more suited to describe complex power relations within states, and not confined to states as units of analysis.

The combination of patrimonialism and clientelism is a necessary, yet not sufficient, condition for personality cults to arise. However, in order to constitute the ground for the rise of a personality cult, this structural disposition needs to be backed-up by cultural acceptance of patrimonialism and clientelism as the “natural” organization of the society. This usually happens for two reasons. The first is by virtue of tradition, as it was the case in Romania, where Ceaușescu achieved absolute power in the late 1960s following four decades of almost uninterrupted patrimonial rule of consecutive dictators with different political orientations and ideological justifications. The second is by

ideology, as it was the case with Hitler's Germany, where a strong leader was accepted as the solution for the economic and social problems faced by the Germans in the aftermath of the WWI defeat, and during the Great Depression. In this chapter I will provide an in-depth examination of patrimonialism and clientelism in Romania, and how it influenced the peoples' perception of their leadership when Ceaușescu was elected first secretary of the Party, to replace the deceased Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. Further, I will specify how this specific structure, and the culture accompanying it, create the seedbed for a personality cult. As with the other structural conditions I identified, I will follow three roughly delimited stages in its evolution. Social structures are through their nature durable, however, not frozen; in fact, they change continuously, albeit slowly. Moreover, a certain structure initially favors the apparition of the cult, but after the cult is present the interaction is bidirectional, the structure is re-shaped by the cult and its new shape further acts upon the cult. This is why I will discuss the evolution of the structures prior to Ceaușescu's appointment as First Secretary of the RCP, since this moment until the approximate time when the personality cult was formed, and beyond, until Ceaușescu's demise in December 1989. I will conclude this section by succinctly analyzing the structure of power in other positive cases, and I will show why even slight variations from this structural arrangement prevent personality cults from happening, by looking at some of the negative cases.

5.1. Patrimonial Rule in Romania

The making of modern Romania, during the nineteenth century, was triggered by the ideas of the French Enlightenment, introduced by Western (especially French) educated intellectuals of the 1840s, in opposition to the Ottoman and Russian cultural influence, more pervasive in Romania before that turning point in European history. Among the consequences of this cultural and political shift, in 1866 Romania became a constitutional monarchy. The adoption of the first constitution, and the acquisition of a foreign prince, the German Carol of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, paved the way for the development of democracy. The Constitution of 1866, modeled after the Belgian charter of 1831, was one of the most democratic in Europe at the time. It imposed constraints on royal government, introduced the separation of powers within the state, and provided for a large array of civil liberties. For the next three quarters of a century, Romania embarked on a promising multi-party democracy, albeit plagued by wide-spread corruption and routinely election frauds (Rady 1992).

Admittedly, democracy in post-World War I Romania developed slowly. Nonetheless, as shown by an analysis of patterns of electoral behavior, democracy matured by the early 1930s. Unfortunately, this was also the time when the multiparty democracy has been abruptly interrupted, perhaps not surprisingly, given the international context where autocracies flourished, while democracy as governing system lost much of its appeal in the context of the Great Depression (Shapiro 1981).

It was Carol II of Romania, the nephew of the monarch appointed in 1866 to bring Romanian democracy to a halt. Born in 1893, son of Romania's king Ferdinand, for the first part of his life Carol made himself remarkable only as a womanizer and adventurer. After his first marriage with the daughter of a Romanian general was deemed unconstitutional, and thus annulled by a court decision, Carol was forced to marry Princess Helen of Denmark and Greece, with whom he had a son, Michael, born in 1921. However, Carol soon began an extramarital affair with Elena Lupescu, former wife of an army officer. In 1925 Carol renounced his rights to the throne, and moved to Paris, together with Elena Lupescu. Thus, when King Ferdinand died, in 1927, the successor was Carol's son, the 6-year-old Michael, represented by an appointed regency. Three years later Carol decided to renege his renunciation, and returned to Romania, where he was proclaimed king by the Parliament, a move in accordance with Romanians' pro-monarchic sentiments, and also with their dissatisfaction with the regency. For the Romanian politicians who orchestrated Carol's return, a young (yet adult) and energetic king was needed to save monarchy and redress the economic situation, on the conditions that he strictly observed the Constitution, give up his extramarital affairs, and reunite with his legitimate wife. Nonetheless, the new king had a different vision, and soon began to implement it, despite the protests of the same politicians (Quinlan 1995). Short time after being recognized as king, he expelled his wife, and brought his mistress, and in the same time undermined the constitution and increasingly exercised power in an authoritarian fashion, by appointing governments formed of yes-men, and granting informal power resources to his camarilla. This culminated in 1938 with the adoption of a new Constitution, which granted virtually absolute power to the king, formalized in

extended executive, legislative, and judicial prerogatives. Shortly after, by royal decrees, censorship of mass-media was introduced, all political parties were dissolved, and later that year a unique party was instituted under the name of The National Renaissance Front, completing the process of accumulation of patrimonial power in the hands of the king. However, Carol's absolutist rule was short-lived; in September 1940, in the wake of the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty, which caused Romania severe territorial losses, he decided to abdicate the throne and deflected the country (Georgescu and Călinescu 1991).

With remarkable political ability, Carol II was able to outmaneuver the democratic political personalities, and, toward the end of his ten years stay in Romania, to secure patrimonial rule. However, the civil society did not yield to the ambitious monarch without fierce and sustained resistance. Romanians' attachment to the monarchic dynasty eased the king's advancement, yet his anti-democratic measures were constantly challenged by political and public personalities, and disapproved by the population. For illustration, the 1938 Constitution was adopted through a peculiar referendum, consisting in non-confidential voting, preceded by police arrests and intimidation of the advocates against the Constitution. Furthermore, the setup of the referendum explicitly threatened those who would vote against, who were noted on a separate list, accessible to the police. Nonetheless, almost 6000 individuals undertook the unavoidable risks and voted against the proposed Constitution – although a tiny percentage of the voters, a significant number to illustrate the populations' support for democracy (Grecu 2012).

Following Carol's flight, now nineteen-year-old Michael became King of Romania for the second time, but the effective power was taken by General Ion

Antonescu, who ruled over the next four years in a military-authoritarian fashion. In the beginning, he constituted a government with The Iron Guard, an extreme right political organization, remodeled as the single official party. The alliance with the Iron Guard broke in January 1941, as the result of an attempted coup d'état of the latter, crushed by the army faithful to Antonescu. The state of necessity, imposed by Carol II in January 1938 was never lifted, due to the special conditions created by the outbreak of World War II, to which Romania began an active belligerent in June 1941, on the side of the Axis. With no support from the traditional political parties, which continued their activity underground, Antonescu ruled over Romania with an iron hand during most part of the War. Officially titled *Conducător* (the Romanian word for leader), Antonescu effectively concentrated the executive, legislative and judicial powers in his hands, bypassing the teenage king Michael, who was mostly a decorative figure during this time. After the separation from the Iron Guard, he appointed a government formed of military and faithful technocrats, and substituted the legislative process with ordinances of the government. Order was maintained by the political police (*Siguranța Statului*), but also, to a large extent, by the German army stationed in Romania (Deletant 2006).

Antonescu justified his patrimonial rule due to exceptional conditions created by the territorial losses sanctioned through the Ribbentrop-Molotov treaty, and subsequently due to the war. Nonetheless, like Carol's, his rule was resisted by the civil society, headed by the representatives of the democratic parties. Although the parties were still banned, Antonescu did not enforce the laws against party activity, and, occasionally, accepted to consult with the parties' leaders. As the war began to reverse its tides after the battle of Stalingrad, in the winter of 1943, Romanian anti-Hitlerist forces, represented

by the historical democratic parties and, by Stalin's demand, by the Communist Party, with King Michael's agreement, began negotiations with the allied powers for the withdrawal of Romania's army's support to the Axis, which led to a coup d'état supervised by the King on 23 August 1944, when Romania signed an armistice with the Allies, followed three days later by a war declaration against Germany. Antonescu himself was arrested and two years later tried for war crimes and executed (Deletant 2006).

By this time, despite the uncertainties brought by the war, and after more than a decade of dictatorship, when Carol consolidated, then exercised his patrimonial rule, and Antonescu followed steps, a multiparty system and the separation of powers were still considered the "natural" form of governance in the future. Populations' attachment to the constitutional monarchy and the multi-party democratic system was evidenced in the numerous mass rallies in support of the king, as well as in the fierce anti-communist resistance, and the voters' choices for the historical parties expressed at the 1946 election, despite the Soviets' intimidations.

After the conclusion of the war, an Allied Control Commission, representing in fact the Soviet Union, and with the English and American representatives in merely decorative positions, was supposed to oversee the normalization of civil and political life in Romania, until the first post-war democratic elections.

The elections of 1946, only supervised by the Soviet Union, marked the victory of the Bloc of Democratic Parties (comprising the Romanian Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Ploughmen's Front and four other small formations) by a

comfortable gap, mainly as a result of the elections being forged (Weiner and Özbudun 1987). These elections sanctioned the transfer of power to the Communist Party representatives, and the beginning of socialism in Romania. In October 1947, the Eighth Congress of the Social Democratic Party decided to merge with the Communist Party. This decision was sanctioned by the Communist Party at its Sixth Congress, in February 1948, which became the First Congress of The Romanian Workers' Party, where the Communists had roughly 80 percent of the seats in all committees with decisional power (Tismăneanu 2003; Cioroianu 2007).

However, before the elections, the Romanian Communist Party had less than one thousand members, already divided into three competing factions: the Muscovites (who were in Moscow, as refugees, during the previous period of repression against Communists), the Central Committee in Illegality, and the group of Communists who were in the Târgu-Jiu prison during the repression, led by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, to which Ceaușescu belonged. A ruthless struggle for power between the three factions dominated the first decades of Romanian socialism. Initially, the Muscovites were trusted by Stalin to govern Romania; however, they were joined as soon as 1948 by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, a versatile diplomat, who was able to win Stalin's trust (Tismăneanu 2003; Cioroianu 2007).

After the First Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party, held between 21 and 23 February, the leadership of the party, and implicitly the de facto rule over Romania, was collectively held by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party. Its members were Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca, Teohari Georgescu (all three representatives of the Muscovite wing of the party), Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (a member

of the nationalist faction, imprisoned during the war), and Lothar Rădăceanu (representative of the former Social Democratic Party). The latter never had any major role in the power struggles, so he continued to hold honorific positions until his death in 1955. The struggle between the other Communist leaders was fierce, and concluded through purges, already tested in the Soviet Union by Stalin (Tismăneanu 2003). By 1952, Dej traveled to Moscow and convinced Stalin of the necessity of the purges of Luca, Georgescu and Pauker, accused of left-wing and right-wing deviationism in the same time. Dej was able to frame the charges so to take advantage of Stalin's increasing anti-Semitic feeling, although only Ana Pauker was Jewish. Dej successfully presented her as the leader of a deviationist faction, adding charges of cosmopolitanism based solely on her ethnicity. Due to their powerful protectors in Moscow, where Vyacheslav Molotov intervened on Pauker's behalf, and Lavrentiy Beria defended Georgescu, their lives and freedom were eventually spared, yet they were confined to powerless – albeit well remunerated – positions at state-owned publishing houses. Less lucky, Vasile Luca was sentenced to death in 1954; his sentence was commuted to life in prison by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. He spent his next ten years in various prisons in Romania, albeit under much easier conditions than the other political prisoners, and died in 1964 in Aiud prison (Hodos 1987; Levy 2001).

Another major purge was directed against the former minister of justice, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. A hard-core Communist, Pătrășcanu was the artisan of forging the 1946 elections, and used every opportunity to prove his loyalty to the party. However, attempting to counteract the popularity of The National Peasants' Party in Transylvania, he played the nationalistic card. While this did not gain popularity for the Romanian

Workers' Party, it garnered a great deal of popular sympathy for himself, as he was perceived by the population as the only Communist willing to defend Romania's national interests against those of the Soviet invaders. His genuine charisma and populist speeches brought upon him the fear and hate of his comrades at the top levels of the party. He was arrested in 1948, under the charge of espionage on behalf of the "imperialist powers". After six years of imprisonment in harsh conditions, he was tried, sentenced to death, and executed only two days after the trial, in April 1954 (Betea 2011). Purges from the Central Committee, as well as from the lower levels of the party hierarchy continued during the second half of the 1950s, as virtually any dissenting opinion from within the party resulted in the destitution of those who voiced it (Ionescu-Gură 2004).

By this time, Gheorghiu-Dej seemed to have secured patrimonial ruling over the party and the government alike. However, in the aftermath of Stalin's death, the new "collective leadership" of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union demanded the leaders of the East-European satellites to split the top state and party positions. With some delay, compared to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, Gheorghiu-Dej, at the time both Prime Minister and General Secretary of the party, gave up the latter position in favor of Gheorghe Apostol in 1954. A year later he switched back, making himself General Secretary and giving the premiership to Chivu Stoica. However, both Apostol and Stoica were among his closest and most trusted collaborators, both representing the "Romanian" wing of the Party (Jowitt 1971; Steele 1974; Tismăneanu 2003).

The following ten years passed without major challenges from inside the party for its General Secretary, who was able to increase his power over both the party and the state apparatuses, while refusing to initiate a real de-Stalinization and in the same time

increasingly gaining independence from Moscow and the supranational institutions of the Eastern Bloc, such as COMECON and the Warsaw Pact. Moreover, the apparent opening he initiated in the last years, concertized in the withdrawal of Soviet Armies from Romania in 1959, the termination of political prisons in 1964 and the bold *Declaration of April 1964*, also gained him certain popular sympathy (Tismăneanu 2003).

By the time Dej died, the patrimonial power concentrated in the hands of one man – the general secretary of the Party – was already considered the normal and desirable political arrangement, for several reasons. First, it was after thirty years of almost uninterrupted patrimonial leadership, under successive dictatorship of different political flavors. Generations of young adults were born during, or shortly prior to 1938, and so they did not have memories of life in a multiparty democracy to compare with a unique party rule. Second, it was widely accepted that resistance to communism is futile, and no return to multi-party democracy is possible. This myth of historical irreversibility was fueled by the realization that the Western powers had not been willing to support the Soviet satellite countries' struggle for democracy, and, no less significantly, by the internalization of the Marxist dialectic view on history as a necessary unidirectional evolution toward communism (Marino 1996). And third, Dej's patrimonial rule was linked with the alleviation of the terror exercised by the Communist Party during the collective leadership, albeit the association was rather spurious, caused in fact by events that took place in the Soviet Union.

Consequently, Dej's death did not leave a question of re-arrangement of the power-share, as in the case of Stalin (Wolfe 1957), but simply, of the person who would inherit the patrimony built by Dej. This person was Ceaușescu, after a short but intense

struggle with two opponents: Alexandru Drăghici and Gheorghe Apostol. A façade of collective leadership was displayed for a short period after Ceaușescu's election as general secretary, however shallow, since the other top positions in the government and state respectively were occupied by Ceaușescu's supporters, who accepted a submissive role from the beginning – Ion Gheorghe Maurer (prime minister) and Chivu Stoica (president of the State Council).

5.2. Clientelism in Romania

Broadly defined, clientelism is the exchange of resources for political support, often taking the form of a hierarchical relationship between patron (the politician providing resources) and clients (providers of political support), and sometimes including intermediaries, or brokers, at different levels of the power structure (Stokes 2013). An important assumption infers a time lag between the support provided by the client, during the elections, and the preferential distribution of resources by the patron, *ex post* (Robinson and Verdier 2013). Scholars tend to agree that clientelism is correlated with poverty, and inversely correlated with modernization and development (Bustikova and Corduneanu-Huci 2011; Hicken 2011), and democracy (Kuo 2013). However, it has also been shown that clientelism is persistent even in the most advanced democracies, in different forms (Auyero 2001; Piattoni 2001; Ermakoff 2011; Gans-Morse, Mazzuca and Nichter 2014; Heywood 2014). In fact, clientelism is possible even when there is a secret ballot, and thus voters' individual behavior cannot be observed, if politicians can observe

more aggregate behavior, and divert resources toward larger collections of sympathetic voters, such as electoral districts (Robinson and Verdier 2013). Therefore it is not the existence of a clientelar system to be questioned, rather its nature, extent, and acceptance in a certain society can condition the rise of a personality cult.

Clientelism was a widespread practice in Romania throughout history, just as it was everywhere in the world, taking different forms to adapt to different election systems. The specific features of Romanian clientelism have been explained through reference to the authority of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and through the dominant traditional background of a backward, largely rural society, going through a fast process of forced modernization, formally taking over foreign models, superimposed on the persistent traditional mentality (Shafir 1985).

Historically, the two Romanian provinces under the Ottoman sphere of influence, Moldova and Walachia, were ruled by Princes, and the throne was auctioned off by the Sultan. Anybody could purchase it should they have a large enough amount of cash, or the ability to take credit from wealthy merchants. Once occupying the throne, the new Principe would hope, and generally succeed, to recover the initial cost, and make a consistent profit, by imposing additional taxes (Georgescu and Călinescu 1991). After the elections system had been introduced, clientelar relations took a different pattern: once elected, politicians would reward their political supporters, or simply their acquaintances, with jobs in the public sector, among which the most common were positions in the local bureaucracies, at the postal services and in the railroads. This practice was generalized to the extent that significant numbers of individuals were moved between different regions

of Romania according to the public job vacancies, often obtained through the en masse dismissal of the current employees (Rady 1992).

Although probably not the only clientelar practices, the two types described above are telling for the general acceptance of such practices in the Romanian society, even before the coming to power of the Communist Party. They also speak to the adaptability of clientelism to different political systems, whether the office is assigned from above, or access to office depends on clients who are hierarchically subordinates to the office seeker.

Romanian Communist Party, albeit insignificant both regarding its constituency and its appeal to the population, had its own tradition of clientelar practices, developed during its rather short history. The Party was founded in 1921 by the Bolshevik faction of the Romanian Socialist Party, who decided to submit entirely to the principles, and leadership, of the third Communist International (Comintern). Direct submission to Comintern made the office of first secretary of the party more relevant, and thus wished for, than it may look if considering the party's insignificance on the Romanian political stage. At the same time, access to the office was subject to a double legitimation process, both from within the party, through secret ballot of the members of the Central Committee, and from Moscow. During the interwar period, various small factions, constantly re-arranged by the interest of the moment, struggled for the party leadership, through complicated backstage plots. However, the machinations in Moscow were more important most of the time, and the office was assigned from above more often than earned from below. Three of the six interwar first secretaries – Ukrainian Vitali Holostenko, Polish Alexander Danieliuk-Ştefanski, and Bulgarian Boris Popov – had in

fact only marginal connections with the Romanian communist movement (Tismăneanu 2003).

Shortly after the war the Communist Party became the leading political force, owing to the direct intervention of the Soviet Union, who dictated in Romania through an Allied Control Council where the American and British counterparts fulfilled merely decorative roles. Soon after the 1946 elections, it will become the only ruling body, initially doubled by the Red Army, which partly withdrew as the Communist Party was able to enlist more personnel, thus to cover the key positions in administration and ensure the stability through police control. In the process, the top party offices became even more rewarding, and the struggle intensified. If, at the beginning of the communist rule, the internal leadership of the party depended on Soviet approval, in the next decades, as RCP's internal power constantly increased, while Soviet attention was required elsewhere, due to its own internal or external crises, relative autonomy from the USSR was achieved by 1964. In the process, specific clientelar relations within the party were established.

In the aftermath of the war, the Romanian Communist Party did not have any support in the population, and high offices in the party and state apparatuses were directly appointed by powerful patrons in Moscow, or negotiated between the members of the various groups of communists active before the war. The most powerful figure within the party at the time was Ana Pauker, benefitting of the direct patronage of Vyacheslav Molotov, one of the closest Stalin's collaborators, and of the few old Bolsheviks to survive the purges. She was offered the position of general secretary, but declined it, suggesting it be given to Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej instead, for reasons of Party's

representation, considering that Romanian society was too prejudiced to accept a woman, of Jewish origins, and recently returned from Moscow, as a leader. However, she effectively ruled for a while by securing the support of two other Central Committee members, Vasile Luca and Teohari Georgescu, before all three of them were ousted by Stalin himself in 1951 (Levy 2001).

In fact, during the early years of socialism in Romania, patrons in Moscow distributed high positions to their clients in the RCP, unwittingly following the model instituted previously by the Ottomans. All the individuals who reached top positions in the party owed their appointment to patrons in the immediate circle of Stalin, if not to Stalin himself. Ana Pauker and her group had been supported by Vyacheslav Molotov, Lazar Kaganovich, and Kliment Voroshilov, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej was rumored to have access to Stalin via his heir-apparent, Georgi Malenkov, and Iosif Chișinevschi, a close collaborator of Dej, maintained relations with Lavrentiy Beria. They did not neglect to maintain friendly relations with potential patron brokers in Bucharest, such as Soviet ambassador Sergei Kavtaradze, entertained by Pauker. Gheorghiu-Dej, on his part, was seeking the favors of Mark Borisovici Mitin, one of the main Stalinist doctrinaires, at the time editor in chief of the Communist Information Bureau's (Cominform) periodical, *For Lasting Peace, for People's Democracy!*, headquartered in Bucharest since 1948 (Tismăneanu 2003).

In the same period, attempts by communist leaders to secure popular support for the Party, in the first place, and for themselves in the internal struggles for power, met with mixed success. Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, addressing rioting students in the Transylvanian city of Cluj, in 1946, played the nationalist card, and allegedly begin his speech with

these words: “Before being a communist, I am Romanian.” This had the expected immediate effect of convincing the students to stop the riot, and brought him personally some popularity among the masses, which, however, did not extend to the Party as a whole. This very popularity attracted enmities within the Party elite, which led to his quick downfall, followed by his arrest in 1948 and execution in 1954 (Cioroianu 2007; Betea 2011). Another attempt was made by Ana Pauker and Teohari Georgescu who, due to the lack of RCP members to accomplish governing at the local level, promoted a policy of mass enrollment in the party, including a deal with former members of the extreme right-wing political formation, the Iron Guard. While this move, made despite Dej’s objections, and without the knowledge of the Soviet representative, Andrey Vyshinsky, was effective in increasing the number of party members from less than 1000 in 1944 to around 710,000 in 1947 (Barbu 1998), it did not make a difference for their initiators, at a time when high party offices were appointed by Moscow (Levy 2001).

It was only after 1952 when a top-down clientelar network emerged, made possible by three factors. One of them was the gradual (and only partial) withdrawal of Soviet Union from the RCP’s internal politics, culminating with the cease of Red Army occupation of Romania in 1958. The leniency showed by the Soviet Union to the Romanian Communist Party was the result of the RCP leadership’s demonstrating fidelity toward the Soviet Union, and in the same time demonstrating the ability to control the domestic situation, at a time when the Soviets had to face numerous crises at home (Stalin’s death) and abroad (the Korean War, and the uprisings in East Germany, Poland, and Hungary) (Cioroianu 2007). The second factor was the consolidation of the RCP, whose membership continued to rise to 1,400,000 in 1965, despite massive purges

between 1940 and 1950 when 300,000 members were ousted (Deletant 1999,a). The third factor was the establishment of patrimonial control by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, after ousting his rivals from the Central Committee.

Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej took advantage of the internal and international political development, and built a strong domestic basis of support for his rule, primarily by appointing his faithful followers in top party and state positions. He recruited most, although not all, of his adjutants from the faction of the RCP who spent the war years in the Caransebeş prison camp, and thus have been his most trusted collaborators. Their fidelity was continuously tested, and some prominent figures of the RCP lost their positions in the Central Committee charged with ‘factionalism’, in fact for not being submissive to Dej. Among those, Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chişinevschi, Dej’s closest collaborator, were expelled from the CC in 1957 (Cătănuş and Tudor 2001; Tismăneanu 2003).

The orbital system of power spread down the party hierarchy, and so party activists at lower levels entertained their own clientelar networks. Consequently, promotion at any level of the party or professional hierarchy became, in the later years, dependent on favors granted by patrons, which could be obtained by specific means, generally unrelated to professional capability, rather to the ability of strengthening personal ties with the patron (Cioroianu 2007). As the clientelar network generalized within the party, it also became flexible, and so it was not uncommon for ambitious young activists to betray their patrons when it was suited for their advancement in the hierarchy. The majority of the most resilient activists at the top of the party owe their

survival to their ability to abandon their patrons' sinking boats on time, and jump to the side of the winners.

Exemplary for this phenomenon is the case of Leonte Răutu, one of the Romanian communists who spent the Second World War in Moscow, where he was the editor in chief of the Romanian department of Radio Moscow. Upon his return, he occupied key positions in the party apparatus, overseeing the official ideology and related fields of historiography, social sciences, and creative literature for more than three decades, until he was forced to resign in 1981, when his daughter applied for emigration in the United States. His outstanding longevity was marked by successive attacks against his patrons and/or collaborators Ana Pauker, Iosif Chişinevschi, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, always finding the way to join the next powerful of the day (Tismăneanu and Vasile 2008). A eulogist of Ana Pauker before her ousting in 1952, Răutu thrived on the vanity of all his patrons. Three decades and a half later, in 1978, he was in the front row of Ceauşescu's sycophants, distinguished by his most incredible and impudent eulogies, using Biblical imagery to describe Ceauşescu's personality (Gabanyi 2000).

A different way to navigate through the clientelar network is illustrated by Petre Lupu. Since 1939, when he joined the ranks of the Romanian Communist Party (in illegality), Lupu was a close collaborator of Nicolae Ceauşescu, then one of the youngest, and least prominent, adjutants of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. Lupu's collaboration with Ceauşescu was constant throughout the following decades, yet, while the ambitious Ceauşescu slowly climbed the party hierarchy, Lupu never had a spectacular role in the decision-making process, yet he always occupied well-remunerated positions in the Central Committees of the Union of Communist Youth (UTC) and RCP, respectively.

Throughout the agitated history of the Romanian communist elites, Lupu survived in the top ranks due to his ability to keep a low profile, and to display an affected modesty, yet he was also skilled in seeking the protection of the powerful of the day. Meanwhile, he created his own network of clients, young cadres whom he promoted in the party upper echelons, and many of whom surpassed their former patron: Mircea Malița, Gheorghe Pană, Virgil Trofin, Ilie Verdeț, Vasile Patilineț, Cornel Onescu, Ion Stănescu, and Paul Niculescu-Mizil. During Ceaușescu's rule, Petre Lupu continued to occupy top positions in the party ranks, yet only made himself remarkable as a yes-man of the General Secretary of the RCP (Tismăneanu 1995).

Furthermore, as the party elite secured its power in society, the patronage system began to extend outside the sphere of politics. Following (consciously or not), the Soviet model (Plamper 2012), Romanian party activists became self-appointed patrons of various social and artistic fields. Some of the high ranked officials developed strongholds in their ministries, and so Emil Bodnăraș controlled the army, Alexandru Drăghici the ministry of the interior, and Gheorghe Apostol built his power base in the industry (Tismăneanu 2003). Although cultural fields were more contested, specialized patrons took over social sciences, creative literature, journalism, and even cinematography during the early years of socialism in Romania. The most important patron of this period was the same Leonte Răutu, who, without being a prominent intellectual himself, became the highest authority in culture, a position facilitated by the unexpected death in a plane crash of his rival, Grigore Preoteasa, in 1957 (Cioroianu 2007). The most important ideologue of the RCP, Leonte Răutu served his ever-changing patrons through creating the ideological justification for their quests to legitimacy, generally grounded in the break

with the former leaders. In the same time, Răutu built and destroyed a series of clientelar networks, disposing of his clients when they became inconvenient, at the same pace he changed patrons. Răutu's reign stretched from social sciences, history, to fine arts and creative literature. His first-hand clients became sub-patrons of the respective fields in their own rights, yet for shorter time periods, due to Răutu's frequent ideological shifts (Tismăneanu and Vasile 2008). The sole criterion in recruiting his clients was their total subservience to the patron. Thus, their ranks included talented sculptor Constantin Baraschi, with solid studies in Romania and France during the 1920s (Șorban 1966), a former assistant engineer in civil constructions, Mihai Roller, converted into the leading Romanian historian (Tismăneanu 2007), the influential novelist Mihail Sadoveanu, as well as socialist realist writers of no literary value such as Traian Șelmaru and Mihai Beniuc (Tismăneanu and Vasile 2008). Although Răutu supported Ceaușescu's election as general secretary in 1965, and was rewarded with high positions in the party apparatus, he was not able to maintain his exclusive patronage over arts and social sciences, successfully challenged by younger party activists Dumitru Popescu (Dumnezeu) and Paul Niculescu-Mizil, promoted by Ceaușescu from his own clientelar base. It is noteworthy that the two young ideologues prepared Ceaușescu's report to the Ninth Congress of the RCP in 1965, which sanctioned Ceaușescu's appointment as the party's first secretary, earlier the same year (Tismăneanu 2003).

Cinematography benefitted by the highest patronage of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, due to his favorite daughter's, Lica, ambitions of being recognized as an actress. Although untalented, Lica Gheorghiu acted in a series of socialist realist movies between 1957 and 1965. At the same time, funds were directed toward building modern

cinematographic studios near Bucharest, while the films casting Lica Gheorghiu benefitted from generous budgets allotted by the state. Lica's acting career ended after her father's death in 1965 made her insignificant in the new power equation (Marcu and Ilinca 2012).

In the next subsections I will trace Nicolae Ceaușescu's route to power within the given power structure, and I will follow the changes he brought to the patrimonial-clientelar system, paralleling, and influencing, his growing personality cult.

5.3. Ceaușescu's Rise to Power

The death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej – although expected, due to his liver cancer – left behind a power vacuum. This tends to happen when a patrimonial ruler departs; for instance, the announcement of Stalin's death urged the Soviet citizens to avoid panic. The real message of this statement was that chaos was threatening the top of the party, because the dictator did not base the discretionary use of power on formal rules, so there was no logic to follow in the exercise of power by his heirs. Furthermore, the call for collective leadership thinly veiled the fierce struggle for power which followed (Wolfe 1957). Unlike in the Soviet Union, in Romania the bureaucratic positions seemed to have stronger definitions, so the real question was who would assume the position of General Secretary of the Romanian Workers' Party. Three candidates made legitimate claims to the heritage: Gheorghe Apostol, Alexandru Drăghici and Nicolae Ceaușescu. All three of them represented the second generation of

Communist leaders (Apostol and Drăghici were born in 1913, Ceaușescu in 1918), were members of the so called prison faction of the party, led by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, and enjoyed his favors. Moreover, they were connected by old and unsettled rivalries and jealousies, dating from the years of illegality (Cioroianu 2007).

Gheorghe Apostol was an activist of relatively little importance before 1945, but also a close collaborator of Dej, who assisted his rise within the Party hierarchy. He held the position of First Secretary of the Party for a short time between 1954 and 1955, when Dej yielded to Moscow's pressures for collective leadership and – while retaining de facto patrimonial power – passed some of the offices he was holding to his trusted men. However, Dej decided in 1955 to retake the position of First Secretary, and to renounce that of Prime Minister, replaced by Chivu Stoica (Steele 1974). His claim to the position of First Secretary after Dej died was based on his allegation that Dej himself appointed him as his successor (Tismăneanu 2003).

Alexandru Drăghici was a Party member since 1931, active in the Labor Unions, incarcerated during the war, and, like Apostol, with a successful career in the Party ranks after 1945. Following the purge of Teohari Georgescu in 1952 Drăghici became the Minister of the Interior, which allowed him to control the Securitate forces. Thus, he became the main executor of Dej's orders, including those related to the purges of undesirable Communist leaders, such as Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. Due to the control of the Securitate, Drăghici was indeed one of the most powerful political figures by 1965, only yielding to Dej (Tismăneanu 2003).

The decision came quickly after Dej died on March 19th 1965. The Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party held on March 22nd sanctioned the appointment of Nicolae Ceaușescu as First Secretary, and of Chivu Stoica as President of the State Council, while Ion Gheorghe Maurer retained his position as Prime Minister. The apparently surprising decision of appointing Ceaușescu was reached behind closed doors, through personal negotiations, rather than through open elections according to the party rules. Consequently, no documents have been preserved, forcing the historians to draw on more or less reliable memoirs, written after 1989, thus subject to retrospective interpretation (Tismăneanu 2003). Nevertheless, the decision was the result of support from members of the old generation of Communists – Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Chivu Stoica, and Emil Bodnăraș, who feared Apostol and Drăghici as too ambitious, and believed Ceaușescu to be more moderate, and docile (Tismăneanu 2003; Cioroianu 2007; Marin 2008).

Ceaușescu had been active in the Union of the Communist Youth since the late 1930s, and advanced in the Party hierarchy after the purge of the Pauker-Luca group in 1953. Ceaușescu proved his obedience to the Party's line, and his intolerance to his adversaries by participating in political assassinations before the elections of 1946, and by leading the most brutal repression against the peasants in the years of the collectivization of agriculture. One of the closest apprentices of Dej during the prison years, he maintained his fidelity to the increasingly powerful leader after 1945 (Betea, Diac et al. 2012). Meanwhile, however, Ceaușescu also put his subservient personality in the service of other patrons, such as Iosif Chișinevschi, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, and – as a general in the Romanian Army – Emil Bodnăraș, and he did not neglect to consolidate

personal and familial ties with other rising stars of his generations, including his future arch-rival, Alexandru Drăghici (Tismăneanu 2003). By the time he was elected First Secretary, he was the least likely to secure patrimonial power among the candidates, since he did not have political prestige based on his merits as an activist during the illegality period, nor control over the repressive apparatus, which was in Drăghici's hands, or strong support from Moscow. Nevertheless, his position as responsible with the cadre politics allowed him to promote many young activists, who owed him fidelity in return (Fischer 1989).

In fact, the collective leadership following the model of the Soviet troika, with Ceaușescu as First Secretary, Maurer as Prime Minister and Stoica as President of the State Council proved to be as ephemeral as the troikas themselves. By the Ninth Congress of the Romanian Worker's Party, Ceaușescu was able to affect major changes in the make-up of the Party's Bureaus and Committees, as well as in the Status of the Party, promoting his trusted men from the young generation of Party activists in large number, thus ensuring they were able to outvote the representatives of the old generation (Tudor-Pavelescu 2004). On December 9th 1967, Ceaușescu was elected to replace Stoica in the position of President of the State Council, thus breaking a paragraph in the Status of the Communist Party imposed by Ceaușescu himself only two years before (Rusan and Boca 2008).

Besides gaining control over his allies, reversing the power relation in his favor, Ceaușescu made sure his main rivals were neutralized. First, Alexandru Drăghici was promoted to the position of Secretary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party. At the Ninth Congress of the Party, the new Status banned the

accumulation of positions in the Party and in the State for one person, thus forcing Drăghici to renounce the powerful position of Minister of the Interior, which was awarded to Cornel Onescu, one of Ceaușescu's faithful (Tudor-Pavelescu 2004). In 1968, Ceaușescu initiated the rehabilitation of some victims of the purges in the 1950s, particularly Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. In fact, this rehabilitation was a staged opportunity for Ceaușescu to attack Drăghici, the Minister of the Interior at that time, and the main executor of Dej's orders regarding the purges. By November the same year, Drăghici was removed from all the positions held in the Party, or State, and deprived of his military ranks and forced to retire as a private. Although he never recovered from this defeat, and never participated in the public life again, he retired in 1972 with a respectable pension as a Communist activist in the years of illegality (Tismăneanu 2003).

Gheorghe Apostol was disposed from the top Party hierarchy after the Tenth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party in 1969, when he was attacked by Constantin Dăscălescu, another one of the young Ceaușescu's disciples. Later, he was sent to South America, as ambassador to Argentina, then Uruguay and Brazil, until 1988. Upon his return, he was one of the signatories of the "letter of the six" in 1989 (Tismăneanu 2003).

During this period, Ceaușescu also took action against the memory of his benefactor, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, blaming him for the excesses of the past, and forcing his family to move out from their sumptuous house in Bucharest, on the grounds that living there was the expression of bourgeois tendencies (Răduică 1999; Betea 2011). Logically, Ceaușescu's next concern was to prevent his protégées from challenging his position. For this purpose he employed two strategies: dynastic socialism, granting the

majority of the top positions to the members of his family, and rotation of cadres, moving ministers and party activists from one job to another after only a couple of years. Since 1971, officials would routinely be moved from Party to state positions and from the capital to the provinces, and back again (Rady 1992).

In this context, it is not a surprise that the only two major acts of dissidence within the party came from Communists of the old generation. First, at the Twelfth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party, Constantin Pârvulescu, - born in 1895, and a member of the Communist Party since its establishment in 1921 – openly accused Ceaușescu of placing his personal interests above the general interests of the country. Pârvulescu’s protest did not have any effect within the party ranks, and he was soon isolated from the public life (Tismăneanu 2007). Nonetheless, the Congress was broadcasted live on television, and Pârvulescu’s intervention gave a new impetus to dissidence from outside the party (Kennel 1995).

The second act of dissidence from within the Party ranks, was an open letter to Ceaușescu, signed by six of the prominent Communist dignitaries of the Stalinist era, marginalized by late 1980s: Gheorghe Apostol, Alexandru Bârlădeanu, Silviu Brucan, Corneliu Mănescu, Grigore Răceanu, and Constantin Pârvulescu. The letter, issued in March 1989, had a good international reception, but had little impact at home, despite being read over Radio Free Europe and Radio Voice of America, widely listened by the Romanians. The six signatories were placed under house arrest, and only released by the Revolution in December the same year (Tismăneanu 2007).

Ceaușescu achieved a position that allowed him to exercise patrimonial rule in very short time, eliminating challengers by 1970. Furthermore, he successfully defended his patrimony until December 1989. Based on the recent experience of Dej's patrimonial rule, Ceaușescu's position was rarely openly contested. As a consequence, even the most ambitious individuals, could not count on the possibility of changing (or at least bending) the system to serve their goals, thus personal advancement continued to depend on one's ability to serve a powerful patron. On the other hand, due precisely to the consolidation of Ceaușescu's patrimonial power, as well as to his strategies for maintaining it, the patronage network suffered some significant mutations, which are the subject of the next subsection.

5.4. Changes in Clientelism during Ceaușescu Era

Ceaușescu's hierarchical advancement during the Dej era was due to the deference showed to different potential patrons, first and foremost to Dej himself, and to the conspicuous lack of any trace of personal initiative. Nonetheless, his services were rewarded with apparently marginal positions in the RCP's organization schema, unlike the higher, and more visible, positions occupied by Drăghici and Apostol. Since 1954, Ceaușescu held a position in the CC's control commission, and, after 1961, he was appointed as head of the organizational directorate, positions which permitted him to promote young activists, thus creating his own network of clients (Cioroianu 2007).

Soon after becoming General Secretary of the RCP, a position he renamed as First Secretary, Ceaușescu took steps to secure and strengthen personal power, taming the state and the party apparatuses. Following his proposal at the Ninth Congress of the RCP to separate the state and the party leaderships and not allowing the same individual to occupy positions in both, key state positions had been opened. Alexandru Drăghici chose to give up the Ministry of the Interior – one of the key battlefields, as it turned out – and preserve his position as a Central Committee member. Following his decision, in July 1965, the Securitate was removed from the Ministry of the Interior, and subordinated to a new institution, the Council of State Security, whose head was appointed Ion Stănescu. In the same time, Cornel Onescu was appointed the new Ministry of the Interior, replacing Alexandru Drăghici. Both the new appointees had been clients of Ceaușescu, who promoted them while heading the Cadre Commission (Marin 2008). The Ministry of Defense was headed by Leontin Sălăjan, one of Ceaușescu's trusted friends, since 1955. Upon Sălăjan's unexpected death in 1966, his position was transferred to another Ceaușescu's client, Ion Ioniță (Deletant 1995; Marin 2008).

In the same time, Ceaușescu aimed to secure the support of the party apparatus through promoting his clients in key positions, and making his rivals harmless in very short time. In theory, the leading body of the RCP was its Congress, which met in ordinary sessions every five years (although in practice the five-year rule was not always respected). Between the Congresses, the leading structure was the Central Committee, and within it, decisional power belonged to its Secretariat, and to the Political Bureau. However, in practice the decisions were taken by a small group of members of the Secretariat, and merely approved by the other bodies (Ionescu-Gură 2004). In order to

secure control over the Party, Ceaușescu employed two main strategies. First, to secure personal control over the highest Party commissions in a short time, Ceaușescu proposed, and The Ninth Congress of the RCP (July 1965) approved, the dissolution of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, and the formation of two new structures, the Executive Committee and the Permanent Presidium of the CC of the RCP. Through this move, Ceaușescu was able to secure the support of the majority in these newly created structures, by promoting his political clients, and in the same time maintaining the positions of the old guard activists. This latter group included those to whom Ceaușescu owed his election as First Secretary (Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Emil Bodnăraș, Chivu Stoica, Leonte Răutu), his rivals (Alexandru Drăghici and Gheorghe Apostol), and other prominent figures (Alexandru Bârladeanu, Alexandru Moghioroș, Petre Borilă, etc.). By the time of the Ninth Congress, they still constituted the most powerful group within the RCP, thus a premature break with them was too risky for Ceaușescu, who preferred, for the moment, only to counterbalance the power by appointing his trusted men, coming from different generations (Paul Niculescu-Mizil, Gheorghe Rădulescu, Constantin Drăgan, Iosif Banc, Mihai Gere, Petre Lupu, Ilie Verdeț, etc.). The ousting of Alexandru Drăghici, three years later, permitted Ceaușescu to further promote his clients Virgil Trofin and Ion Iliescu, as substitutes for Drăghici. At the same time, the CC Plenum sanctioned Ceaușescu's proposal to supplement the Executive Committee with two more candidate members, Dumitru Popescu and Emil Drăgănescu. (Marin 2008).

The Secretariat was enlarged from four members (Nicolae Ceaușescu, Mihai Dalea, Paul Niculescu-Mizil and Leonte Răutu) to nine, by adding Alexandru Drăghici, as a barter for renouncing the position of Ministry of the Interior, Alexandru Moghioroș,

an influent member of the old guard, and Ceaușescu's clients Manea Mănescu, Vasile Patilineț and Virgil Trofin. Having secured the cooperation of Răutu and Niculescu-Mizil, Ceaușescu enjoyed a comfortable majority in the secretariat (Marin 2008).

A similar strategy targeted the Central Committee at large, the structure responsible to elect the leading offices of the party, including the First Secretary, and to sanction the political decisions pursued by these offices. Thus, at the Ninth Congress, the total of full members and candidate members increased from 110 to 196. Considering that many of the old members were sympathetic to Ceaușescu, this increase secured him a supportive majority in the most important party structure (Fischer 1989). It is worth mentioning that the same strategy had been successfully employed at the Seventh RCP Congress (Second Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party), in 1955, by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, when the headcount increased from 57 to 96 (Fischer 1989). During the years of Ceaușescu rule, while the political relevance of the CC decreased, the number of members significantly increased after each new Congress, reaching a high of 466 members after the Fourteenth (and last) Congress in November 1989 (Ionescu-Gură 2004).

At this point in time, political clientelism did not differ significantly from the clientelar model identified in other periods of Romanian history, made more relevant by the coming to power of the RCP, nor with clientelar networks established in other (especially Socialist) dictatorships. A patriarch ruled the country surrounded by a small group of political clients, who benefited from his (or her, in the case of Ana Pauker) patronage. In their turn, they had the ability to offer privileges to their own clients, serving as intermediate patrons, or patron brokers, and the network could extend further

down to the local level. With small variations, this arrangement of the power flows can be identified in all instances of personality cults. However, a policy implemented by Ceaușescu in the early 1970s altered the clientelar system, making it even more prone to generate a personality cult, although, to be sure, the cult was only a by-product, not the intended outcome of the policy.

At the CC of RCP plenum in February 1971, Ceaușescu proposed the rotation of cadres as a party and state policy, proposal sanctioned by the RCP National Conference in July 1972, and included in the RCP's Statute. According to this principle, the party activists' continuing education should include, besides a strong theoretical background, exposure to different tasks and environments, thus a better comprehension of the complex Romanian reality acquired through direct contact with various aspects of the society. Consequently, all party cadres should be regularly rotated to positions in the state and party apparatuses, at the central and local levels, and in production (King 1980; Marin 2008). Although its justification was apparently positive, offering the party cadres a broader range of perspectives, the real motivation behind it was Ceaușescu's fear of his own clients. Now, that he ousted his rivals from the old guard, it was time to take measures against potentially rising challengers. Through the reshuffling of the cadres, Ceaușescu created an insecure environment for the high ranked activists, whose positions were subject to change at any moment, and the new appointments depended on how they demonstrated fidelity to the First Secretary. In the same time, the cadre rotation prevented the elites from developing their own clientelar bases. Due to its unpredictability, the reshuffling made attachment to a potential patron irrelevant, if not undesirable, with the exception of Ceaușescu himself, and few other stable personalities. The rotation was

intensified prior to the major events of the party life (congresses, plenary sessions, etc.), as a means to further weaken the power of the party to oppose Ceaușescu (Fischer 1989). Lastly, the rotation prevented young and ambitious activists from building a career within the Party ranks that would allow them to be seen as potential successors, if not challengers, of Ceaușescu. Not surprisingly, the most promising activists of the new generation, until that point promoted by Ceaușescu himself, such as Paul Niculescu-Mizil, Ion Iliescu, and Virgil Trofin, were among the victims of the rotation (Frunză 1999).

However, not all high ranked activists were subject to rotation. Historian Adrian Cioroianu (2007) identified “hard cores” of members of the ruling echelons who maintained their positions in the Political Executive Committee, the Secretariat of the CC, and the Government, respectively, for the entire decade between 1980 and 1989. The “core” includes Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena Ceaușescu, whose increasing power entitled her to her own personality cult, and a small number of personal clients who managed to demonstrate their fidelity to the leader(s), not in the least through organizing and participating in adulatory performances. There are about thirty activists on the “short lists” of stable cadres, among who Ion Coman, Emil Bobu (in the CC Secretariat), Constantin Dăscălescu, Gheorghe Rădulescu (in the Permanent Presidium of the Political Executive Committee), Ion, Dincă, Paul Niculescu-Mizil, Dumitru Popescu, Gheorghe Oprea (full members of the Political Executive Committee), Ana Mureșan and Suzana Gadea (in the Government). Many of them upheld simultaneously multiple positions in the CC and in the State structures (the government or the Great National Assembly).

At the same time, RCP became increasingly the fiefdom of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu's biological families. Five of Nicolae's brothers had been promoted to important positions in various ministries, of higher notoriety being Ilie Ceaușescu, deputy minister of defense, and Nicolae A. Ceaușescu, lieutenant general in the Ministry of the Interior and head of RCP's cadres department. Ceaușescu's brother-in-law Vasile Bărbulescu and Elena's brother Gheorghe Petrescu were both members of the Central Committee, and occupied important State positions (Shafir 1985; Jowitt 1992). In the same time, Ceaușescu attempted to set the stage for a dynastic succession, appointing his younger son, Nicu, and overseeing his political ascent and prominence (Gabanyi 2000; Tismăneanu 2003).

As a result, Nicolae Ceaușescu acquired direct patronage of virtually every field of political and social life in Romania. Besides him, members of his immediate family, his wife Elena and his son Nicu, were able to form stable clientelar bases, and even (to a limited extent), to compete against Nicolae's interests (Gabanyi 2000). Elena Ceaușescu's network of clients included Eugen Florescu and Suzana Gadea, two activists "notoriously uncommitted to cultural issues" appointed in top positions dealing with ideology and education (Gabanyi 2000:125), as well as her yes-men and advisors in the field of Chemistry, led by Ion Ursu (Cioroianu 2007). Nicu fostered his own network of friends and protégées, and so activists with no other merit than of being associated with Ceaușescu's favorite son in the UTC were promoted in the CC – Cornel Pacoste, Pantelimon Găvănescu and Eugen Florescu –, or in influential positions at the county level – Tudor Mohora, Constantin Boștină, Ion Traian Ștefănescu, Ion Sasu and Nicolae Croitoru. Nicu's wife, Poliana Cristescu, was given the leadership of the Pioneer

Organization (the official, party sponsored, organization for children), and became a CC member (Tismăneanu 2003).

Apart from Ceaușescu and his family members, political clientelism in the sense that a patron would support the advancement of his or her client(s) within the party ranks was inexistent. Nonetheless, a few individuals who demonstrated unusual stability regarding the good relations with the ruling family, were able to build niche clientelar networks in various fields of the social, and particularly artistic life. Thus, Dumitru Popescu established his personal patronage over publicists and creative writers, a privilege formerly enjoyed by Leonte Răutu (Betea 2010). Poet Adrian Păunescu, although not a member of the nomenklatura, however a first-hand client of Nicolae Ceaușescu, identified a lucrative niche and worked his way up to patronize popular entertainment, in particular rock musicians and singer songwriters. Another niche which turned very popular was soccer. Valentin Ceaușescu, the dictator couple's eldest son, assumed patronage over the soccer team Steaua Bucharest, despite his father's opposition for "wasting his time on such trivial matters" (Poenaru 2015:240). Due to Ceaușescu's marked disinterest, the soccer championship became the contested ground of political influences, with Tudor Postelnicu (the head of the Securitate) assuming patronage over Dinamo Bucharest, Valentin Bărbulescu over Victoria Bucharest, while Generals Ion Ghenoiu and Marin Dragnea, of the Ministry of the Interior, pushed the – otherwise irrelevant – club Flacăra Moreni to participate in the UEFA Cup in 1989 (Wilson 2012).

By the 1980s, the role of the subpatrons, or patron brokers, became less significant than it was before, thus only being a direct client of Ceaușescu, or of a member of his family, could increase ones chances to achieve a powerful position,

however without securing it. Even individuals placed in the immediate vicinity of the first circle of power, represented by Ceaușescu himself and his family, were subject to reshuffling positions, which made it increasingly difficult to create and maintain a clientelar basis. In the few cases where (sub) patrons-clients relations formed, their durability depended on continuous performance of fidelity to the leader, both by the subpatron and by the clients, which really meant active participation in the reproduction of the personality cult.

To sum up, by the time Ceaușescu was elected First Secretary of the RCP, patrimonial leadership was already accepted by the Romanians as the “natural” state of being, as a result of more than 30 years of successive dictatorships. At the same time, an orbital system of power was in place, with clientelar threads originating at the top and encompassing the entire political and social life. The safest way for an ambitious individual to achieve success in any field was to serve a powerful patron, and be promoted in exchange for subservience. Fidelity to the patron, especially at the top, had to be performed and continuously reenacted, which could lead to the formation of personality cults of powerful patrons.

After achieving power, Ceaușescu was quick to eliminate his rivals and to prevent other potential challengers to rise from the ranks of the party. While tightening his control over the party, Ceaușescu’s policies also altered the nature of clientelar networks, making it very difficult for individuals other than himself and his family members to act as patrons or patron brokers. However, these changes occurred in parallel with the growth of the personality cult, and causality is not unidirectional anymore, in fact the two phenomena influenced each other. In order to test if the distribution of power described

above is a structural condition for the formation of personality cult, a situation similar with the one existent in Romania at the time when Ceaușescu took over the power has to be identified: patrimonial rule accepted as “normal” by the members of the society, and clientelism having a significant impact on the society.

5.5. Comparative Perspective

Besides Romania, personality cults tended to develop in societies where patrimonial rule was not only perceived as legitimate, but its legitimacy was not questioned. This is the case, whether patrimonialism was enforced upon the society before the leader came to power – Stalin, for example took over a state apparatus modeled by Lenin’s dictatorial tendencies – or it was presented as necessary for the salvation of the nation – this type encompasses Hitler, Tito, Hoxha, and Mao Zedong. A third path to the same result can be observed in the newly freed colonies, where the populations uncritically accepted patrimonial rules of future dictators – such as Amin, Bokassa, Duvalier or Trujillo – as better alternatives to the former colonial rule (Chirot 1994).

A different situation could be seen in Hungary. Like in Romania, a long tradition of patrimonial exercise of power was established, under two dictators who also enjoyed personality cults, Miklós Horthy, regent of Hungary between 1920 and 1944, and the first communist dictator, Mátyás Rákosi (Apor 2010; Romsics 2010). Unlike in Romania, the effects of Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” seriously damaged the patrimonial system,

especially due to Khrushchev's orders for reformation of the Soviet bloc by nominally separating the powers within the state. Rákosi was forced to retire, and the patrimonial power could not be preserved by his successor, Ernest Gerö, in the midst of the heated events of 1956. The separation of powers between the leader of the party (János Kádár, who replaced Gerö after the first Soviet intervention) and the head of the government (Imre Nagy) was complete in the days between the two Soviet military interventions. Thus, although Kádár unified the two positions as soon as Imre Nagy was arrested, his patrimonialism was not perceived as legitimate. Moreover, despite his long "reign" over Hungary, he had to work his way to earn the respect of his fellow countrymen, against the original reputation of a traitor, gained in the aftermath of the events in the autumn of 1956 (Steele 1974).

Clientelism is a universal practice, not confined to authoritarian neither to undeveloped, or otherwise backwards societies, as I pointed in the introduction of this chapter. Neither patrimonialism nor clientelism by themselves create personality cults, however, both are necessary for their development. Thus, it is not the existence of clientelar practices to be questioned, but their extent and relevance for how the leader's image is constructed. In the Socialist countries, an all-encompassing clientelism is directly attributable to the Marxist-Leninist dogma, prescribing leadership of the society by a unique vanguard party, composed of professional revolutionaries. Since Marxist theory falls short of explaining who the legitimate professional revolutionaries are, and how the vanguard party is formed, the stage is set for personal relations to secure bases of power for the leaders – patrons, and to ensure preferential distribution of privileges for their supporters – clients. The absolute guidance of the vanguard party made the "vertical

interest aggregation and articulation” a defining characteristic of the socialist system.

Thus,

“The local needs of community became secondary in importance; what mattered was the approval or support of the hierarchically organized, vertical cast of characters. The future of a district employee was tied not to his local network, but to his superior, located at the county level; in the economic realm, decisions made at the local level always had to be taken with an eye toward meeting the needs of the immediately higher sectorial units. The vertical system of allegiances and interest aggregation thus resulted in the effective destruction of the local community as an economic unit” (Volgyes 1995:15).

In fact, clientelism, the logical consequence of socialism, is in large part responsible for the accumulation of power into the hands of an individual, as demonstrated by a recent analysis of the formative years of Communist Yugoslavia. Based on primary archival sources, the analysis shows that Tito’s omnipotence was not the cause, but the result of the clientelistic relations established in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and in the state structures (Obradović 2013).

Highly ranked officials’ patronage over fields outside their government and party portfolios developed early in the Soviet Union, and, subsequently, in other socialist countries. Kliment Voroshilov undertook patronage over fine arts during the Civil War years, when he was in the position to distribute scarce resources to painters, who, in return, chose their topics so to immortalize the glorious Red Army. Later, his patronage over arts became unchallenged, as shown by numerous letters he received from painters or painter associations asking for his assistance or for arbitrage, and not stopping short of calling him the *vozhd’* (leader, or master) of the fine arts. Following his steps, Lazar Kaganovich patronized architecture, Avel Enukidze the theater, Vyacheslav Molotov – after Enukidze’s death – the theater and opera, while Stalin directly patronized literature

and film (Plamper 2012). Similarly, József Révai, an important name of Hungarian communism, founder of the Hungarian Communist Party and CC member since 1945, assumed patronage over writers in the early years of the Sovietization of Hungary. However, his patronage was not uncontested, allowing eulogistic writers like László Réti, Béla Illés, Gyula Háy, Sándor Rideg and others to compete for the favors of the highest potential patron, and in the process construct a mythical figure for the Party Leader, Mátyás Rákosi. While other members of the political elite, among whom György Lukács and Mihály Farkas had their sayings, the winner, Béla Illés, enjoyed the personal friendship of Rákosi himself (Apor 2004, Von Klimo 2004).

Clientelism is also pervasive in the postcolonial states, whether they evolved toward dictatorships or multi-party democracy, as pointed out by most scholars studying post colonialism (see, for instance Kapoor 2008; Beekers and Gool 2012; Van de Walle 2014). It is doubled and, generally, overpassed, by corruption, another illegitimate means of exercising the power in exchange for immediate benefits (Morris and Blake 2010). Far from being in competition, clientelism and corruption can foster each other, such as when paths of corruption used repeatedly cement and personal connections based on corruption are built. It is the case of dictators from former colonies, many of whom also enjoyed personality cults, like Rafael Trujillo, François Duvalier, or Jean-Bédél Bokassa. Their absolute control of the society came, in fact, with the price of having less control over the coercive apparatus, where highly corrupt clientelar networks regulated the redistribution of power at the lower levels (Chirot 1994). Like in socialism, successful sub-patrons maintained their corrupt clientelar networks by continuously demonstrating fidelity to

their own patron, and ultimately to the patrimonial leader, which, like in socialism, set the stage for lavish flattery.

As in other totalitarian settings, clientelar networks overdeveloped in fascism, despite official claims to the contrary. While Mussolini rose to prominence as a leader of the fight against party clientelism, his rule only changed the patrons, but not the criteria controlling the flow of resources (Roniger and Güneş-Ayata 1994). If anything, clientelism became more powerful, and more stable, since it was now operated within one party-state, which “became the center of a new clientelism, cutting across class lines and old party affiliations and networks, and generating a new flow of resources” (Roniger and Güneş-Ayata 1994:93). It is no less true that Nazi Germany created an impersonal bureaucratic machine able to transmit the Führer’s orders to the lower levels of the chain of command, and through this fully revealed bureaucracy’s darkest side. However, German bureaucracy was mostly effective in mobilizing citizens to participate in the process of production, whether of goods or the production of death (Bauman 1989). Construction of the Führer’s image was largely the responsibility of two individuals, both of whom were privileged over potential competition due to their personal friendship with Hitler: his propaganda ministry Josef Goebbels, and his personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffman (Kershaw 1999).

5.6. Concluding Remarks

Patrimonialism is present by definition in the societies I am investigating for identifying causes of personality cults. Clientelar practices are present in any known society, whether authoritarian or democratic. However, only a specific combination of the two can form the seedbed of personality cults. First, patrimonialism in itself is not a condition for the formation of personality cults, unless it is not questioned by the population. If succession in power needs to be settled, the question is who should occupy the patrimonial position, not whether one individual should be placed above the society. This was the case in Romania, in the aftermath of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's death, when the position of General Secretary of the unique party ensured absolute control of the society. The arrangement was not contested, due to the long tradition of patrimonialism initiated by Carol II in 1930. In other cases, the patrimonial rule of one individual was legitimated as emerging from the revolutionary struggle, or through ideology.

Clientelism is not a rare phenomenon either. In fact, in different forms, it is present in any society. Beyond political clientelism per se, where positions in the party or in the state apparatus are distributed according to personal relations or in exchange for political support, I pointed to clientelar networks in fields related to cultural creation, such as literature and fine arts. In this case, clients can satisfy their patrons by adapting their craft to serve the patron's ideological requirements, such as painting battle scenes and portraits of the military leaders, or implying "correct" political statements in novels and poems.

However, neither patrimonialism, nor clientelism, are enough to form the basis for personality cults. The structure needed to condition the cult consists of clientelar relations which necessarily lead to the patrimonial ruler, either directly or intermediated by subpatrons, or patron-brokers. Thus, a sufficient number of ambitious individuals, who know that advancement in the social hierarchy depends on the patrons' satisfactions, have to demonstrate their fidelity to the leader. To this end, flattery of the patron was a worthwhile strategy, among others. Fidelity to the patron, including the patrimonial ruler, can be demonstrated in other ways, such as continuous bribery, conspicuous zeal in following orders, etc. This makes the specific structure of power analyzed above a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for personality cults to arise. In conjunction with other conditions, this structure of power can, however, make public adulation of the leader the intuitive path to be followed by individuals situated at key points in the power flow.

6. Dissidence

Suppression of dissidence is a logical, and obvious, condition for the formation of personality cults. At surface, it seems like this should not be considered a distinct structural condition, because it is presupposed by the focus of this inquiry exclusively on the cult of dictators. Indeed, suppression of dissidence is a distinctive feature of dictatorships (Moghaddam 2013). Nonetheless, it is worth examining for two reasons. First, not all dictatorships met with the same level of success in suppressing dissidence. Second, during the reign of the same dictator, neither dissent, nor its vocalization – dissidence – are constants, therefore it is important to analyze the evolution of dissidence in relation to the evolution of the cult. I postulate that personality cults can form if dissidence is nearly absent in the early years of a dictator's rule. Exaggerated claims about the amazing qualities of the leader can only flourish to a point where they define the social life if they are not challenged by voices showing the inherent shortcomings of any leadership. On the other hand, once the cult has been established, in some cases dissidence was revived, but it was already too late to stop, or reverse, the cult.

This is a particular case of a more general phenomenon, related to reputation building. Employing a weak constructionist approach, stating that reality is largely socially constructed, but ultimately based on positive reality as foundation (see Smith 2010 for a detailed assessment), sociologists demonstrated that reputations are determined by social and structural factors, and subject to contention. In brief, the biographies of highly visible individuals serve as the basis for contention surrounding

their reputation, which can be used as symbolic hallmarks by interested parties.

Reputational entrepreneurs thus contest the meanings attributed to the life facts of the individuals, and, depending on their interests, attempt to create either a (predominantly) positive or a (predominantly) negative reputation of the personality. When one party is weak, absent, or uninterested, the reputation is sealed, whether good or bad, at least for a period, as discussion can be reopened (Fine 2001). Reputational entrepreneurs interested in projecting a positive light on the dictators, are able to secure an entirely positive reputation if opposition is suppressed. However, when the dictator is no longer in power, due to political changes or death, his reputation is open to re-scrutiny, and, in all cases, the party supporting a good reputation finds itself in a weak position, and the ex-dictators reputation erodes swiftly and permanently. Claims supported by coercion for too a long time lose their credibility when the coercive force is no longer there.

In this chapter I will follow dissidence in Romania longitudinally, from the Communist occupation in 1945 to the downfall of Communism in 1989, divided into three more or less distinct periods: from 1945 to Ceaușescu's coming to power in 1965, Ceaușescu's consolidation of power and the early signs of a personality cult, until around 1974, when signs of the emerging cult were undeniable, and the years of the cult, until 1989. In the closing subsections I will test the relevance of this condition by discussing the extent and the visibility of the dissidence in other dictatorships, and its relation to the formation of personality cults. I will conclude this chapter with a few general remarks linking Ceaușescu's case with other cases I analyze.

6.1. Repression and the Instauration of Communism in Romania (1945 – 1963)

The first concern of the Communists after taking over the power was to crush any form of real, alleged, or potential opposition. In the East European countries under Soviet Union's sphere of influence after World War II, this mass repression was directly demanded, supervised and assisted by the Soviet Secret Services (Courtois 1999). Openly expressed dissent, and the following repression defined the Romanian society in the aftermath of WWII. Nonetheless, throughout this chapter I will only discuss dissidence and repression of relevance to the topic of this dissertation. Out of the multiple forms of repression, those directed against an alternative discourse, able to question the official propaganda, constitute structural conditions for the creation of a personality cult. I will examine them below, under three categories: political and syndical activity opposed to the hegemony of the unique party, the activity of the intellectuals, and the role of the church.

6.1.1. Political parties and trade unions

The Communist Party achieved effective power over Romania on March 6th 1945, when a coalition government led by Dr. Petru Groza was formed, by the order of Andrey Vyshinsky, then deputy minister for foreign affairs of the Soviet Union. The next day, the NKVD representative Evgeny Sukhalov handed a ten-point document containing a three-

year plan for communization of Romania, to a deputation of Romanian communists, headed by Ana Pauker. One of the ten points specifically asked for “eradicating the historical political parties by imprisoning, murdering and kidnapping their members” (Tismăneanu 2007:200). At that time, political parties were still functioning legally. Members of the National Democratic Block, led by the Communist Party, formed the Groza government, while the most important opposition parties were the National Peasants’ Party, The National Liberal Party, and the Social Democrat Party. A massive wave of arrests of members of these latter parties began in 1945, peaking in 1946 in anticipation of the “free” elections held in November 18th, with the obvious purpose of hindering the hugely popular historical parties from organizing an effective electoral campaign, and to prevent their most prominent leaders from running in the elections (Deletant 1999,b). A second wave of arrests began in February 1947, resulting in the complete annihilation of the opposition political parties by 1948. The trials, based on groundless charges, such as “fascism”, “espionage on behalf of the Anglo-American imperialists”, and “war crimes”, resulted in harsh prison sentences for virtually all top and medium-level members of the historical parties, many of whom died in the political prisons of the Romanian Gulag (Deletant 1999,b). The opportunity for the de jure abolition of the historical parties came in July 14th 1947, when a number of prominent politicians of the National Peasants’ Party attempted to defect the country, after they have been offered the chance to leave on board of two small airplanes from the Tămădău airport. They were immediately arrested on the charge of high treason based on the allegation that the fugitives were attempting to establish a government in exile. This event marked the beginning of the final assault against the National Peasants’ Party; the

entire party leadership was arrested on July 19th, and the party was banned on July 30th. Public trials were staged for the party leaders, ending in November 1947, and all of them were sentenced harsh penalties (Frunză 1999). The other two major political parties, National Liberal Party and Social Democrat Party, were similarly annihilated through a series of arrests followed by staged political trials, in 1948-1949. The Social Democrat Party was forced to merge with the Communist Party, yet only a fraction of its members accepted this compromise; those who didn't were tried in 1949 for treason (Tismăneanu 2007). The last blow against the prominent members of the historical political parties was the arrest and incarceration of the former secretaries of state from 1919 to 1945, in May 1950, most of them already in their seventies or even older. A systematic witch-hunt against the second-echelons and youth organization activists of the historical political party was carried on between 1950 and 1952, thus completing the annihilation of democratic political life (Tismăneanu 2007).

As for the trade unions, Romania had only a moderate tradition in the pre-war period, due to the low level of industrialization, the small proportion of urban-based industrial workers, and the competition between the established Social Democratic Party and the tiny but aggressive Communist Party for organizing the unions (Nelson 1988). Soon after effectively taking power, on June 11th 1945, the Communists reorganized the trade unions by merging them into one all-encompassing institution, The General Confederation of Labor – Confederația Generală a Muncii, CGM –, in fact a subsidiary of the Communist Party, diverted from the stated purposes of a trade union (Tismăneanu 2007). Renamed The General Union of Trade Unions in Romania in 1966, it became

another mass organization at the disposal of PCR, tailored to implement the Party's directives rather than to represent workers' interests (Nelson 1988).

6.1.2 Intellectuals

The massive repression characteristic of the dawn of socialism in Romania specifically targeted intellectuals, rightfully considered dangerous due to their capacity for critical thinking and for their potential influence over the masses. Even the few intellectuals who activated in the RCP before 1945 were regarded with suspicion by their colleagues with more modest origins, but incommensurable personal ambitions. Thus, despite their demonstrated fidelity to the cause, communists of intellectual formation were sure victims of the internal party struggles. While the only true intellectuals at the top of the party hierarchy, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu (arrested in 1948 and executed in 1954) and Miron Constantinescu (ousted in 1956) were disposed of without much remorse (Tismăneanu 2003), the Party preferred to coopt "fellow travelers" from the ranks of less politically involved intellectuals (Cioroianu 2007). Meanwhile, not only unsympathetic intellectuals were silenced, but intellectuals were annihilated as a class. This was possible through concerted action on multiple levels: physical destruction and/or intimidation of individual intellectuals, eradication of the traditional institutions, and strict control over education.

In the first phase, immediately after 1945, the intellectual elite of the interwar period was decimated through incarceration in political prisons. Preliminary results of a

census of the incarcerated population, initiated by the Memorial Museum of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance show that 17.1% of the direct victims of the communist repression were college educated (Rusan 2007). Among those were prominent intellectuals of various profiles, such as historian Gheorghe I Brătianu, pedagog Onisifor Ghibu, sociologist Anton Golopenția, physicist Gheorghe Manu, psychologist Nicolae Mărgineanu, philosophers Constantin Noica, Ion Petrovici and Petre Țuțea, poets Radu Gyr, Nechifor Crainic, Constant Tonegaru and Vasile Voiculescu, medic Ion Jovin and many others (Ionițoiu 2000). Some intellectuals agreed to collaborate with the communist power, in exchange for some privileges, for example writer Mihail Sadoveanu, poet Tudor Arghezi, or mathematician Gheorghe Țițeica. Since many positions in the academia were vacated due to the arrests, a new kind of intellectual emerged, concerned more about defending the Party's line than demonstrating mastery of the discipline. A typical example is Mihai Roller, a former assistant engineer in civil constructions, who became the most important voice in Romanian historiography. In his work as book editor, he secured absolute obedience to the interests of the party in all books or textbooks related to history (Rura 1961).

At the same time, universities began to purge students with “unhealthy social origins”, favoring instead the sons of workers and poor peasants, as a means to prepare future intellectuals less hostile to the party. Many of the students who avoided being expelled were coerced to collaborate with the secret police as informers. The repression against college students intensified in 1956, in the aftermath of the movements in other socialist countries –Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary – which elicited a strong

response from Romanian students, quickly repressed by the Securitate (Tismăneanu 2007).

Another notable tool of repression was the banning of books and publications, initiated in August 1945, when a list of 910 titles to be removed from circulation was issued. The list would increase to 2538 titles by the next year, and was updated to 8779 titles by 1948 – by this time, the list necessitated itself a 500 page tome (Tismăneanu 2007).

A final assault against intellectuals was undertaken by the Party in 1958-1960, starting with public trials of composer Mihail Andricu, sculptor Milița Pătrașcu, physician Mihai Nasta and others, in front of large audiences consisting of “workers” – in fact, Securitate employees – demanding capital punishment, and of other intellectuals, forced to attend and too scared to react in any way (Liiceanu 2003). The culmination of this last wave of repression was in 1960. This was the year of the trial of the “Noica – Pillat group”, comprising 23 well-known intellectuals, who were charged with circulating forbidden literature. They received sentences varying between 7 years of correctional prison to 25 years of hard-labor (Giugariu 2010).

6.1.3. Religion

Although the 50 years of Communism could not eradicate the religious sentiments of the population, the Communist governments were able to destroy the pillars of

religion, namely the churches, synagogues, and mosques as independent, strong institutions. The importance granted by the communists to silencing any religious practice disobedient to the Marxist-Leninist ideology was apparent from the beginning of their rule in Romania, both in the activity of the government and that of Securitate. The new legislation regarding practicing religion was issued, as a decree in August 4th 1948. The text of the law incriminated all denominations, denying any presumption of innocence. The same law defined the attributions of the “special delegates”, government employees responsible for the surveillance of the religious cults (Tismăneanu 2007).

The most important churches in Romania at that time were the Romanian Orthodox Church, and the Uniate or Greek Catholic Church in Transylvania. The former was quickly brought under the Party’s control due to the collaboration of some members of the high hierarchy, consistent with the historical submissive behavior of the Romanian Orthodox Church to foreign rulers (Ediger 2005). Also, the Communists had increasing power in electing the high representatives of the church, and, by a law of 1947, imposed an upper age limit of 70 for all clergy, thus vacating all the five metropolitanates and twelve bishopries, who were subsequently assigned to members of the clergy obedient to the new regime. In 1948, the death of patriarch Nicodim allowed the election of Justinian Marina as his successor, thus ensuring Communist control over the heads of the Orthodox Church (Deletant 1999,a). Nevertheless, Communism did not elicit the same enthusiasm among the lower hierarchy priests and monks, who resisted more or less openly the changes imposed by the Party. Thousands of them were arrested between 1948 and 1953; show trials were staged for the members of two movements with particular appeal to the masses, thus threatening the “popular democracy”: the superior and the nuns of the

Vladimirești Monastery in 1955, and Rugul aprins (The Burning Altar) in 1958 (Enache 2005).

The Communist government did not attempt to control the Uniate Church, but suppressed it instead. Its strong ties with the Occident – it was directly subordinated to the Pope – made it unreliable in the Communists’ eyes. However, this attempt met with great resistance, mostly because Uniate bishops displayed remarkable dignity, courage, and fidelity to their creed (Deletant 1999,a). As in other cases, those who refused to comply with the Communists’ decision were arrested; the Uniate church was beheaded, as its bishops were arrested and sentenced to prison, despite of the heroic resistance of the parishioners, who in many cases defended their priests at the cost of their own liberty. Even so, the Uniate Church survived clandestinely, and resumed its official activity after 1989 (Ionițoiu 2000).

Similarly aggressive actions were taken against the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches, active especially in Transylvania, where the faithful of these churches were mostly Hungarians and Germans. Although the churches were practically outlawed by the Decree of August 4th 1948, which stipulated that “foreign religious cults may not exercise jurisdiction over faithful on the territory of the Romanian state”, the Churches continued to exist in an ambiguous position, being tolerated, but not recognized (Deletant 1999,a:92).

With a smaller number of faithful, Judaism and Islamism were controlled by similar means. The Synagogue became a mere accessory of the Communist power after 1948, when obedient Moses Rosen replaced the brutally expelled chief-Rabi, Dr.

Alexandru Şafran. Furthermore, between 1958 and 1989 hundreds of Jews were “allowed” to leave Romania, in exchange of big sums of money, paid by Israel (Ioanid 2005). While the Muslim community in Romania was small, located mostly in the Eastern province of Dobrogea, a number of imams were arrested, especially for aiding the Crimean Tartars, in their attempt to escape Stalinist terror in Soviet Union (Ioniţoiu 2000).

Considering the extent, the brutality, and the duration of the repression, it is safe to consider that, by early 1960s, all opposition to the communist regime had been effectively silenced. While dissent continued to be present, it was impossible to express it, even in private conversations with family members or close friends, without facing the risk of arrest. On this background, a switch in the policies pursued by the RCP preceded the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and the subsequent rise to power of Nicolae Ceauşescu. This switch, which I will discuss in the next subsection, made possible by the effective suppression of all individuals and ideas deemed as dangerous to the system, also change the face of Romanian dissidence for decades to come.

6.2. Dissidence during the “Romanian Spring”

A post-Stalinist thaw occurred in Romania in asynchrony with the other countries of the Eastern Bloc, spurred by a different motivation, and with different outcomes.

While other socialist countries, including the Soviet Union, undertook a limited liberalization of political and social life in the wake of Stalin's death, accelerated after 1956, the Romanian Communist Party maintained its Stalinist position, and only followed Khrushchev's calls for de-Stalinization at the surface, with minimal changes (Tismăneanu 2003). Khrushchev's thaw resulted in large popular protests in Poland, East Germany, and Hungary, pressing for accelerated and deeper reforms than those intended by the Kremlin leader, and eventually suppressed by the Soviet army (Steele 1974). Romanian population, especially students in Timisoara, Cluj, and Bucharest, rallied in support of their Hungarian colleagues to demand similar reforms from RCP, but the Romanian communist demonstrated they were in control, and responded with a quick and effective repression (Granville 2008).

Following their demonstrated fidelity to the Soviet Union, Romanian communists were allowed to continue their own policies, with gradually decreasing interference from Moscow, and as a consequence de-Stalinization never happened in Romania. However, a liberalization occurred in the early to mid-1960s, as a means to rally internal support of the population in their attempt to release themselves from Soviet domination. Probably the main reason behind RCP's partial break up with the CPUS was the latter's attempt to impose a supranational economic planning, known as the Valev plan, according to which Romania was supposed to become an agricultural economy, and to abandon its efforts toward industrialization, a plan rejected by RCP's leadership (Steele 1974). Unlike the thaw of 1956 in the other countries of the bloc, the Romanian thaw emerged at a time when all opposition to communist rule had been crushed, and the population realized there was no hope for the restoration of a normal political or social

life (Marino 1996). Thus, the thaw did not spur protests, instead the population accepted the suggestions that USSR was solely responsible for the recent hardships, and credited RCP with fulfilling their hopes for a better life. As a result, in the early 1960s any kind of intellectual criticism of the official ideology was quasi impossible. Besides, Romanian intellectuals, who refrained from criticizing the regime, received the apparent de-Stalinization initiated by Gheorghiu-Dej with hope, as they were promised a real change. Thus, by the time Ceaușescu took over the power in 1965, intellectual dissidence was indeed negligible. Furthermore, many intellectuals were themselves enchanted by Ceaușescu's charismatic strategy (Stolarik 2010). It is not surprising that very few acts of open dissidence can be counted in Romania during the 1960s and early 1970s.

The most notable was the solitary action of Vasile Paraschiv, a worker from Ploiesti, and a Party member since 1946. On October 24th 1968, he publicly announced his resignation from RCP, in protest to the activists' abuses against the workers, and to the generalized practice of "voluntary" (read: mandatory) unpaid labor. He was quickly (and abusively) arrested, and interned in a psychiatric hospital, a subterfuge of the Romanian authorities to whitewash political imprisonment. Released after a few days, Paraschiv did not consent to end his protest, which continued until 1989 and beyond, despite being constantly harassed by the Securitate, including multiple confinements in psychiatric facilities (Ionițoiu 2000).

Another solitary protest, no less relevant with respect to its echoes both in Romania and in the West, was that of Radio producer Cornel Chiriac, on March 1969. Cornel was one of the young journalists who, taking advantage of the thaw, promoted jazz music – formerly banned until about 1962 – and the new pop-rock originated in the

West, in Romanian mass-media. Besides helping Romanian audience familiarize with jazz through his articles, Cornel broadcasted Western and Romanian jazz musicians on the National Radio (Popan 2010). His increasing interest in pop-rock music, from about 1967, was also visible in two directions, broadcasting the big names of the international scene on Radio, and promoting young Romanian bands, among which he considered a band from Timișoara, *Phoenix*, as the most promising. On March 1969, Cornel participated at the *Golden Stag* [*Cerbul de Aur*] music festival, at the time the most famous festival of its kind in Eastern Europe, attracting musicians and tourists from the other side of the Iron Curtain, and used by the propaganda as a display of Romania's liberalism and openness to the Occident (Matei 2012). Enraged by the authorities' refusal to allow the band *Phoenix* to perform for the festival, Cornel locked himself in the hotel room, and set the curtains on fire. While firemen were able to break the doors and stop the blaze, Cornel disappeared, and in the same night he deflected from Romania. Soon after, he began to broadcast pop-rock music for Romania from the Munich-based Radio Free Europe. Besides the latest pop-rock releases from the Occident, Cornel transmitted to his increasing audience consisting mainly of youths searching for an escape in music, a consistent, while down-to-the-earth, politically charged message, until his assassination, on March 4th 1974 (Dobrescu 2011; Fichter 2011).

The only collective protest during these years was spontaneous, and gathered a small number of people. In fact, the protest has been made relevant rather by the disproportionate authorities' response than by its scope. On Christmas Eve 1968, frustrated for having their Christmas vacation suspended, students from a few dorms in Bucharest decided to defy the regime by singing carols (by their nature religious songs,

thus constituting a transgression, albeit minor, in a self-proclaimed atheist regime), on the city streets. Eventually, the procession grew several hundred strong, and, occasionally, slogans could be heard. The topics, however, were diverse, ranging from demands for Christmas vacation to a revanchist call for the “liberation of Bessarabia”. Some tens of students were arrested, and the authorities announced radical measures against the participants in what was deemed no less than a rebellion. Eventually, however, only a few students, considered the instigators, were expelled from University (Fichter 2011). The very few other action of public protests during those years, such as a ten minutes demonstration of five students in front of the Czechoslovak embassy, in protest against the Soviet invasion, in August 1968, and a supposed self-immolation in front of Ceaușescu on November 1970, passed rather unnoticed (Fichter 2011).

Despite the paucity of open acts of dissidence, explained through the effective silencing of dissidence in the recent past, the continuous surveillance by a still strong, yet less conspicuous, Securitate, and the trust granted by the population to the new RCP leadership, large segments of Romanian population were still dissatisfied. However, their dissent materialized in acts of everyday resistance, carrying lesser risks than open contestation, but in the same time hindering the coalescence of organized dissidence. Deflection, already a mounting phenomenon (Evans and Novak 1969), later constituted the most common form of dissent. However, it also had the side effect of further diluting organized dissidence, since emigration was a means to solve personal problems at the cost of abandoning opposition to social evils (Georgescu 1983). Those unable or unwilling to deflect the country found refuge in areas of the social life untouched yet by politics, such as the re-emerging jazz scene, which offered an alternative to the official

message not by opposing it, but by providing an ideology-free space of expression (Popan 2010). Finally, the lack of real political participation was compensated by the population through engaging in (usually critical) political conversations, spreading political jokes, and listening to foreign radio stations, especially Radio Free Europe (RFE from here on), but also Voice of America, BBC, and Deutsche Welle, phenomena that intensified during the second half of the 1970s and reached their climax in the next decade, partly as a reaction to the personality cult (Marin 2014).

6.3. Dissidence after 1974

After the rather silent decade analyzed in the previous subsection, Romanian dissidence was slow to develop few isolated voices, and even slower to coagulate into a serious challenger to the system. By any measure, Romanian dissidents have been fewer, less organized, and of less political relevance than their counterparts in other East European socialist countries for the entire period until the fall of socialism, despite the higher level of population resentment (Petrescu 2004). Although, as I shall discuss below, a fair number of dissidents challenged the regime, especially during the 1980s, and their opposition was well-known and admired by the population, no effective leader or leadership group crystallized until the regime crisis led to its demise, forced by popular revolt (Pollack and Wielgohs 2004). Dissidents' activity was diverse, ranging from voicing personal claims, such as the desire to emigrate, to more general themes, addressing workers' and ethnic minorities' rights, human rights violations, ecologic and

cultural themes. Protests against Ceaușescu's personality cult were also present, and multiplied along with the growth of the cult, especially after 1978. However, it was already too late to stop the mechanisms which set the cult in motion, and the protests had no effect. The sycophancy only increased, and reached apocalyptic dimensions in the late 1980, before the regime's fall.

Intellectual dissidence was slow to recover in the years of Ceaușescu rule, and consisted mainly of isolated individuals speaking up against the regime, and few timid attempts to organize into networks, most of them quickly halted by the secret police. Romanian intellectuals were never able to organize a consistent, more visible dissident movement, similar to those formed in other socialist countries, including the Soviet Union (Curry 1983). The first notable protest by novelist Paul Goma, in 1977, was only endorsed by two other intellectuals, writer Ion Negoïtescu and psychiatrist Ion Vianu. Other dissidents – Doina Cornea, Dan Petrescu, Liviu Cangeopol, Luca Pițu, Mircea Dinescu, Dorin Tudoran, Gabriel Andreescu, Radu Filipescu – were confronted with a similar lack of support from their peers. Indeed, the first protest involving a group of intellectuals was a letter of support for Mircea Dinescu, signed by seven prominent intellectuals, on 20 March 1989 (Tismăneanu 2007).

The only groups of intellectuals opposing the regime in a more organized fashion, and using successfully the means of samizdat, were the representatives of national minorities, namely the German intellectuals of Aktionsgruppe Banat (Action Group Banat) in 1975 and the Hungarian intellectuals who issued the samizdat magazine *Ellenpontok* (Counterpoints) between 1981 and 1982. However, their dissidence

primarily reached an international audience, having little resonance among the Romanian public (Rady 1992).

Of more relevance was the continuing protest of intellectuals in diaspora, centered on Radio Free Europe and other foreign radio stations, such as Voice of America, BBC and Deutsche Welle (Marin 2014). It was, in fact, the only voice able to speak to both Western and Romanian audiences, and reveal the truth about the “wonderful life” in Ceaușescu’s Romania. Radio Free Europe was a constant concern for Ceaușescu, who ordered his espionage services to carry out a series of terrorist attacks against the headquarters and the personnel (Pacepa 1987).

The other potential pillars of dissidence analyzed in this chapter were even less present in the Romanian political landscape during Ceaușescu era. Although historical political parties had some activity in diaspora, and to an even smaller extent in underground at home, after some of their activists who survived political prison were eventually released in 1964, the activity was directed merely toward ensuring the survival of the parties, not toward posing any challenge to the communist system (Coposu and Arachelian 1996).

The few attempts to organize free trade labor unions in the late 1970s – during a time when such organizations were spreading in the Soviet Block, in Poland (although Solidarity came to the scene only in 1980), Czechoslovakia, and even Soviet Union – were quickly and brutally repressed by the Securitate. The only union of significance remains The Free Trade Union of the Working People of Romania [Sindicatul Liber al

Oamenilor Muncii din România, SLOMR], active between January and April 1979 (Deletant 1995).

As was the case with other types of dissidence, by 1965, religious dissidence was virtually nonexistent, thus the state was confident enough to reduce the personnel of the Direction for Religious Cults from 342 employees, among who 198 were special delegates in 1956 to 136 employees, with only 42 special delegates in 1970 (Tismăneanu 2007). The few religious based acts of dissidence which followed in the years of Ceaușescu era, were, nonetheless, better organized than the protests of the intellectuals, partly due to the ecumenical character of the dissent. However, the religiously motivated protests were carried by individuals, priests or laymen, without institutional support from the churches. In fact, except for the illegal Uniate Church, whose clandestine activity consisted mostly in providing religious services for its faithful, the other religious institutions were obedient tools of Communist propaganda, with little inclination toward dissidence (Tismăneanu 2007).

Between 1973 and 1980, an active group initiated by a member of the Evangelical Church, Iosif Țion, uniting representatives of other Neo-Protestant cults – Baptists and Pentecostals – activated under the name of Christian Committee for Defense of Religious Freedom [Asociația pentru Libertate Religioasă Creștină – ALRC]. They drafted several documents calling for religious rights in Romania, not only for the denominations they represented, but also for the reopening of the Uniate Church. They also supported the Orthodox priest Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa, who was arrested for protesting the demolition of a church in Bucharest. The authorities reprimanded the movement, however with less brutality, due to their support from the Occident, in the years that

followed the Helsinki treaty, endorsed by Romania. By 1980, however, the majority of its leaders were forced to leave Romania (Romocea 2011; Tismăneanu 2007).

Finally, the solitary protest of Hungarian Reformed pastor László Tőkés was to have the biggest impact on Ceaușescu's rule. Tőkés had been known to the Securitate since 1982, due to his contribution to the underground magazine *Ellenpontok*. In the following years, as a pastor, he continued to denounce the Romanian government's human rights abuses from the pulpit, amidst continuous Securitate harassment. However, his position was less precarious than that of other dissidents, due to the fact that his case was known in the Occident, and diplomatic pressures had been posed on the government for his protection. Ceaușescu's international isolation in the late 1980s made these pressures less relevant, and actions against Tőkés, both by Securitate and by the Church hierarchy, submissive to the regime, constantly increased during 1988 and 1989. On November and December 1989, the Securitate seemed determined to evict him from his church flat. Unexpected by the authorities, his determination to stay was equal to that of the Securitate, and so was the parishioners' courageous support for their pastor (Deletant 1995). On December 15th 1989, parishioners gathered around his house to protect him from harassment and eviction. In short time, passersby joined the protest and turned it into an anticommunist manifestation, while the original cause became largely irrelevant by dusk (Mioc, 2002). This manifestation unlocked a chain of events which, in less than a week, led to Ceaușescu's overthrow and the demise of Socialism in Romania.

6.4. Comparative Perspective

If the lesson learned from Romania's case can be generalized, we should expect personality cults to form only in those dictatorships which managed to suppress dissidence to a point where it was almost inexistent, or irrelevant for any other reason. Moreover, a short period of a few years when dissidence is silenced is enough for the personality cults to form; when the personality cult is already ongoing, its contestation is largely ineffective.

The Soviet power was concerned from the beginning with elimination of any form of opposition. While the Red Army was engaged in a destructive civil war, crushing the Bolsheviks enemies and some of their initial allies (Mawdsley 2000), a separate institution was created for brutally repressing civilian demonstrations of distrust in the dictatorship of proletariat. The *All-Russian Emergency Committee for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage*, better known by its Russian language abbreviation – *Cheka* – was created during the early days of the Revolution, on December 20th 1917, as a means to coerce the disobedient peasants who resisted requisitions of grains and mandatory conscriptions in the Red Army (Courtois 1999). It was the first centrally organized in a long series of secret police organizations in the service of the Soviets, bearing different names and slightly different organizational schemas, but sharing the extensive apparatus employed with the purpose of controlling and coercing USSR's own citizens by means of mass repression (see the *Abbreviations* page for the complete list). On September 1918, the Bolsheviks launched an open war against the population,

officially named the *Red Terror*, and sanctioned by Lenin himself. Although officially concluded a month later, the extensive surveillance and repression of the Soviet people only intensified and increased in magnitude in the next decades (Courtois 1999). Thus, by the time of Lenin's death, his successor, which turned out to be Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, only had to deal with internal opposition at the top of the Party. After he resolved to eliminate Trotsky and to settle the disputes with Kamenev-Zinoviev and Bukharin-Rykov factions in his favor, since 1927, Stalin ruled with discretionary power over a giant empire, aided by an overgrown repression apparatus, and no visible dissidence (Sebag Montefiore 2004; Service 2005).

Hitler's rise to power, although on a different path, coincides with brutal repression of all actual and potential opposition. The Parliamentary elections of March 1933, which sanctioned NSDAP's acquiring the largest number of seats in the Parliament were accompanied by violence involving the SA troops, the paramilitary wing of the Party. In very short time the Nazis resolved to suppress civil liberties through The Reichstag Fire Decree, signed by President Paul von Hindenburg, and to exercise full legislative power through the Enabling Act, voted by all the parties represented in the Reichstag with the exception of the Social Democrats. By summer of the same year, Hitler and the NSDAP forced all other political parties to disband, including the German National People's Party, although nominal allies of NSDAP, and, on July 14th, NSDAP was declared the only legal political party. With freedom of the press suspended since February, the Nazis effectively shut any dissidence (Shirer 1960). The next summer, 1934, following a series of events known as "the Night of the Long Knives", Hitler suppressed internal opposition. Under allegations of treachery, Hitler had Ernst Röhm

and other SA leader, as well as some of his political adversaries, executed, an act approved by the majority of the German population, who believed that Hitler was restoring order (Kershaw 1987). The only consistent dissidence in the early years of Nazi leadership was voicing dissent against the suppression of religious liberties. However, like in Romania's case, the two major churches in Germany, Catholic and Lutheran, submitted to the Führer – the Catholic Church due to a concordat signed in 1933 between the Reich and the Holy See, the Lutheran through direct control by the Nazis, who appointed an obedient Bishop – and dissidence was carried by isolated individual clergymen (Hoffmann 1988). A more organized resistance coagulated later, during the War, but it consisted mainly of underground networks of partisans and/or networks for support of the Jewish families targeted after the Final Solution was decreed. Understandably, this resistance did not openly challenge the official discourse, since operating in the underground best served its goals (Cox 2009). The only consistent dissident group, addressing the German people through its own media outlet, was the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party (Sopade), operating from exile in Prague until 1938 (and later from Paris, then London, pushed by the German expansion in the early phases of the war). However, similar with Radio Free Europe for Romania, its impact was limited during the early years of Hitler's dictatorship, when he was still enjoying the trust of a large segment of the population (Kershaw 1987).

All other cases of personality cult occurred in dictatorships which brutally suppressed opposition in the early phases of the dictators' rules: Rafael Trujillo, François Duvalier, and Jean-Bedel Bokassa reigned in terror, sustained not by the false legitimacy created by their cults, but by overgrown repressive apparatuses (Chirot 1994). With a

gigantic labor camp system, and total state control of information, no credible dissident organization or movement was possible in North Korea (Chen and Lee 2007). In Iran, open dissidence against the Shah was a constant in the years preceding the revolution, with consistent support from diaspora and the foreign public opinion. Shortly after taking over the power, Ayatollah Khomeini turned against the civil liberties of his own people, and severed relations with the West (Ritter 2015). Not surprisingly, while there was no cult of the Shah, only a few years later Khomeini became the object of compulsory adulation (Moghaddam 2013). Facing little opposition, mainly due to the economic growth based on a wise management of the country's mineral and oil resources, but also due to a policy of encouraging the submissive wing of the nominal opposition, while intimidating, and occasionally repressing inconvenient opponents, Kazakhstan's president for life Nursultan Nazarbayev is enjoying a growing cult in his country (Isaacs 2010; Hess 2013). Meanwhile, in the nearby Turkmenistan, a similar economic context – this time based on the huge natural gas resources – combined with one of the most repressive dictators worldwide to give birth to a personality cult of grotesque dimension, featuring, among others, a gold-plated statue of President Saparmurat Nyazov, rotating to always face the sun (Oakley 2007; Šír 2008).

However, after Stalin's death, and in context of the Khrushchev's thaw and the anticommunist revolutionary movements in Central Eastern Europe, dissidence was able to reorganize, denying the possibility of other personality cults in the decades that followed. To be sure, there were periods when the Communist governments tightened their control of the society, as it was the case in Hungary in the aftermath of the 1956 Revolution, in Czechoslovakia since August 1968 until well into the 1980s, and during

the Martial Law in Poland. However, none of these regimes were able to effectively silence dissidence, and, consequently, there were no cults of János Kádár, Gustáv Husák, or Wojciech Jaruzelski. Dissidence was not directly opposing the Communist leaders and their regimes, instead it was exposing false claims made by propaganda on topical issues, such as religious freedom, workers' rights, or civil liberties. In Poland, a strong pillar of resistance was the Catholic Church, which could not be subjugated by the state, due to its strong ties with the Vatican, and its long tradition of opposition to the foreign invaders (Ediger 2005; Angi 2011). Strong youth countercultures in Czechoslovakia and Hungary seriously challenged the communists' self-descriptions of happy nations marching together in perfect discipline toward the glorious future (Kürti 1991; Bolton 2012). Finally, more cohesive intellectual and unionist dissident movements complete a picture where claims about the awesomeness of the leader are at most improbable and at least ridicule (Curry 1983).

More recently, strong political opposition prevented the creation of a cult of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, quite in contrast with the popularity he enjoyed in the Leftist circles around the world (Dobson 2013). In Russia, dissident activism on various issues, from environmentalists to LGBT rights activists to punk rock groups, indirectly prevented the creation of a genuine cult of the leader (Sperling 2012; Dobson 2013; Gessen 2014). However, the probable increasing international isolation brought by the EU and US sanctions following the beginning of armed violence in Ukraine will probably make Russian dissidence less relevant, and allow the right conditions for the formation of a personality cult to establish.

No dictatorship displaying a relevant dissidence developed a personality cult for the dictator. The opposite, however, is not true: for different reasons, some of the most repressive regimes in the twentieth century, the Military Junta in Argentina and the Khmer Rouge terror under the leadership of “brother number one”, Pol Pot, were not associated with personality cults of their leaders (Chirof 1994; Short 2005). Moreover, in the early years of Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, when all dissidence was suppressed through brutal force and through indiscriminate accusations of fascist sympathies against anybody opposing Soviet power, the rapid crush of opposition led to divergent outcomes in the occupied countries. While atypical, short-lived cults of local leaders flourished in Hungary and Poland (Apor 2004; Main 2004; Rees 2004; Apor 2010), in Romania, despite scattered, while notable, encomiums raised to the individual considered the de facto leader of the RCP – initially Ana Pauker, later Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, they did not coagulate in a cult of either of them (Cioroianu 2007). Therefore, the lack of dissidence, although a necessary condition for personality cult formation, is not a sufficient one; other conditions and processes need to be investigated.

6.5. Concluding Remarks

Although dictatorships are defined by lack of voice for the regime’s opponents, not all dictatorships were equally successful in shutting off the opposition. Personality cults rarely emerge as devices imposed from above, most of the times they are constructed through the interaction between the leaders and a certain category of clients.

In a very early phase, before the personality cults coagulate into mass phenomena, praise is rather timid, raised by isolated individuals, hoping to gain the favors of the leader. If successful, they will be imitated and surpassed by other moral entrepreneurs who join the competition. However, while the cult depends on the success of these early encomiums, they can be easily shut by opposition, who can spot them, and shame both the originators and the intended receivers. Personality cults need a relatively short (a few years) period of incubation, when the opposition is irrelevant on the political stage.

The Romanian civil society was quickly crushed by the new Communist power, in all its possible aspects. I have briefly reviewed the relationships between the political, syndical, intellectual, and religious institutions and the Communist power between 1945 and 1989. A trend is apparent: after the brutal repression against the civil society in the first years of Communism, by about 1960 there was virtually no dissidence in Romania. This was followed by an apparent relaxation, when dissidence was slow to develop, due to the hope that things would change. Thus, by the time Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power in 1965, there was no voice to represent civil society. Later – when the abuses of Ceaușescu’s administration were felt – dissidence began to reemerge, yet less organized than in other socialist countries. In fact, the civil society destroyed in the 1950s never fully recovered. Furthermore, in what interests the present study, the dissident acts began to be known to at least a part of the Romanian public only after the late 1970s, when the cult of personality created its own logic of organizing the society, which could not be challenged by scattered acts of opposition.

7. *Tukhta*

The term *Tukhta* has been brought to the consciousness of the public by Alexandr Solzhenitsyn (1974). It has been borrowed from the thieves' argot, and can be roughly translated into English as "falsification of output", referring initially to inflating economic indicators in the official scripts, or reporting work that has not been performed. What is particular to *tukhta* is that the lie is not incidental, but embedded in the economic system, originating from it and securing its perpetuation in the same time. Solzhenitsyn's basic explanation for this is that, in a centrally coordinated and planned economy, the bureaucrats responsible with designing the norms are out of touch with reality, so in most cases they assign workers quotas that cannot be accomplished. In response, workers report *tukhtas*, which are accepted at face value by other bureaucrats, thus maintaining, only in the reports, the appearance that the system works correctly. Whatever its origins were, it is certain that it accompanied socialism during its entire existence, and, arguably, it constitutes both its hallmark and its strongest pillar which made it persist for decades, despite the unpopularity at home and the threats posed by the Cold War from the outside.

Tukhta turned out to be one of the most successful innovation in socialism, providing an effective means for individuals to adjust to the unrealistic demands of the planned economy. Not surprisingly, it spread rapidly horizontally, among workers. Somehow less expected was its vertical adoption by Soviet authorities. However, as I shall discuss below, *tukhta* is in fact the natural consequence of an un-free economy, and it has been, and continues to be, the basis of economic growth reported by all

dictatorships, of socialist flavor or not. Furthermore, as soon as economic *tukhta* became habitual, it created a platform for over-reporting non-economic indicators, such as the client's fidelity to the patron, or the subject's admiration of the leader, and thus opened the way for personality cults to develop.

Unlike the other chapters discussing structural conditions, I will open the present chapter with a general description of *tukhta*, necessary due to its little use in social sciences. In the next subsections I will assess *tukhta* in socialist Romania, and its direct connections with Ceaușescu's personality cult. Throughout this chapter I will highlight the comparison with other personality cults as the discussion on *tukhta* develops, not in a separate section.

7.1. What Is *Tukhta*?

Tukhta was brought to the attention of the Western audience with the publication in France of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novel *The Gulag Archipelago*. Here, *tukhta* is presented as an artifice invented by zeks (political prisoners) in order to survive the organized extermination in the Soviet political prisoners. In the labor camps, food rations were conditioned by fulfilling the working quotas assigned by the supervisors. Most often, the prisoners who were not able to fulfil the quotas had their food rations diminished, but sometimes surpassing the quota could bring the workers certain benefits, such as a food supplement, a privileged position in the camp, or, rarely, the right to send a post card home. Thus, first the struggle for survival prompted the inmates to find

ingenious ways to cheat on their labor quotas, and then the competition for scarce privileges took over-reporting even further, accounting for impossible achievements. The initial over-reporting translated into continuous increases of the assigned quotas: the originally inflated figures of those workers recurring to *tukhta* with no restraint had been taken at face value, and imposed on all other workers. Eventually, the labor quotas and the reported figures increased so much that nobody could achieve them, and so *tukhta* became a means of survival, not a choice, while there was no interest in measuring the real output (Solzhenitsyn 1974).

The practice of *tukhta* originated in the Soviet labor camps and soon permeated the entire society. As I will show below, it was soon embraced by the authorities as a propaganda tool, and subsequently spread top-down in the Soviet society, and, after 1945, in other socialist states under Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. However, it should be noted that the apparition of *tukhta* is conditioned by two features of socialist economy: the impossibility of economic calculation, and the inflexibility of the supply chain. Economic calculation is only possible in free-market based economies, where the buyers set the prices by manifesting their preferences. In non-free economies, particularly – but not only – in socialist economies, prices can be set from above through trial and error, but only for consumer goods. The process of transforming raw materials into consumer goods involves a large amount of trade, which, in free-market societies, is regulated by the individual interests of the various entrepreneurs involved in the process. In socialism, however, the process takes the form of many intermediate trades having the state as both buyer and seller. The impossibility of assessing the price for each of these transactions

leads to computation chaos, making, eventually, economic indicators meaningless (Von Mises 1951).

A second characteristic of the socialist economy which sits at the origins of systematic over-reporting is its impossibility to adapt neither to changes in demand nor to accidents in the supply process. While free market economies not only permit, but require entrepreneurs to anticipate possible changes in demand, and in the same time to search for the most cost-effective supplier of raw materials, a centrally planned economy prescribes the output of each economic unit, with the assumption that both the suppliers' possibilities and the consumers' demands can also be ascribed. In theory, socialist economy should be set like a perfect mechanism, where each unit delivers exactly its pre-established quota. Over- or under-fulfilling the quota would be equally disastrous for the economy. However, such a perfect mechanism cannot be planned; Soviet economy was dysfunctional by design, rather than by accident (Rosefielde 2007). Moreover, over-fulfilling the quota is only possible in the primary industrial sector (e.g. production of raw materials through mining), since all output in the secondary sector is conditioned by the input of raw materials. In practice, "central planning simply meant merely having targets, often devoid of any element of realistic projection based on the balance of allocable and needed resources"; the logical consequence is that the system was more often than not "a mockery of reality", and the "reports were based on wishful thinking" (Volgyes 1995:44-45).

When economic calculation is impossible, and the demands are established by a central political authority, instead of the market, placing on each economic unit responsibility for the possible failures of its suppliers, economic indicators become

meaningless. Factual indicators (i.e. the real output) are not relevant for economic computation. Consequently, inflated indicators cannot be detected by economists. When there are also incentives to over-report production, inflated indicators will naturally replace the factual ones. In the Soviet Union, the first social category to seize the opportunity were indeed zeks, for whom the incentives to lie about the labor output were as important as the difference between being alive and dying of starvation. However, the labor camps commanders also had incentives to report the inflated figures (and maybe add something themselves), in order to demonstrate their effectiveness. GPU leadership had the incentive to back up their increasing claims for resources through its Gulag system's alleged significant contribution to the Soviet economy. A similar mechanism soon formed in the entire Soviet economy, outside of the labor camps, with similar incentives at different levels of command: workers, factory managers, local and regional leaders. Finally the leadership of CPSU was willing to accept the inflated figures, and use them as a legitimizing tool, insofar it proved "mathematically" the superiority of the socialist economy, and the prosperity of the workers. In a way, the bottom line is that *tukhta*, in aggregate form, turned against the very people who contributed to its creation. In this view, Solzhenitzyn's (1974) claim that *tukhta* was so pervasive that falsification became the rule rather than the exception seems at least plausible.

The word *tukhta*, in its more literary form *tufta*, as well as the associated verb *tuftit'* ("to pretend to work when in fact you are doing nothing") were signaled by Western linguists studying modern Russian slang as early as contacts with Soviet Union could be reestablished in the years of the Khrushchev's thaw (Grosberg 1960:65-66). However, the word had to wait two more decades before its existence was officially

sanctioned in the Soviet Union as a title entry in a Dictionary of Neologisms in 1984, with the meaning “idle talk; lies” (Rothstein 1985:463).

The publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* spurred a short-lived debate among economic historians centered on the magnitude of *tukhta* in the Soviet economy during the first five-year plan (1928 – 1932). Challenging the official figures provided by the Soviets, and accepted by Western scholars, Steven Rosefielde (1980) identifies four different types of *tukhta*, namely (1) the reporting of nonexistent output, (2) the overvaluation of inferior goods as superior products, (3) the inclusion of valueless goods in official indexes, and (4) the failure to account for the cost of social bads produced by types 1, 2 and 3 of *tukhta*.

Type (1) of *tukhta* is most often cited by memorialist literature of labor camps survivors. Its variety is practically unlimited, depending only on the workers’ imagination. One of the many illustrations is provided by Eugenia Ginzburg, recollecting how zeks (herself included) working at cutting timber were able to fulfil the ridiculously high quota, and implicitly to survive. In the forest, there were piles of timber previously cut by other zek teams, and abandoned due to shortcomings of the transportation system. Old timber was “freshened up” by sawing the ends, so that it looked newly cut, and reported as such, thus the same log appeared on paper multiple times (Ginzburg 1967).

Type (2) *tukhta* is self-explanatory, but in the same time the most difficult to assess, lacking, as I showed above, the possibility of economic calculation. Probably the most extensive employment of this type of *tukhta* was, however, not in the Soviet Union, but in China, during the Great Leap Forward. Mao’s ambition to double the steel

production of 5.35 million tons in 1957 to 10.7 million in the next year by forcing each village to use all human and natural resources for this purpose was accomplished. But the steel so resulted, was of poor quality, and could not be used for industrial purposes. In the process, type (4) *tukhta* must also be accounted, as agriculture was abandoned in favor of the highest patriotic duty of producing steel, and in the subsequent famine an estimate of 40 million people died. Besides, the deforestation resulted from the need for wood to heat the steel ovens had its negative effects felt for decades to come (Chirot 1994).

Type (3) *tukhta* is best illustrated by the construction of the Belomor Canal. By direct Stalin's order, a navigation canal was built between Leningrad and Kem, on the White Sea, although already connected by railroad, so the economic or strategic value of a canal was questionable. The canal was built, as desired by Stalin, within 20 months, between September 1931 and April 1933, with slave labor provided by political prisoners, and no technological support beyond shovel, wheelbarrows, and dynamite. However, it turned out to be too shallow to accommodate ocean-going vessels, and, at the end of the day, completely useless. When Solzhenitsyn visited the canal in 1966, the whole traffic he could observe during an 8 hour interval consisted of only two barges, carrying the same cargo in opposite directions (Solzhenitsyn 1974; Rosefielde 1980).

Type 4 *tukhta* refers to the computation of national economic indicators without taking into account the deleterious side effects of certain products. Here is Rosefielde's example: "a nuclear reactor which pollutes and therefore must be shut down, [...] represented a wasted expenditure of millions of dollars, in addition to imposing substantial cleanup costs on the economy" (Rosefielde 1980:570). This is a computation error of concern to economists, which indicates indeed a dysfunctional economy;

however, for the purpose of the present study, I will only consider types 1, 2, and 3 of *tukhta*, which, as I shall discuss below, transcend the realm of economic practices and become cultural habits, transferable to other areas of society.

Considering the extent of *tukhta* practiced in the labor camps, as described by Solzhenitsyn, and the Gulag's share of the national product, but admitting the limitations of assessing the extent to which *tukhta* was practiced outside the archipelago, Rosefielde suggests to adjust the official economic indexes for *tukhta* by subtracting anything between 10% and 20%, admittedly a conservative measure, which does not preclude higher estimates (Rosefielde 1980). Together with an attempt to assess the contribution to the Soviet economy of the labor camps during Stalinism (Rosefielde 1981), Rosefielde's article attracted a series of irate rebuttals from economists. Although the existence of *tukhta* in labor camp culture had been admitted by the time this controversy took place, economists were still in disbelief about its extent (Birman 1980; Davies and Wheatcroft 1980; Gregory 1980). The unexpected realization of the structural flaws of socialist economies accompanied by the rapid collapse of the Soviet political system in the next decade seem, however, to indicate that the contribution of *tukhta* to the reported economic growth was larger than that proposed by Rosefielde, and was not limited to the Soviet Union. The perfect example is German Democratic Republic, whose self-reported economic success, endorsed by some Western analysts who, by more measured appraisals, suggested that GDR's per capita was higher than Great Britain's or Italy, turned out to be fictitious when compared to the real situation revealed after the fall of Berlin Wall (Baylis 1995).

In fact, while economists only considered *tukhta* performed in the labor camps, its practice pervaded the whole society even faster and deeper than the word “*tufia*” infiltrated Russian language. The new Russian slang was explained as a direct consequence of the labor camps, where many of the inmates were members of the intelligentsia. Due to daily contact with inmates from the lower strata of society, they enriched their cultured Russian language with elements of criminal slang, which they transferred outside the Archipelago upon being released (Grosberg 1960). The practice of *tukhta*, however, facilitated, as I have showed above, by the impossibility of economic calculation, penetrated Soviet economy and society earlier, as products supplied by the Labor Camps Administration were received by economic agents together with the freely invented quantities, which were carried on paper. The thick and dysfunctional bureaucracy discouraged potential buyers from filling complains about the discrepancy between the quantity on paper, and what was actually delivered, while corruption at all levels facilitated the transfer of fictitious goods through the chaotic Soviet economy (Rosefielde 1980).

Tukhta as a practice from below met an aggressive propaganda from above, obsessed with demonstrating the superiority of socialist economy and way of life. Dishonesty (of a different kind than *tukhta*) was already employed on a large scale by the leaders of the vanguard party themselves, and accepted by their “fellow travelers”. Russian and Western observers, mostly renowned writers, were invited by authorities in expensive field trips through the Union, and competed to report the glorious Soviet achievements and to ignore the suffering, blinded by a mixture of gullibility, wishful thinking, and self-interest. One of the most infamous cases was of humanist novelist

Maxim Gorky, who visited the political prison on Solovki Islands in 1926. Although the tour was carefully organized to prevent Gorki from seeing the real treatment of the inmates, he had the possibility to understand the real conditions in the camp. Nonetheless, Gorky wrote an idyllic description of an island populated by joyous former enemies of the people, now in the process of rehabilitation through labor, some of them so happy about it as to consider remaining on the island after the completion of the sentences (Robson 2004; Figs 2007).

The hollowness of the propaganda was revealed by Western writers faithful to their mission as truth-searchers. The first to notice it was probably Romanian writer Panait Istrati. A well-known leftist journalist and novelist, and a close friend of French influential intellectual Romain Rolland, Istrati accepted an invitation to visit the Soviet Union in 1927, during the anniversary of the October Revolution. Accompanied by the Soviet ambassador in Paris, he only witnessed what was on display by the Communist authorities. He returned to Soviet Union two years later, on an extended trip, this time not prearranged by the authorities. Another reality was revealed on this occasion, where entire population groups were persecuted, and the people of the Soviet Union did not have any human or political right (Istrati 1987). Few other fellow travelers followed the path opened by Istrati and expressed their disappointment in the Soviet Union, and in communism, among the most notable being Andre Gide and Arthur Koestler (see Crossman 1950).

Given this background, it should not be surprising that *tukhta* was quickly embraced by authorities and sanctioned as state policy in the Soviet Union. CPSU requesting from workers and proudly publicizing fictitious labor output figures stayed at

the core of Stakhanovism, a movement initiated in 1935, of workers throughout the Union and across all industries. A Stakhanovite was any worker who, on his or her own initiative, and employing hard labor, would over-fulfill the personal working quota assigned by the central planners. Despite the obvious absurdity of such claims, the movement flourished in the Soviet media, and was exported to the countries that became socialist after World War II, as a recipe for economic success (Siegelbaum and Sokolov 2000).

The Stakhanovite movement was rooted in the struggles of the Soviet economy in the post NEP (New Economic Policy) era. The New Economic Policy was introduced by Lenin in 1921, while Soviet Economy was suffocated by the civil war and by the abuses made during the forced requisitions of agricultural products, following a draught in 1920 which already adversely affected the crops. Attempting to revitalize a bankrupt economy, Lenin renounced the forced requisitions in agriculture, and replaced them with a tax in kind, and allowed operation of small private enterprises in manufacturing and services. The state maintained control of the banks, foreign trade, and large industries. Despite opposition from Nikolai Bukharin, the only economist in the Soviet leadership, Stalin abruptly repealed the NEP in 1928, and reverted to an economy fully controlled by the state, based on a list of economic goals to be fulfilled over a five year period (Wolfe 1957). The inefficacy of a centrally planned economy was quick to surface, and was counteracted with claims by isolated groups of workers, most of them Komsomolists (members of the youth division of CPSU), that obligations over and above their work assignments can be fulfilled merely through intensifying the labor input. The term “shock work” was employed to delineate these efforts. Shock work gained official recognition

and expanded to the entire economy, in the form of socialist competition between workers. Its presence was visible mostly at the declarative level, and consisted of “open letters, resolutions, and challenges to emulate or outdo the examples of pioneering shock workers” (Siegelbaum 1988).

Socialist competition gained momentum, and a new name, in 1935, with the widely publicized achievement of a young coal miner, Alexey Grigoryevich Stakhanov, at the time working in the Donbass mining area, in Ukraine. On the night of 31 August, Stakhanov was reported to have mined 102 tons of coal in a single shift, representing 14 times his quota. His performance brought him national and international fame, as he was featured on the cover of *Times* magazine in December of the same year. To be sure, although the record has been disputed in the second half of the 1980s, when the politics of glasnost allowed more information from the past to surface, Stakhanov’s performance is plausible, for it was attributed to a better organization of labor, not to sheer hard work, and, equally important, it was in the primary sector, thus not depending on the supply chain (Siegelbaum 1988). Nonetheless, the absurdity of over fulfilling the working quota in a planned economy has been revealed even before the coal mined by Stakhanov reached the ground surface. While Stakhanov was paid according to the output – and made 200 rubles on the record night, instead of 23 to 30 in a normal shift – the haulers had been paid by hour, and they were obviously not happy with the increase in coal to be transported in a single shift (Siegelbaum 1988).

Soon after that, Stakhanovism spread across industries in the Soviet Union. Fueled by encouragement from above, and *tukhta* from below, Stakhanovism reached occupations where its implausibility needs not be demonstrated, as it produced norm

breaker milkmaids and calf tenders (Siegelbaum and Sokolov 2000), railroad engine drivers (one of them, Pyotr Krivonos, applying the principles of Stakhanovism, was able to increase the train's speed threefold), etc. (Cioroianu 1998).

After 1945, mainly via Stakhanovism, *tukhta* was exported to the newly occupied Eastern European countries, where it survived Stalinism, and marked the socialist economies until the transition to market economies finally made it unfeasible. In the next section I will discuss *tukhta* as practiced in socialist Romania, but, before moving forward, a brief clarification is required: if my argument that *tukhta* is the logical consequence of any economy where economic calculation is impossible is correct, than falsification of output should be detected in other economies sharing the same characteristic, but different from the Soviet economy in other respects.

Indeed, different ways of over-reporting, originating either at the bottom or at the top, have been observed in economies not directly related to Soviet Union. For instance, collectivization of agriculture in Julius Nyerere's Tanzania, a regime promoting African Socialism, and maintaining closer relations with China, turned into a farce when Party officials in charge "realized that their futures depended on producing impressive figures quickly". Thus, the local officials' strategies of systematization shifted gradually from attempts to persuade peasants of the systematization's benefits, to forcing them into the new settings, and, finally, to reporting fictitious achievements, the latter activity unleashing "a process of competitive emulation" (Scott 1998).

Nazi Germany's economy, although nominally preserving private ownership of the means of production, strictly controlled the economic decisions regarding output and

price, therefore effectively suppressed the free market (Von Mises 1951). The self-proclaimed economic miracle, especially regarding heavy and armament industry directly supervised by Albert Speer, was delusional, and forced labor and massive loans from the population could not compensate for the structural flaws of the economy (Tooze 2006).

Moreover, over-reporting economic output seems to be a characteristic of all authoritarian systems. Comparing the World Bank's World Development Indicators, compiled primarily from data self-reported by each individual country, with the observed growth of nighttime lights obtained from satellite images, a discrepancy of 1 to 1.5 percentage points became apparent (Magee and Doces 2015). While the authors place the blame on the regimes' quest for legitimacy, assuming that data is inflated on the road from the country's office of statistics to World Bank, they cite news reports which suggest that inflated economic indicators might originate at a deeper level. Thus, in China "officials at all levels of government are under pressure to report good economic results to Beijing as they wait for promotions, demotions and transfers to cascade down from Beijing" (Magee and Doces 2015:235), while in Ethiopia "officials are given targets and then report back what superiors want to hear" (Magee and Doces 2015:236). Whatever the reason may be, the net result is that all dictatorships tend to overstate their economic growth.

7.2. *Tukhta* in Socialist Romania

Soon after the Soviet occupation, Romania emulated the model of the more experienced country in building socialism. This included the incarceration of large parts of the population deemed “class enemies” in an extensive system of political prisons, labor camps and deportation sites, lasting for almost two decades, until 1964. However, there are only a few instances of *tukhta* mentioned in the former inmates’ memoirs, demonstrating that it was rather the exception than the rule in the Romanian Gulag. A variety of differences between the Soviet Gulag and its Romanian counterpart explain this non-proliferation of *tukhta*. First, the purpose of the Romanian coercive system was extermination of its inmates, and it played virtually no role in the economy; second, and related, the proportion of labor camps to prisons was smaller than in the Soviet Union. And third, in Romanian prisons, political prisoners had little contact with common law criminals.

Instead of emerging from below, in Romania *tukhta* was imported from the Soviet Union in its more advanced incarnations of Stakhanovism and socialist competition. Even before RCP took control over the political life, and before the complete nationalization of the means of production, the pro-communist *Romanian Association for Strengthening the Ties with Soviet Union* (from here on ARLUS, by its acronym in Romanian language), through its periodical *New Era* [*Veac nou*] began popularizing the wonders of the Soviets. A series of articles emphasized the unbelievable (and, indeed, unreal) achievements of the Soviet workers, and their uncommon abilities employed for the

noble cause of building the socialist society. Often identified by their first and last names, the representatives of the Soviet working class, “new men and women” of the socialist type were limited in their might only by imagination. From more modest Stakhanovites who decided to help the Soviet economy by working at several machine-tools at the same time, to trailblazers (first women operating a tractor, driving a train, and commanding an oceanic vessel), to the most outstanding norm breakers, who fulfilled their quotas 46 times, all stand witness to the superiority of the socialist economy, able to produce such amazing results. The Soviet miracles did not stop in the realm of production. Thus, scientist Alexandr Bogomelets was reported to create a serum able to prolong life to a span of 130-140 years. The celebration of this particular achievement in Romanian media came to a sudden halt when Bogomelets died in July 1946, aged 65 (Cioroianu 1998). Notably, none of the “facts” presented by *ARLUS* and *New Era* were the result of the Romanian journalists’ imagination, but mere translation from the Soviet publications of the time.

The widely publicized achievements of Soviet workers were emulated by workers throughout Eastern Europe, and encouraged by states as the only way to increase industrial production exponentially (Siegelbaum and Sokolov 2000; Matošević 2011). Since, after nationalization, workers became the owners of the means of production, they were for the first time able to unleash their full working capacities. Stakhanovism was sanctioned as state policy in Romania through a series of decisions of the CC of the Romanian Workers’ Party in 1951, which defined the term “Stakhanovism”, acknowledged the importance of socialist competition for Romanian socialist economy, and established a series of moral and material rewards for Stakhanovite workers and their

families. In the following years, until 1965, the Communist Party, after securing its rule by force and terror, began to think of legitimacy. Since legitimacy could not be achieved through elections, nor through tradition or genuine appeal to the population, an aggressive *tukhta* based propaganda was employed in all mass-media channels. In short, Romanians were learning from the radio broadcasts about the wonderful lives they were living, due to the quasi-maternal care of the Party, while the reality was not at all close to what media portrayed (Tismăneanu 2007).

After Stalin's death, and the subsequent de-Stalinization initiated by Khrushchev in 1956, Stakhanovism slowly faded away. *Tukhta*, nonetheless, was there to stay, perhaps the only reliable mechanism in socialist economies, always performing its task to reconcile central planning with the real possibilities. Ceaușescu's decisions in the 1980s to promote Party cadres at county or local level on the bases of the self-reported accomplishments in production (Nelson 1988), and, in 1987, to weigh workers' salaries according to the percentage of quota fulfilment added to the incentives for using *tukhta* (Gabanyi 2000).

Not surprisingly, official figures remained unreasonably high throughout the entire communist rule, untroubled by the internal changes at the top of the party, nor by changes in political and economic direction, nor by the switch of international orientation marked by the Declaration of April 1964. The only notable change was that many Western observers, lured by the apparent split with the USSR initiated by Dej and continued by Ceaușescu, were less interested to question the said figures. Just like it was the case with Western writers invited by Stalin to visit Soviet Union, they had an important contribution in perpetuating *tukhta*, which cannot be excused invoking mere

gullibility. Scholars endorsed Ceaușescu's claims in the early 1980s that Romania was a developing socialist state, characterized earlier as on an "inexorable march toward modernity". A British guidebook published in 1965 described Romania as "making rapid strides towards the luxurious living of the twentieth century" and compared the economic development with post-war Germany and Italy (all cited in Nelson 1995:198-199).

The figures presented by Romanian officials corresponded to the five year plans, first introduced for the 1951-1955 period, and continued until 1989. The overall figures, as well as the figures for each economic unit, constituted the main argument to demonstrate the superiority of the socialist economy to its capitalist counterpart (Cioroianu 2007), and, after 1965, also to distinguish the "Romanian way" as leading the other socialist economies. Thus, for the period between 1951 and 1975, Romania's economic growth rate averaged 13% per year, one of the highest rates in the world, only surpassed by Japan, while ranking second, after the United States, in per capita steel production (Chirot 1994). Predictions however ambitious, were anticipated by an even more ambitious reality of the present times. Thus, by 2000, Romanian agriculture was envisioned to yield 40 to 45 tons per hectare of combined products. However, already in 1989, the production was of 60 tones, setting a high world record with respect to per hectare production (Boia 1998).

To make it clear, everybody, at all levels, was aware of *tukhta*, yet operated with inflated figures as if they were real. Some workers made use of it in pursuance of material rewards, while the majority were just forced to report the realization of the plan, under conditions which made it impossible, due to unrealistic standards set by their immoral colleagues, lack of raw materials, and a crisis of energy power necessary to

operate the machineries manifested increasingly in the 1980s. Unit managers, as well as local and county party leaders had their own incentives to report imaginary data. Moreover, data was supported through hard evidence, in a complicated ritual of selling and buying the bear's skin. Ceaușescu's numerous working visits in factories and agricultural cooperatives were met with laborious preparations by the local officials, who borrowed the best-looking products from other similar units, even from other counties, and displayed them in front of the General Secretary as if they were locally produced. The exhibits were then moved to the next stop on Ceaușescu's itinerary (Marin 2014).

Going up the hierarchy, the heads of ministries, willing to preserve their positions by demonstrating their efficiency, were active participants in the transmission and production of *tukhta*. The one instance when a high party official refused to play the comedy had tragic consequences for the whistle-blower. Virgil Trofin, a member of RCP since 1945, had been one of the most important figures of the generation of communists who joined the Party after the war. One of the few Ceaușescu's protégées, Trofin also developed an impressive clientelar network, including, among others, Cornel Pacoste, Ștefan Andrei, and Ion Iliescu (Tismăneanu 1998). During the joint plenum of CC of RCP and the Supreme Council for Economic and Social Development, Trofin, then one of the highest ranked dignitaries, and considered by many as a potential successor to Ceaușescu, chose to present the real situation in the mining and petroleum industries, and to refuse the routine scenario of self-criticism followed by commitments to overcome the shortcomings (Gabanyi 2000). During the same plenum, Trofin was demoted from the position of Minister of Mining, Petroleum, and Geology, and, in the same month,

excluded from CC of RCP, marking an abrupt end of his political career. He died three years later, allegedly committing suicide (Tismăneanu 2003).

Ceaușescu, in his turn, was aware of the gross falsifications in the reported economic indicators. A Romanian Television crew visiting his summer residence in Neptun after the Revolution, discovered documents indicating that he was also aware of the disastrous state of the economy. They contained a two column harvest figure, one allegedly true (although it is debatable whether anybody could tell or was interested in counting the real output of any economic unit), and another one inflated, which he had presented at the Politburo meeting in the autumn of 1989 (Deletant 1995). Besides employing *tukhta* as a propagandistic means to legitimize his leadership through the outstanding economic achievements, Ceaușescu invented a second, more perverse, use. Especially during the austerity imposed to the country in the 1980, Ceaușescu still preserved some traces of legitimacy in the eyes of the Romanians, as a good leader misinformed by his subalterns of the real situation in the country, a myth he occasionally reinforced in order to settle disputes with rebellious top party activists. For instance, at the RCP's National Conference, in December 1987, he openly accused cadre members of "tolerance degenerating into complicity", alluding that, in order to secure their incomes and posts, activists and managers in both industry and agriculture report false plan fulfillment and circumvent legal provisions (Gabanyi 2000:267).

7.3. Beyond Economy

Although *tukhta* developed initially as an economic mechanism, meant to adjust reality to planning, given the impossibility of economic calculation, its use extended beyond the economy, infecting all social relations. As soon as inflating labor outputs became customary, it was not a matter of high creativity to adapt the tool to different needs, primarily to demonstrate popular support for the ruling party or, in other cases, clientelar fidelity, but not only. This section attempts to offer a brief review of the uses of *tukhta* outside the economy.

Following the established model of the Soviet Union, dictators use *tukhta* to enhance their international relations. It is not merely propagandistic misinformation, but a systematic web of lies, so deeply entrenched in their system of beliefs to make the truth indistinguishable. Consider, for illustration, the following excerpt from a discussion between Romanian Prime Minister Dr. Petru Groza and the American political representative Burton Berry. The latter complained about the disruption of the electoral campaign preceding the 1946 elections by gangs of hooligans acting on behalf of the Communists, which, in his opinion, was a break of the Yalta treaty. Groza explained:

“[...] when the Anglo-Americans agreed to Moscow decision they were thinking in terms of free elections such as were held in England or America, whereas the Russians were thinking in terms of free elections such as were held in Russia. In view of the presence of Russian army in Romania, the coming elections would likely be held according to the Russian interpretation of free and unfettered” (Deletant 1999,a:78).

A few decades later, democratic ballots in Ceaușescu's Romania turned in successful demonstrations of the population's free political participation. Whether representing election for the Great National Assembly, where voters were given the opportunity to choose between two candidates representing the RCP, or a referendum (in 1985) regarding policies proposed by Ceaușescu, the voting centers were always reporting massive participation, generally over 99%, achieved in some cases as early as 10:00 AM. Votes counting revealed 100% approval of Ceaușescu's proposed policies, and no cancelled bulletins in the elections. Letters to Radio Free Europe, on the other hand, disclosed that a large number of citizens took advantage of the ballot's secrecy to write on the bulletins messages revealing their unfavorable opinions of RCP and its leaders. The respective bulletins were counted as valid, and assigned to either of the two candidates (Marin 2014).

A second adaptation of *tukhta* outside of the realm of economy has its best illustration in the reported activity of the French Communist Party, notorious anyway for its blunt disregard of inconvenient evidence by refusing to admit the authenticity of Khrushchev's secret speech until the era of glasnost and perestroika made further denial ridiculous (Tismăneanu 2003). According to communist media, Stalin's death, on March 1953, spurred a wave of grief in the mining region of Longwy-Villerupt, a stronghold of the French Communist Party. Under its guidance, workers in the region held together a moment of recollection in the memory of the Great Leader: everybody stopped working, and railway engines' alarms echoed the workers' mourning. Later testimonials contrast with the initial statements' solemnity. Almost forty years later, questioned about this outstanding demonstration of sympathy with the Soviet Union, one of the former

members of the Communist Party admits that the mourning was not spontaneous, but rather orchestrated by the party in order to legitimate the workers' representatives and challenge the existing hierarchy in factories. Most of the workers remained indifferent to these demonstrations. Even more, one of the workers who was in the Valley during the events, recalled: "In our workshop, we only kept moments of silence twice: once in the memory of Fausto Coppi, and another time for Humphrey Bogart" (Montebello 1993:117).

In fact, *tukhta*'s pervasiveness prompted intellectuals from socialist societies to raise doubts about the ontic foundations of socialism. Serbian poet Dragoljub Ignjatovic included, in a long enumeration of the problems confronting Yugoslav society "lying and falsification as forms of communication" (cited in Zukin 1983:134). Soviet exilée Alexandr Zinoviev uses paradoxes and antiphrases to describe the socialist society as the opposite of what it pretends to be, however consistent and coherent in its fabric of mystifications, which constitutes its strength, rather than weakness. For instance, socialism succeeded in creating the much blared "new man", but its actual incarnation does not resemble the original ideal. Instead, the socialist human, ironically termed *homo sovieticus* is indeed a new species, distinguished through its complete adaptation to living a lie (Zinoviev 1985).

More trenchant, Romanian professor of comparative literature and leading anti-communist dissident Doina Cornea notes, throughout her indictments of socialism:

"[...] pervasive lie is [...] recurrent in communist societies. Speaking about truth becomes a sin and the need for truth, naturally imbedded in every human being, starts to slowly fade away, and eventually disappears" (Cornea and Liiceanu 2006:54). Furthermore, "Romanian people must confront a counterfeit philosophy

and a counterfeit artistic creation, which have nothing in common with its spirituality; to these we may add a counterfeit economy and a counterfeit hierarchic promotion of the people in charge with its destiny” (Cornea and Liiceanu 2006:180).

A more parsimonious, yet more far-reaching assessment of socialism belongs to Polish former-Marxist philosopher Leszek Kołakowski: “the lie is the immortal soul of communism” (cited in Tismăneanu 2012:190).

Not by accident, the “single most important theorization of the dissident movements in East-Central Europe prior to 1989” (Falk 2003:215), Václav Havel’s essay *The Power of the Powerless* builds upon the realization that even carrying everyday activities in a socialist state implies the tacit acceptance to living the lie. His diagnostic of socialism, harsh, yet – as it turned out – lucid, is consistent with other dissidents’ cited above:

“[L]ife in the system is so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies: government by bureaucracy is called popular government; the working class is enslaved in the name of the working class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available; the use of power to manipulate is called the public control of power, and the arbitrary abuse of power is called observing the legal code; the repression of culture is called its development; the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed; the lack of free expression becomes the highest form of freedom; farcical elections become the highest form of democracy; banning independent thought becomes the most scientific of world views; military occupation becomes fraternal assistance. Because the regime is captive to its own lies, it must falsify everything. It falsifies the past. It falsifies the present, and it falsifies the future. It falsifies statistics. It pretends not to possess an omnipotent and unprincipled police apparatus. It pretends to respect human rights. It pretends to persecute no one. It pretends to fear nothing. It pretends to pretend nothing” (Havel 1985:31-32).

However, the lies are so transparent that nobody believes them, nor is anybody required to do so. Instead, the regimes’ resilience and strength rest on their ability to force individuals to behave in accordance to the lie, thus participating in its perpetuation.

In an interesting twist of phrase, Havel suggests that individuals can reject the generalized falsification of everything simply by behaving “as if” truth was the norm. Thus, truth can only be restored through the falsification of the everyday mystification imposed by the regimes. Living “as if” has, for Havel, the meaning of living in truth. Furthermore, living in truth does not require outstanding courage, by contrary, it can be accomplished by ordinary individuals in everyday activities. Havel illustrates this metaphorically by the action of the greengrocer who decides to stop displaying the “Workers of the World, Unite!” sign in the grocery store window, upon the realization that he is disconnected from the message it is conveying. Disrupting the lie, even at the most modest level, the individual challenges the very foundations of the system. Thus

“The greengrocer has not committed a simple, individual offense, isolated in its own uniqueness, but something incomparably more serious. By breaking the rules of the game, he has disrupted the game as such. He has exposed it as a mere game. He has shattered the world of appearances, the fundamental pillar of the system. He has upset the power structure by tearing apart what holds it together. He has demonstrated that living a lie is living a lie. He has broken through the exalted facade of the system and exposed the real, base foundations of power. He has said that the emperor is naked. And because the emperor is in fact naked, something extremely dangerous has happened: by his action, the greengrocer has addressed the world. He has enabled everyone to peer behind the curtain. He has shown everyone that it is possible to live within the truth. Living within the lie can constitute the system only if it is universal” (Havel 1985:39-40).

7.4. Stepping Stones toward Personality Cults

Precisely this metastatic-like expansion of *tukhta* from the narrow realm of economic measurement to encompass all spheres of social activity lays the foundation for the cults of personality. *Tukhta* contributes to the cults in three distinct ways: clients

over-reporting fidelity to their patrons, clients over-reporting admiration of their patrons, often by exaggerating the latter's real or alleged qualities, and, in the later stages of the cult, authorities issuing inflated reports of admiration for the leader. This later case points that the cults themselves consisted largely of *tukhta*, but this should not come as a surprise, since the majority of communication was *tukhta* in socialism.

7.4.1. First Stepping Stone: Adhesion

The first category is most common to the clients' competition for the graces of the patron preceding, and sometimes leading to, the emergence of the personality cult. In this phase, open praise of the leader would be out-of-place, and possibly ridiculed. It is a phase of testing the limits of servility, and assessing its benefits. It is, however, not necessarily akin to sycophancy; in some instances, as illustrated by the following anecdote recalled by Andrei Lupu, son of nomenklatura member Petre Lupu, it is merely a survival strategy, employed with the goal of escaping the attention of an unwanted boss.

In 1978, in the aftermath of the 1977 earthquake, Andrei Lupu got a spectacular promotion. His new job of main building engineer placed him in charge of all big projects in downtown Bucharest and his salary doubled. As the promotion was unusual for his age and experience, Lupu asked himself what were the real reasons behind it and concluded that it was his father's fame that put him in this position. He was the perfect front man: if things went wrong, nobody could fire him because he was the son of an important person. He decided to play the game and soon he was stunned by the workers' reaction:

„Everybody was quietly listening to me, nodding approval, and after the meetings they were telling me “We haven’t had such a building engineer in many years!” I was running the meeting, I was talking, and they were taking notes... I was like Ceaușescu! I went home and told my wife: “Do you know how smart I am? Everybody puts in writing what I am saying!” I was blinded by power! But she answered to me: “You are a fool, they are mocking you!” At the next meeting I asked them to show me their papers – they were just pretending to take notes, they were drawing piggies, planes, boats....” (Betea 2010:172-173).

Lupu’s subordinates were merely playing a farce probably observed at Ceaușescu’s working visits, always concluded by the precious indications given by the General Secretary and attentively recorded by the attendants, who would later praise them as invaluable in guiding their activity. While there is no evidence that Ceaușescu’s visits followed the scenario described by Lupu, the president’s competence in everything is at best questionable. Yet the only known instance when his indications were openly rejected was so out-of-the-ordinary that it left Ceaușescu reactionless. Two weeks after the earthquake in Bucharest, in March 1977, a survivor was extracted from underneath the ruins, and taken to the Emergency Hospital. Ceaușescu showed up soon after, and began instructing the doctors on how to nurture the patient, but was quickly interrupted by Dr. Zorel Filipescu, who assured him that, as medics, they knew what they had to do. Reportedly, Ceaușescu left the room immediately, and there was no follow up neither of the incident, nor of the patient’s progress (Kennel 1995).

Beyond the anecdotes, this type of cult related *tukhta* was prevalent between 1971 and 1973 in Romanian media. The following quotes are extracted from the rubric *Anthology of Shame*, maintained by Romanian émigré and critic of the socialist regime Virgil Ierunca in various publications in diaspora, and broadcasted on Radio Free Europe, between 1957 and 1961, and, after a 10 year hiatus, continuously between 1971 and 1989 (Merișanu and Taloș 2009). Ierunca’s selection constitutes an invaluable source for

following the evolution of the sycophancy insofar it has been captured at the time of their production, thus escaping the peril of retrospective interpretation. It needs to be handled with the necessary caution, keeping in mind that it represents Ierunca's subjective selection, however, this potential source of bias is attenuated by my interest in the diachronic evolution of the thematic content, rather than in indicting certain individuals. Although I will name some of the personalities who achieved the unwanted honor of being listed in the anthology – since anybody can look them up anyway, following the citation – I must insist that the purpose of this dissertation is not to single out contributors to the cult – a complete list would be unattainable, anyway – nor to subject them to value judgments. Using the anthology as a data source, I am modestly responding to Virgil Ierunca's own wishes, expressed in 1985, that

“The texts of these well-trained political whores constitute an anthology of shame in Romanian literature and they will greatly avail not only the next generation of literary historians, but also the sociologists who will decipher the processes that lead to the formation of a totalitarian society, where the functional role of lying is primordial.” (Merișanu and Taloș 2009:7).

The content analysis of the entries in *The Anthology of Shame* from 1971 and 1972 reveals little interest for Ceaușescu's person, while the emphasis is on the sycophants' attachment to the – most often unnamed – values contained in his speeches, and to their willingness to follow his guidance in their work. The majority of the quotes from this period mark an unabashed capitulation in front of the new direction imposed by Ceaușescu to Romanian culture, through a series of meetings with the representatives of artists and writers in February 1971 (Rusan and Boca 2008), and sanctioned through the *July Theses*, a speech delivered in front of the Executive Committee of RCP on 6 July the same year. The speech marked a mini Cultural Revolution, characterized by the

reintroduction of strict Party control over culture, the return to socialism realism, and a neo-Stalinist offensive against cultural autonomy manifested through attacks against non-compliant intellectuals (Deletant 1995; Tismăneanu 2003; Cioroianu 2007).

Tukhta in this period is limited to over-reporting the enthusiasm for the content of the *Theses*, the internalization of their guidance, and the absolute agreement with the new directives. At its center is not the leader but the sycophant, eager to show his or her fidelity and submissiveness. Thus, in some cases, Ceaușescu's name is not even mentioned, and instead the author thanks to a more abstract potential patron, the Party, to whom the wisdom of the new policy is attributed:

“It is a known fact that our party stimulates the artists' absolute liberty of creation, their manifestation in the most varied styles, but it is for the convenience of the unstoppable progress of all art genres that we must be ideologically firm and to unfailingly reject any example popped-up from nowhere and any concession made to foreign ideas by our Marxist mindset. It was emphasized during this meeting that the Party wants the artists to create popular works in true sense of the word, good screenplays, top level plays, political prose and poetry, and not an apolitical literature that is the equivalent of “what everybody gives it a thought”.” (Emil Manu, poet and literary critic, former political prisoner, August 1971) (Merișanu and Taloș 2009:249-50).

In other, more typical, cases, Ceaușescu is mentioned, however without being at the center of the message. The focus is still on the intellectual's enthusiasm for the *Theses* themselves:

“(During) these days of July, these days so dense for our conscience, the elaborate account presented by the general secretary of the party generated a creative effervescence that embraced our entire society, including the literature's ministrants who had the opportunity to profoundly meditate to the duties and responsibilities of present-day art [...]

Engraving upon us the amenable pathos of action, truth, and complexity, the general secretary of the Party commissioned us to create great comprehensive works,

resonant with originality and the spirit of our times.” (Alecú Ivan Ghilia, writer and painter, July 1972) (Meriřanu and Taloř 2009:196).

Even the less plausible praise to the leader (indeed, illogical), falls short of attributing Ceauřescu superhuman qualities, but desperately attempts to demonstrate the applicability of his speech to the specific work of a literary historian, using a concrete illustration:

“It seems to me that one of the most brilliant particularities of Odobescu’s¹ writing is polyvalence. I was reflecting upon the example of this great and warm-hearted scholar, after I had been reading again comrade Nicolae Ceauřescu’s speech at the enlarged plenary of the Bucharest’s Municipal Party Committee” (Henry Zalis, literary critic, October 1971) (Meriřanu and Taloř 2009:405).

This initial way of *tukhta* to serve the personality cult is not yet characterized by the obscene display of epithets and qualifiers glorifying the leader, but anticipates it. It demonstrates the willingness to renounce dignity and participate in the farce. The immediate result was a split of the intellectuals in two conflicting camps, most evident in the Writers Union, where the compliant faction was opposed to writers more reluctant to compromise, who took advantage of the previous opening to publish original works (Deletant 1995). The apparent success of the first faction, benefiting of more resources, and less attention from the censors, and the hardship faced by their noncompliant rivals, revealed new incentives for *tukhta*, who could move to the next level. Also telling was the fluidity of the two factions: immediately after the publication of the *Theses*, young writers, such as Augustin Buzura, Adrian Păunescu, Dumitru Radu Popescu and Marin Sorescu were joined by veteran collaborators of the regime Eugen Jebeleanu and Zaharia

¹ Alexandru Odobescu (1834 – 1895), Romanian author, archeologist and politician, had no connection with the 19th century Romanian socialist movement

Stancu in criticizing the new orientation, and emphasizing the need for autonomy in creative literature. Soon, some of the rebels, notably Adrian Păunescu and Marin Sorescu, jumped the boat of the obedient camp, manifesting their satisfaction with the Party's guidance (read interference) of creative writers (Deletant 2008).

A similar situation happened in the realm of fine arts in Stalin's Soviet Union. The belligerent factions were the nonconformist avant-garde artists, continuing the tradition of notorious artists such as Wassily Kandisky and Kazimir Malevich, versus the realists, continuators of a no less notorious artistic lineage opened by Ilya Repin, Ivan Shishkin, and *The Wanderers*. The split was marked by the existence of two rival artists association, the Society of Easel Painters promoting the interests of the modernists, and the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, representing the realists. The latter, specialized in painting battle scenes of the Civil War and portraits of Bolshevik military leaders, entered the graces of the Kremlin leaders, and their art was officially recognized as accepted socialist art, sanctioned through the decree *On the Reconstruction of Literary-Artistic Organizations*, in 1932, one year before Stalin's cult "took off in earnest" (Plamper 2012).

As the personality cults advance, this first type of cult related *tukhta* fades away from the spotlight, but continues to be employed by not so zealous individuals, who are nonetheless forced to participate in the comedy, and chose a middle ground: lacking the courage to openly protest, they still have the dignity to stay away from the center stage.

7.4.2. Second Stepping Stone: Beatification

Capitalizing on Ceaușescu's hobby for hunting, party secretaries in the counties where game was available used to offer the first secretary staged hunts, where the leader invariably knocked the most valued trophy by all international standards. Whenever Ceaușescu missed the target, the gamekeepers swiftly replaced it with another animal, shot previously in preparation to the presidential game. Members of his entourage, consisting of high Party officials, reassured Ceaușescu that he was the one who shot the game – even when this was not true – and that he broke all gaming records (Marin 2008).

The above anecdote is an extreme variation of the second way *tukhta* contributes to the personality cult, but nonetheless it captures its main characteristics. The perceived success of the first stepping stone prompts moral entrepreneurs to advance new ways of manifesting clientelar fidelity to the patron. The message still originates at the level of the individual client, and is intended to demonstrate his or her admiration to the leader. However, the content of the message is enhanced to incorporate the client's admiration, if not prostration, in front of the outstanding qualities of the patron. As soon as the floodgates are opened for this type of *tukhta*, Stakhanovite admirers engage in a mounting competition for revealing the most amazing, unique, and original flattery, restrained only by the limits of their own creativity. While the previous phase contributed to the sedimentation of the sycophants as a group, this phase is characterized by the elimination contest among the sycophants. The leader becomes a larger-than-life figure as

a result of the cumulative effect of individuals' efforts to occupy the front stage of sycophancy.

In at least one case, this phase was given an institutional frame: in August 1951, the CC of the Hungarian Working People's Party decided to celebrate Mátyás Rákosi's 60th anniversary, in March the following year, through a series of events, including the publication of the general secretary's biography, a task assigned to writer László Réti. The resulting production was "saturated with enormous falsifications and exaggerations of the leader's role in influencing the course of events [...] far beyond the acceptable limits, and the possibility of provoking ridicule of the leader became an imminent threat" (Apor 2004:71). Some episodes from Réti's book may seem indeed hilarious for a reader unaccustomed to the realities portrayed by socialist realism. The young Rákosi was so determined to fight capitalist oppression, that he ate an entire package of food at British customs because the officials would not let him bring it through, and so charismatic that, although his attire was marked by deep poverty, with the toes poking out of his shoes, he was the first to teach the lyrics of the *Internationale* to Hungarian demonstrators in March 1912. Eventually Réti's biography was not published, in favor of a shorter one by Béla Illés, a writer apparently with connections at the highest level of the Hungarian communist elite (Apor 2004). Nonetheless, Balázs Apor makes it clear in his analysis of Rákosi-cult building that Réti's biography was not the exception, but the rule regarding the encomiastic literature of the time:

"No matter how tempting it might be, Réti's abandoned biography can hardly be used as a representative example of what constituted an excess in the construction of Rákosi's cult. Apart from the numerous ridiculous statements, quoted above, the style, the structure, and even the editing process of Réti's biography was very similar to Stalin's official biography, and with some extra effort it could have

easily been adjusted to the standard of the Soviet leader's life story. The fact that the biography was rejected in the end therefore does not clearly indicate the limits of the leader cult" (Apor 2004:71)

At other times, the emergence of this second phase in cult formation is spontaneous, as the initiative belongs to a courageous moral innovator, hoping to be noticed by the powerful patron, and willing to risk being ridiculed. A sound qualitative change in Stalin's cult was heralded by the publication of *On the History of Bolshevik Organizations in Transcaucasia*, a work commissioned and signed by Lavrentiy Beria, at the time first secretary of the Transcaucasian Central Committee of CPSU. The book grossly distorted the facts in order to assign a more prominent role to Stalin, in the same time discrediting his former revolutionary colleagues. Its publication had two relatively short term effects: three years later Beria was promoted to Moscow, and other historians who previously published studies on the same topic were castigated for "gross distortions in the history of Bolshevism in Baku and Tbilisi". Among them, Avel Enukidze was immediately expelled from the Party ranks, and arrested, tried, and shot, two years later (Knight 1991:756).

This phase marks the establishment of the cult, and the related *tukhta*, constitute the bulk of cultic communication. I call it *Beatification* because during this phase the leader's image is upgraded from leader to hero and to god, corresponding with the sycophants' efforts to outshine each-other by producing new qualities of the leader, or at least new ways of exaggerating those already established. Romanian historian Manuela Marin (2008) identifies the four major themes which constituted the organizing structure of Nicolae Ceaușescu's cult. Referring to real or alleged events from the past, and/or

accomplishments of the present, Ceaușescu's eulogists constructed his figure as a young revolutionary, with an outstanding contribution to RCP's activity before 1945, the architect of modern Romania, champion of peace in the world, and guarantor of national unity and independence. Her longitudinal analysis of each of the themes between 1965 and 1989 reveals that, after 1973, and intensified after 1977, the content of the four themes constantly changed, continuously adding new layers of awesomeness to the dictator's image. Often, new accounts of historical events involving Ceaușescu contradict previous accounts of the same event, even by the same author. I extract one case from Marin's book, illustrative for the processes which characterize this phase of the cult.

According to RCPs official historiography, a crucial point in the antifascist resistance was represented by the parade on 1 May 1939 in Bucharest and other cities in Romania, coordinated jointly by RCP and Romanian Social Democratic Party. Communists infiltrated participants to a popular rally organized by the authorities in praise of Carol II, then king of Romania. The apex of the rally was the workers' march through Palace Square, in Bucharest, hailed by Carol from the grand stand, when the workers chanted antifascist and patriotic slogans provided by the RCP, much to the king's stupefaction. Nicolae Ceaușescu and Elena Petrescu (his future wife) were among the most active RCP agitators (Marin 2008). By other accounts, including the memoir of former RCP member Pavel Câmpeanu, nothing unusual happened during the parade, and Carol's plans were never overturned. Moreover, there is no evidence, nor any recollection, of Ceaușescu's involvement with RCP at that time (Câmpeanu 2003). The event was first mentioned in mass-media for its 35th anniversary on May 1974, when *Scântea* [*The Flame*], the main RCP's outlet, published a series of commemorative

articles, emphasizing the success (from the communists' point of view) of the rally, and Ceaușescu's contribution as a member of the organizing committee. Ceaușescu's contribution is mentioned, but not emphatically – for instance, out of ten presentations at a symposium dedicated to the event, only two make any reference to Ceaușescu's contribution as organizer. However, starting with 1979, 1 May 1939 will be commemorated every year in mass-media, each article including at least one paragraph underlining Ceaușescu's participation. At the 45th anniversary, in 1984, the commemorations were more grandiose and more diverse, centered on Ceaușescu's participation, but also including extensive references to other themes, mainly Ceaușescu's role in Romania's development since 1965. Finally, 5 years later, in 1989, the commemorations expanded to three weeks (26 April to 15 May), and took place simultaneously in Romania and in various cities abroad (Beijing, Berlin, Ulan-Bator, Hanoi, Madrid, and Moscow). This time, both the general significance of 1 May, and the events of 1939, were of secondary importance, as the spotlights were set on the general secretary and his wife (Marin 2008). Between the round anniversaries celebrated in 1984 and 1989 Ceaușescu's participation at the 1939 rally has been established irrefutably. Thus, on 1 May 1985, *Scanteia* published an archival photograph of the popular rally. One year later, *Romania literara* [Literary Romania], the outlet of the Writers' Union, re-published the same photo, this time with the faces of Nicolae Ceaușescu, Elena Ceaușescu, and another communist, Constantin David, pasted in the crowd. The forgery can be easily detected: the pasted faces are larger than those of other people next to them, and face the camera, while everybody else is looking to the left (Marin 2014). In the media articles of the following years, 1988 and 1989, Ceaușescu's alleged contribution to

the events was turned into his leading role in organizing, and was described with more details (Marin 2008).

The Anthology of Shame offers a good illustration of how encomiastic literature was upgraded from Adhesion to Beatification: one poet was induced in the anthology with two slight variations of the same stance, published in 1971 and 1978, respectively. The practice of well-known sycophants to submit old creations, slightly modified, when the contribution to reverential volumes or special issues was solicited was not exceptional, to be sure (Gabanyi 2000). In this case, however, the apparently minor retouching of the stance captures the evolution of the cult. The 1971 entry is centered on the poet's exaggerated enthusiasm for the values of communism, and appreciation for its achievements:

If I wouldn't be
And I should be
And if moira or fatum or fate
(or whatever destiny may be called)
would ask me by chance
When,
Where
And, especially,
what I like to be?
I would answer with Miorița's² tongue:
Now
and
Here
in this endless spring,
in this country,
Romania
A communist man. (Ion Dodu Balan, literary historian and critic, member of CC
of RCP, February 1971) (Merișanu and Taloș 2009:67-68)

² Allusion to a well-known Romanian folk song, considered archetypal for the Romanian soul. Miorita was a talking sheep

Seven years later, with slight alterations – some lines reversed, and a reference to what could be considered mysticism removed – the same poem is published again, in the issue of 26 January (Ceașescu’s 60th birthday) of *Tribuna* [*The Forum*] magazine. The two lines added at the end of the stance, however, move the gravity center of the poem from the originator of the message to the targeted receptor:

Yes, if I would be born again
and if someone
would ask me:
“When,
where
and, especially,
what I like to be?”
I would answer with Miorița’s tongue,
Now,
and
Here,
A Communist Man,
in this endless spring,
in this country,
Romania,
Contemporary with the Man who honors
Humanness. (January 1978)(Merișanu and Taloș 2009:68-69).

Beatification constitutes the bulk of the cultic communications, and the most noticeable characteristic of the cult. When, in August 1968, Ceașescu defied the Soviets and openly criticized the Warsaw Pact military intervention in Czechoslovakia, he was sincerely admired by the majority of the population. Yet the admiration was expressed in punctual terms, generally attaching only two epithets to Ceașescu: patriot, for his perceived restoring of national dignity, after twenty years of Soviet domination, and courageous, for what was considered a daring act of standing up against a more powerful enemy. After 1973, however, Ceașescu’s image was increasingly constructed with an abundance of invocations and exclamations, rhetorical appeals, hyperboles, and

antithesis. Anything could pass, as long as it casted a positive light on the first secretary's image, and no sense of ridicule could stop the admirers to manifest their adulation (Gabanyi 2000). Ceaușescu was hailed by Constantin Pârvulescu, one of the founders of RCP, as “the man who has instilled a new spirit into every field of activity”, thus summing up the “considerable efforts [...] made to apotheosize Ceaușescu by describing him as a major Romanian thinker who has made original contributions in various fields as a Marxist ideologist, an economist, a scholar, educator, theorizer in international politics, as a strategist, etc.” (Gabanyi 2000:26). The Romanian leader was constantly compared with those national personalities from the past distinguished through their martial qualities (military leaders who defeated the Ottoman armies, leaders of popular rebellions, revolutionaries of the 1848 era, and so on), only to reach the conclusion that Ceaușescu was bigger, braver, and more relevant than any past warrior (Marin 2008). At the same time, he was the outstanding hero of peace in the world, who can “make cannons and atomic bunkers melt” (as noted by German-language newspaper *Neuer Weg* [*New Way*] in 1983, cited in Gabanyi 2000:66).

The term *Beatification* I chose to name this type of cultic related *tukhta* is fully justified, since the admirers of the leader do not stop short of portraying him as a saint, nor of attributing him characteristics of mythological heroes or Biblical figures. *Romania Literara* [*Literary Romania*] of 1984 designated him as capable of “vanquishing the storm”, of “confronting the wrath [of nature], and regulating the [rising and setting] of the sun” (cited in Gabanyi 2000:73); the building of the Danube – Black Sea Canal, inaugurated in 1984, “was compared in Biblical terms to the creation of the universe”, in

Contemporanul [*The Contemporary*] magazine, “and Ceaușescu to Prometheus” in *Flacara* [*The Flame*] (Gabanyi 2000:401).

Alluding to the Christian doctrine of hypostasis, and enlarging it to fit Ceaușescu’s larger-than-life dimensions, Leonte Răutu, in 1978, described the Romanian leader’s triple nature, symbolically unifying in his person the pillars of the socialist theology:

“Ceaușescu was born a PEASANT... He became a WORKER... He learned, learned tirelessly, he is an INTELLECTUAL... This triple nature: peasant, worker, intellectual; this is what seems to us to be the “key” that “deciphers” Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu’s great personality.” (Cited in Gabanyi 2000:30)

7.4.3. Third Stepping Stone: Consensus

In a non-free economy, economic *tukhta* is, sooner or later, appropriated by the authorities, and conscientiously used as a legitimizing tool, by publicizing the inflated output reports as proofs of the system’s economic successes. A similar process can be observed with admiration related *tukhta*. The ruling elite, lacking an accountable measure of popular support, of the type offered by free elections in democracy, overtakes *tukhta* promoted from below by interested individuals. Initially, as I pointed so far, *tukhta* was not intended to show everybody’s support for the leader, but to single out the originators of the praise, who are hoping for personal rewards for their demonstrations of clientelar fidelity. Nonetheless, if successful, it prompts other clients to adopt praise as a means for advancement, and eventually it can aggregate to an impressive amount of sycophancy.

The rulers may seize its legitimizing potential which, however, can be accomplished only with the allegation that everybody has the same exaggerated feelings toward the leader. Consequently, a consensus of inflated admiration toward the leader is fabricated.

Two clarifications are necessary. First, it should not be inferred that nobody feels sympathy toward the leader. In fact, Ceaușescu had a moment of strong genuine support of the population, in August 1968, when he condemned openly the Warsaw pact military intervention in Czechoslovakia. Even later, when the economy was in crisis and civil liberties suspended, there were individuals whose admiration for Ceaușescu was unaltered. The archives of the CC of RCP contain a number of congratulatory letters addressed to Ceaușescu by average Romanians. While the language and the motifs used by the official propaganda can easily be detected, there is no reason for doubting the sincerity of the letters. They have been addressed to Ceaușescu personally, never intended to be published, probably never read by the addressee, and there is no request implicit in the message (Marin 2014). Similarly, studies on Stalinist propaganda revealed that as an educational tool, leader's cult met with mixed results: some kids internalized it, others didn't care, while others were cynical about it, and turned it into parodies and jokes (Davies 1997; Kelly 2004).

Second, nondemocratic regimes are constantly facing a legitimacy problem; lacking free elections, which in democracies sanction legitimacy for the leaders in the short term, dictators have the power to rule, but not the authority, which needs to be constantly created and recreated (Nelson 1984). One strategy toward this goal is to create a façade of wide popular support for the regime, for instance through staging grandiose parades, bringing together thousands of happy workers, chanting at unison their

satisfaction with the leadership, which occupied the center of the parades (Rolf 2004). The parades are means of legitimizing nondemocratic regimes, whether centered or not around a personality cult, and in some cases, including Romania, preceded the cult. To be sure, the first time Ceaușescu's name was chanted during a parade, it was on 23 August 1968, marking the 24th anniversary of the military insurrection of 1944, when Romania deflected the Axis and, shortly after, joined to the war efforts of the Allied forces. The parade of 1968 came only two days after Ceaușescu's charismatic moment occasioned by his stance against the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The genuine popular sympathy surfaced in the spontaneous chants of Ceaușescu's name (Marin 2008). In the following years, especially after 1978, the mass parades supposedly honoring historical events having RCP at the center (23 August), or international workers' celebrations, were gradually confiscated for promoting the image of the general secretary, and of his wife. Increasingly, the chants and the imagery (portraits, ornaments, choreography, etc.) switched the content, displacing the original event from center stage, and replacing it with adulatory messages toward the leader (Marin 2008). It is of interest to note that the parades followed an elaborate organizational schedule, approved by the CC, which regulated everything related to the parade, including the order and the content of the slogans chanted (Betea 2010). According to Cornel Burtica, a CC secretary until 1977, Elena Ceaușescu assumed complete control over the popular rallies since mid-1970s (Chelaru and Burtică 2001).

The two clarifications are necessary for understanding the mechanisms of *tukhta* formation. First, it does not necessarily imply making up something out of nothing, but exaggerating something that is there, to the point that it accrues a different meaning. Of

equal importance, *tukhta*, in its advanced phases, is polished by multiple forces. The first two types, *Adhesion* and *Beatification* are emerging from below: the action of immoral individuals who seek reward for their clientelar fidelity, and, due to the competition with like-minded colleagues, exaggerate it to the grotesque. At the next level, they justify fidelity through admiration for various qualities of the leader, themselves pushed well into the realm of fantasy. The circle is closed when the authorities take over *tukhta*, as an aggregate of all individual *tukhtas*, and project it to the society as a whole, thus once again inflating the report. However, at this point, individual sycophants lose their initial relevance, and the admirers of the leader become anonymous, represented through categories.

In the late 1980s, various historical commemorations, all contributing in fact to the glorification of the general secretary of RCP, were attended by numerous categories of unnamed individuals, which seemed to enjoy with the same enthusiasm scientific symposia, openings of art exhibitions, film screenings, and meetings with writers – the latest also unnamed, but further identified through subcategories (Marin 2008). A typical event was the commemoration of 50 years from the 1936 Brasov trial against members of the RCP, including Ceaușescu, in the Transylvanian cities of Brasov and Făgăraș. The commemorations, held in May 1986, consisted of

“meetings with writers – poets, novelists, playwrights, and literary critics, attended by workers from the factories and institutions [of the respective cities], activists of the state and party apparatuses, activists of mass and collective associations, school children, college students” (Marin 2008:227).

The cult of personality is complete only when this type of *tukhta* is set into motion. The focus, across the ABC of sycophancy, switches gradually from the originator

of the message (the client), to the object (the leader), to the audience, which is, willy-nilly, incorporated in the farce. Unintentionally, this is also the moment when socialism fulfils its promise to have at its heart the collectivity; in its turn, the collectivity demonstrates its consensual adhesion to the ideal, as described in the following report made for Radio Romania in 1982:

“The days when the big forum of the National Conference of the Romanian Communist Party was in session, enjoying the enthusiastic participation of representatives of all social categories, found us [...] in one of the most important industrial centers in Transylvania, Mediaş. I witnessed the attention and the outstanding interest that the working people gave to the Account presented by comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu. I heard the workers and the engineers from *Vitrometan* [factory] vividly commenting on the chapters and paragraphs of this precious document that brings into focus and highlights the major realities of today’s Romanian socialist society. I felt their animated participation to the sessions of this important conference whose relevance is augmented by the contribution that its first document brings to solving the theoretical problems concerning the present stage of Romania’s development and to clearing up some contradictions. I had in front of my eyes the sure proof of the love that these people have for the president of the country, their concern for the prosperity of socialist property, for the achievement and advancement of our goals, for an enhanced and optimal quality of work.” (Vlaicu Bârna, poet and novelist, December 1982) (Merişanu and Taloş 2009:80).

A different incarnation of this type of *tukhta* consisted in manufacturing admiration from abroad, expressed with an enthusiasm corresponding to that of Romanians. To be sure, due to his politics of separation from USSR, and the Western politicians’ eagerness to break the Soviet Bloc, Ceauşescu scored a few uncontested international successes: President Nixon visited Romania in August 1969, and invited Ceauşescu to visit the US, which he did in December 1970. Ceauşescu returned to the US in April 1978, before an official visit to the United Kingdom in July of the same year, an honor unprecedented to a head of the Warsaw Pact country. Meanwhile, Romania was granted a series of economic favors: admission to the General Agreement on Tariffs and

Trade in 1971, acceptance into the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in 1972, preferential trading status with the European Community in 1973, and the US most-favored-nation status in 1975 (Deletant 1995). To this was added a considerable number of foreign orders, medals, awards, and honorary academic titles, the list of which filled almost three pages of the monthly *Historical Magazine* in 1982 (Gabanyi 2000), and no less than 206 books in his honor (the figure combines anthologies of his writings, tributes, and re-issues), published in 42 foreign countries (Marin 2008). Archival research reveals evidence that most – if not all – of these books have been sponsored by Romania’s Ministry of External Affairs (Marin 2008), and by the Department of Foreign Intelligence, a branch of the Securitate (Deletant 1995). Moreover, while some of the book authors, or foreword authors, in case of anthologies, were indeed well-known personalities such as Greek ex-president Constantin Tsatsos, or Italian Communist Party leader Luigi Longo, most of them were rather unknown to the public, even in their own countries. . No matter how insignificant their roles in their home countries, in Romania they are raised to the rank of important personalities themselves (Gabanyi 2000). A majority of the books were mere translations of corresponding volumes in Romanian, while two other books, including one signed by Italian academic Giancarlo Elia Valori raise doubts about their originality, as the style and composition seem to indicate a low quality translation from Romanian language (Marin 2008).

The events surrounding the book releases abroad had two types of coverage: in Romanian media they were depicted as big events, with thousands of attendees, including major personalities from the respective countries, while foreign media denounced the insignificance of the events, the low participation, and the counterfeit interest for the

books, and indirectly for Ceaușescu, mentioning the financial contribution of the Ministry of External Affairs to the publication, and the release (Marin 2008). The culmination of this type of *tukhta* was the report in 1988 in *Scânteia* of a book published by the Washington, DC, based Acropolis Books publishing house titled *Nicolae Ceaușescu: An International Politics of Independence, Peace, and Cooperation*, with details from the book release, and an interview with the publisher, who asserted his pride for having the honor of publishing such a book, followed by a series of flattering remarks about Ceaușescu's vision of international politics. Few days later, Radio Free Europe disclosed that the event connected with the release of the book was cancelled, while Acropolis Books declined having any connection with the book (Marin 2014). Even more, the same Romanian newspaper published fictitious congratulatory letters on Ceaușescu's birthday from British MP Margaret Thatcher in 1987, and from Her Majesty, Queen Elisabeth II, in 1988, falsifications which elicited official protests from UK officials (Marin 2014).

7.5. Concluding Remarks

Tukhta is primarily an economic term, designating the falsification of output possible in non-free and centrally planned economies. It is possible when meaningful economic calculation is absent, and it is determined by the structural flaws of economic planning. Thus, central planners schedule aggregate targets for the economy, and specific targets for each economic unit. The impossibility of predicting the output is evident in agriculture, where yearly yields depend on meteorological events which cannot be

foreseen. Nonetheless, dealing with such a complex system as a country's economy, central planning must set output targets taking into account the supply of raw material, and the labor capacity of each unit. Consequently, each unit must reach – and not surpass – the assigned quota, contributing to the smooth functioning of the economy, according to the plan, an obvious impossibility. Naturally, economic actors will be forced to present false reports of reaching the quota, even if in reality they fall short, either due to the lack of supplies, or to labor related shortages. Enhanced by the impossibility of economic calculation, *tukhta* goes even further, to report over fulfillments of the designated quotas, although it makes no logical sense.

In the Soviet Union, where it was “christened” and documented the most, primarily due to Alexander Sozhenitzyn's revelation published in *The Gulag Archipelago*, *tukhta* was created by the interaction of different, sometimes competing, forces. Its inception has been attributed to individual workers in the lowest stratum of the Soviet society: zeks in the labor camps. Due to the impossibility of fulfilling the assigned quotas, which, in this case, was a condition for the very survival of the person, combined with the direct communication with a numerically strong and well organized contingent of common law criminals, political prisoners began to find creative ways of falsifying the work output, which resulted in being granted the food ratios in full, or even supplemented. Continued pressure from below perpetuated and increased *tukhta*, which evaded from the labor camps to encompass the entire Soviet economy in short time.

When *tukhta* could no longer be ignored by the authorities, instead of repealing it, they appropriated it and used its aggregate, as well as individual, values, for propaganda purposes. The official communications integrating *tukhta* stressed on the superiority of

socialist economy compared to its capitalist counterpart, evidenced in the rapid economic growth, based on aggregate indicators, and in the super-human labor capabilities of the Soviet workers.

At this point, *tukhta* encompassed the entire society, providing it with a new ontology, where everything was possible, but nothing was real. Organically growing in this ontology, *tukhta* continued to produce ramifications, outside of the narrow realm of economic indicators. Practices (such as Soviet style free elections), values (humanism), beliefs (in communism) have been subject to inflated reports, in societies with increasingly fewer connections with reality and truth.

Personality cults are the result of the expansion of *tukhta* to over-report clientelar fidelity. The process of invading the entire society is the same with economic *tukhta*, which makes it a particular category of *tukhta*, rather than a different phenomenon. The three-steps process of cult creation, which I termed the ABC of sycophancy responds to the same forces as economic *tukhta*: it is generated from below, by interested (and immoral) individuals, who over-report their clientelar **Adhesion**, followed by an exacerbation due to competition between would-be favorite clients, a phase that leads to the **Beatification** of the leader. The circle is closed by the appropriation of *tukhta* by the authorities, who use it in aggregate values to construct the **Consensus** over the admiration of the leader. The three steps are not sequential, but build upon each other, in the sense that, similar with economic *tukhta*, the more advanced steps do not outplay the others, so in the advanced phases of the cult all three types coexist, suffocating other means of communication.

My analysis of *tukhta* as a precondition for the personality cult to arise focused on socialist societies under Soviet domination, due to the availability of literature documenting *tukhta* in the Soviet Union and eastern European socialism. While there is evidence of over-reporting economic indicators in other dictatorships, such as Nazi Germany and African Socialist Tanzania, more research is needed to assess the causes and the extent of falsification in these societies. A recent article based on data made available by satellite technology (measuring the overtime growth of nighttime lights) indicates that over-reporting is a common characteristic of authoritarian societies, regardless of their ideological foundation. Further research is also necessary to assess whether cases of personality cults outside socialism are linked with over-reporting of economic indicators.

8. Conclusions

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify structural conditions which make personality cults of state leaders possible. I identified three necessary conditions, however, none, and no combination of the three is sufficient for the cult to emerge. Apart from the three conditions, and beyond the scope of this dissertation, a path dependent process needs to take place. In order to sketch the complete theoretical model of cult formation, I outlined the main stages of this process in a brief summary of the model.

While a rich literature, across several disciplines, tackled the topic of personality cults, there are few systematic large scale studies, notably those delivered by political scientist Lisa Wedeen (1999), focused on Hafez Al-Asad's cult, historian Manuela Marin (2008), on Nicolae Ceusescu (this one published only in Romanian language), and art historian Jan Plamper (2012) on visual cultic representations of Stalin. As it is often the case in social sciences, the vast literature yielded a multitude of definitions for the phenomenon I study. Integrating previous definitions, particularly those of Plamper and Marin, and addressing the inaccuracies, in the light of Durkheim's foundational *Rules of the Sociological Method*, I defined the cult of personality of state leaders as quantitatively exaggerated and qualitatively extravagant public demonstration of praise of the leader.

The review of literature revealed a large breath of explanations, classifiable in nine broad categories. Although rooted in different epistemologies, all nine categories of explanations bring important contributions to a causal assessment of the phenomenon, yet none of them provides a sufficiently convincing explanation. Therefore, I was aiming for

more than a simple integrative theory. Employing a historical and comparative perspective, focused on one central case – Romania’s Nicolae Ceaușescu – and testing the theory on the making through unsystematic comparisons with other cases, while integrating the existent knowledge related to personality cults, I explored structural dimensions of the authoritarian societies not considered by other scholars.

Three structural conditions are necessary for the personality cults to emerge. First, the power flows in a society must be characterized by preferential relations of patron-client type. If the summit of the power is in the hands of a patrimonial ruler, the cult of personality becomes possible, because deference will be offered increasingly to the highest potential patron, increasingly isolating him from intermediary patrons. Thus, a client of an intermediary patron will have to demonstrate fidelity to the immediate patron and to the patrimonial leader, while the patron himself, in order to maintain his or her privileged position, will have to bow in front of the leader.

Second, personality cults can flourish only in the absence of credible dissident voices within the society. Although lack of dissidence is considered definitory for authoritarian societies, not all regimes were equally successful in silencing opposition. When dissidence is present the ridicule of unwarranted praise of the leader is exposed, preventing it from generating a competition between the most ambitious clients of the leader. Conversely, the seedbed for the personality cult can only be laid when dissidence is absent or very weak, even if only for a relatively short period of about three years. If this is accomplished, even when dissidence gains strength, sometimes directed precisely against the cult, after the take-off phase of the personality cult it cannot be reversed, nor,

at least, kept in check. Therefore, a weak dissidence is necessary only for a small window of a few years, during the early phases of cult formation.

Third, it is necessary that the cultural fabric of the society is based on a specific ontology, accepting falsification as normal, and thus making truth irrelevant. The source of this ontology lies in the type of economy: unfree economies, particularly those subject to central planning, necessarily lead to falsifications of reported outputs, termed *tukhta* by Alexandr Solzhenitzyn, the first to bring this practice to the attention of the Western audience. Initially a creative means of individuals struggling to survive adverse conditions, or to gain advantage in competition with other individuals, *tukhta* pervades the entire society, like a cancer, given the impossibility of meaningful economic calculation. It ends up being appropriated by authorities, who integrate it in the official propaganda and use it to their own advantage. Regimes manufacture legitimacy through the display of aggregated *tukhta* figures, demonstrating economic efficiency, and implicitly the population's high standards of living.

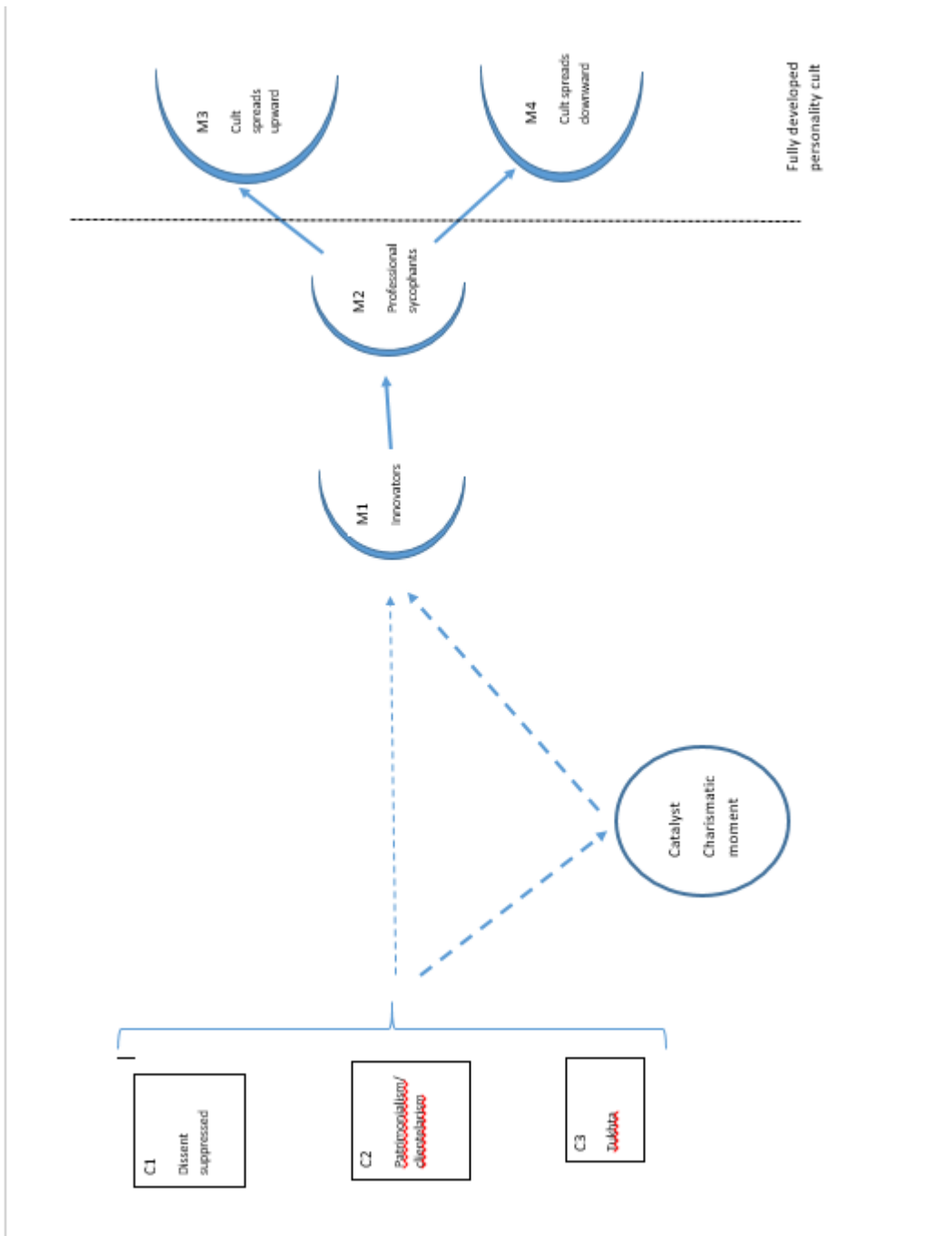
Once economic *tukhta* becomes established in a society, it infects other spheres of the social life. When the other two conditions are present, clientelary fidelity becomes subject to *tukhta*, unrestricted by possible exposures. The formation of the personality cults follows the same process as economic *tukhta*, following three steps which I termed the ABC of sycophancy. In an early phase, clients demonstrate their fidelity by over-reporting their Adhesion to the values represented by the patron. The taking-off phase consists of Beatification of the leader, due to the increasing competition between adhering clients. Finally, the cult is completed when the authorities appropriate the *tukhta*

which emerge from below, and project it to the entire society, constructing a fake Consensus of admiration of the leader.

Further research is needed to identify the more intimate mechanisms related to the emergence of personality cults – what I consider the path dependent process, where different sets of social actors play their part at different moments of the cult development, much like different parts of a gigantic, gaudy, farce.

Appendix

Figure 1: Graphic representation of the theoretical model of personality cult formation



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