

## Communist human models promoted by the Romanian History textbooks

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### Abstract

This paper proposes a historical approach of Romanian communist education as it is reflected in the textbooks edited in the second part of XX century. For communist regime the textbooks, especially history ones became a tool of promotion political principles. There are many pictures, texts, exercises and additional readings which offer enough examples about what behaviour ought to be (non)appreciated and manifested by students, what they have to feel, to act or not. Furthermore, scientific contents of textbook transmit to students a set of beliefs and values even if the teacher do not intend to focus on them. In this way, history textbook could be a perfect promoter of communist thinking and lifestyle. In addition, the textbook narrates about some 'heroes' and their acts, gestures, political and military victories. Talking about them, it is a good way to promote those personalities that could become 'models' for younger generation. Using theoretical research methodology, we have structured human models, as they had presented in the history textbooks, placing them into a communist human typology. As a result, this paper demonstrates that the textbooks have been important ideological tools, having a bigger impact to students' consciousness and behaviour.

Keywords: Communist ideology, education, history, human models, textbooks

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most frequently scientific debates is, in nowadays, the communist regime, in Romania, also in the entire world. Certainly, most of them are focused on the following aspects: The special features of the communist regime, anti-communist resistances, the social, economic, politic impacts, influence over the public and private space. However, there are not so many studies about the communist education, especially the tools of communist ideology used in the schools, even fewer studies which analysed the textbooks or scholar programs during communist regime. The reason for this situation could be that the communist regime affected all aspect of people life. On the other hand, the explanation is connected with the impression that the textbook is only an ideological tool, like every book or study. In fact, the textbook could be a useful research source for studying manifestation modalities of ideological politics, adaptation ways of ideology to the learner's particularities and stages of communist evolution.

The communist regime was gradually instituted and developed in Romania from 1945 to 1989 (Scurtu & Buzatu, 1999). The instauration of communist in Romania was in connection with politic and military European context. First, it was instituted as a political and military pressure from the Soviet Union (Red Army). Second, it was instituted as an action of Romanians communist leaders and sympathizers. From 1965 to 1971 was a period politic known like a brief relaxion in the internal repression and an opening relationship with the west (at the same was in 1953 when the Romanian Communists instituted a 'national path' to Communism). After that political episode, the communist regime became more repressive and it was instituted a totalitarian governance. It was 'the Ceaușescu period' (In 1965 Nicolae Ceaușescu assumed power, becoming both President of Romania and General Secretary of the Communist party; his wife, Elena, became the First Vice Prime Minister and Chair for the National Council on Science and Education). During this time (Petrescu, 2003), Romania became the most heavily centralised and tightly controlled political and socio-economic system in all of East Europe (Gilberg, 1990). All decisions, including educational policy, were made at the highest levels of government (Sadlak, 1991; Almond, 1992).

In essence, communism can be viewed as a socioeconomic structure (Cernat, 2004) based on force and propaganda that promotes the establishment of a classless, stateless society based on common ownership of the means of production. All citizens work according to their capacities and abilities and they are getting. This regime collapsed on the December 1989, year of Romanian Revolution for freedom, for democracy.

The communism, like a totalitarian ideology (Arendt, 2017) for taking control of the political government and keeping its power used many conviction instruments and strategies as the following: Persuasion, manipulation, terror, force and pressures, actions of political police and abuses, propaganda. In this way, the human fundamental rights and freedoms were annulated and exchanged with ideological norms and principles. One of the most effective ideological instruments was the school (Cristian, 2004; Momanu, 2005) needed for training the young generation for socialism life. Education had to be adapted for the new type of society (Falls, 2011) as it was defined by the Romanian Communist Party: A 'multilaterally developed socialist society that will provide affirmation of socialist principles in all sectors of economic and social life, expressing more fully the human personality, a harmonious combination of personal interests with the general aspirations of the whole society. With the rise of communism rose a new vision for Romanian educational system, probably, for create a centralized system of education that would link higher education to the needs of the centrally planned economy (Sadlak, 1991)

On the other hand, the communism as a left extreme ideology, is conducted by the social equality principles which act for uniformisation, obedience, class fight (irreconcilable division between the 'bourgeois' and the 'new man', 'proletariat', 'workers' and 'socialists'), labour, giving glory to political leader, communist party, country and Romanian nation.

History as a science and school subject was seen like a perfect tool for cultivate the social and human relationship, proposing models of actions, thinking, promoting some personalities, gestures, values and attitudes which can be imitated.

## **2. Methodology**

This research was written in qualitative research method. Qualitative research is a method that adopts to examine the research problem with an interpretive approach, based on a holistic interdisciplinary perspective (Karatas,2015). Starting from premise that the textbook is an educational instrument useful for training and orienting younger people, we propose a theoretical research that respect the specific research strategies, such as the analyse, comparison and generalisation. For us is really important finding the similar aspects which allow making generalisations, comparisons and common noticed.

The following approach directions were included in this paper:

- Analysing the history textbooks edited in the communist regime from 1971 to 1989 and comparing them and highlighting similar and particular aspects of them;
- Identifying the human values that were included in some human models, also; presenting how all of them are represented in the history textbooks;
- Identifying some strategies that were used by the textbook authors for promote these models and values; mentioning the educational consequences of them in the student's education human;
- Making some notices that can be useful for a better understanding of the communist influence on the students' consciousness and behaviour.

Intending to develop the abovementioned research finalities, we used the history textbooks edited from 1971 to 1989.

## **3. Results**

In general, the textbook reflects vision of the political government, mission of the national education and economic and social realities. For this reason, writing of textbook means both to be respected the curriculum and others legal norms, and to be verified/evaluated by specialists for scientific quality of content.

In the communist regime, the textbook was a unique one, for each level of studying. It was edited by the education minister, a national institute directly subordinated to central political government. Of course, there are a few examples of textbooks which mentioned the authors' names, but this is not an argument that can prove the responsibility of authors for objectivity of contents. From the educational effects, the unique textbook did not allow the individual development. The students used the same textbooks even if they were different they have not the same psychological and physical structure, learning potential and experience, interests, motivation and feelings. In this way, the textbook is not efficient for develop competences, but it is useful for propaganda and survey of learning process.

In next section of our paper, we were interested analyse the history textbook which was used in Romania during the communist regime from two perspectives.

### *3.1. History textbooks like a political convincing instrument*

History, like a science of the past and future offers enough argues and examples for justify actions, gestures and decisions. This is reason for use it as an instrument of communist propaganda and political

actions. On the other hand, the history textbooks from communist regime have been no evident changes from an edition to others. Maybe, the communist censorship actioned for keep the textbooks contents, especially for some points of view, reflections and theories, and in this way, students could learn them better. It cannot be excluded the idea that the textbooks authors themselves were interested keeping some interpretations, conclusions and examples for fear of censorship actions. It is well known that the communist censorship was active in the cultural production and individual expressing. If an author did not write something from the communist perspective, the censorship stopped him literal or scientifically creation and he could be chased by the political police and punished.

In Romanian educational process (Vaidenau, 1995), the communist regime acted using different strategies (Radu, 2016) that can be organized in three categories. The first of them is focused on the teachers and their activities: They needed to be such as a moral and multilateral developed model for students and society, in general, a perfect example of 'good behaviour, attitude and convictions' (1); they had the mission to oversee the educational process in school and afterschool for communist principles triumph in people life (2); and they had to educate students in socialism spirit (3). The second was focused on didactical resources that mean all instruments used by teachers for their educational activities. These educational materials were conceived and realised for sustain the communist ideology (as a form of communist propaganda and persuasion). Another category, distinguished, but dependent on the categories mentioned below must be the textbook/handbook. In general, the textbook is a student learning instrument, but it is more valuable with the teacher contribution.

For a better understanding of the connection between teacher and textbook, we propose the following schema (Figure 1).

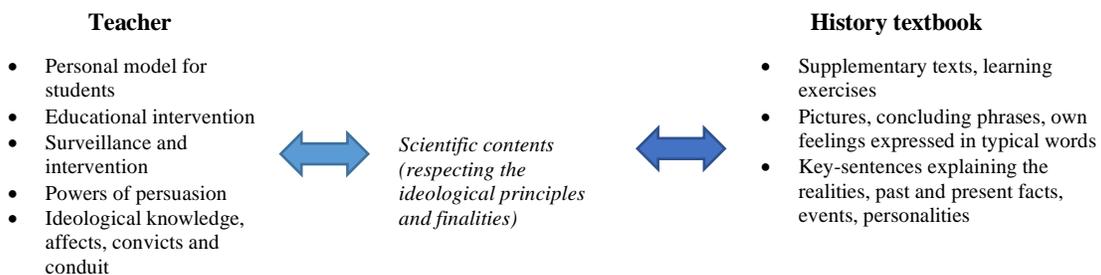


Figure 1. The connection between teacher and textbook in the learning process

As it can be noticed, the history textbook and teacher activity were in a complementarity connection. However, textbook was as well a control factor, a didactical element which can act without teacher contribution, also. If teacher neglected his role to be a promoter and a sustainer of communist ideology, the textbook itself could be one. If teacher actioned against communist principles and government, then textbook was a perfect contradiction instrument against teacher and his convicts. Using their textbook, the students could notice these differences and act themselves for a correct learning or inform about it to other persons, specially the head of school. Having so many good examples of what the students need to know, feel and act, the textbook can be consider a really instrument of political regime.

In fact, in many cases, the introduction part of textbook, there are some phrases which mention the role of history, in general, and of history textbook in special. For example, starting to the theory of Marxism–Leninism, the history textbook has the role of 'educator for people',

he needs to learn younger generation the patriotism, national solidarity; he is a tool of patriotic education, of materialism principles.

The discourse of history 'is based on the documents', but they are not described or explicated how they are used relating about events and personas. In this way, the reality can be falsified easier.

### 3.2. History textbook like a model for younger people

In this section, we analyse the history textbooks edited during communist regime in Romania from human typology perspective. With other words, we identified some human models and values of communist ideology as they are reflected in the history textbooks.

First, it is obvious the textbook reflects the communist ideology, especially four principles of it:

- Collectivism, as a form of standardization, social uniformization and integration (as a comradesly mutual aid: 'One for all and all for one'). This principle explained that all people are equal, but the collective is superior to persona, the collective possession is superior to private property and the physical work is more valuable than intellectual work. It presupposes the cultivation in people of their civic duty and responsibility, social activism and a striving to devote one's resources to the common cause. To live mean to live a communist life. In essence, it is the attitude that fitted the government well because it did not want individuals to have initiatives but only to obey orders;
- The fight-class, as a form of progress of Romanian society, from antiquity to contemporary time. Both principles were presented as a condition of the future, also a civic duty. New ideology divided society in two categories: So-called 'unhealthy' social classes which included all educated who had to be re-educated for this new society (1) and 'healthy origin' who were and had in their family manual labourers (2). Between them there were only contradictions. In addition, people were encouraged to 'produce' the palpable objects and to be proud of only what they physically produced (Falls, 2011). All social revolts were presented from a fight against to the rich and powerful. The revolt is accepted because the people freedom must be kept (Betea, 2005); the people fight to keep their freedom and rights;
- Veneration of leader, as a first persona of him people ('the cult of personality').
- Working was the main principle of Romanian communist regime; labouring is a duty of people and a national proud. The people have to work together for freedom add rises of their country; the 'work helped human being to not be anymore an animal'.

Therefore, values and attitudes agreed by the Romanian communist regime were collectivism, sacrifice, patriotism, heroes honouring, working and fighting for nation and country. The history textbooks reflected these values and attitudes in many human models that can be subsumed by the two categories of 'characters'.

- a. **Collective Character/figure.** In general, the history textbooks mentioned about human groups, named 'classes', 'the masses', 'crowd' and 'bunch'. This situation is for 'workers', 'villagers', 'intellectuals', 'socialists' and 'communists'.

In the following Table 1, we propose a typology of *collective character*.

Table 1. Collective character as a communist typology

Collective character	Generalized representation in history textbooks	Particularities, examples in history textbooks
<b>Villagers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are presented as a vulnerable class, poor and hard-worker one, who were exploited without limits, merciless by rich people, boyars and noble families;</li> <li>• They revolted sometimes against abuses and cruelty of noble families and boyars. Even if they were defeated, their sacrifice and courage were kept overtime. Furthermore, their sacrifice shown that they do not give up until the social equality will be recognised by the government. The villagers shown everyone that they can scarify themselves for justice; they suffered punishment, but they did not give up;</li> <li>• Rebellion of villagers if ever it was defeated, there are not a beaten people; they understood that the boyars can be shot down.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘They work all day until midnight’ (Almas et al., 1985);</li> <li>• ‘Their social revolt demonstrates their fighting force’ (Almaş &amp; Fotescu, 1971)</li> <li>• The Romanian communists are present on all important historical events: ‘All the great minds have joined villagers in their rebellion in 1907’, but it was exemplified only with workers from Galati and Pascani factories (Almaş &amp; Fotescu, 1971); at the revolts of workers from factories in 1933, were participated the communists too, ever if is done only two names as examples.</li> </ul>
<b>Intellectuals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are an important human category for the fight-class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chronicle’s writings were about the national conscious;</li> <li>• As ‘the revolution leaders’ they are based on the ‘popularise masses’ (Hurezeanu et al., 1988);</li> <li>• Doctors and medical personal are a good example for people for their courage on the battle fights.</li> </ul>
<b>Workers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Almost every time they were acted for social and political liberties and rights;</li> <li>• They were the principal factor of society progress;</li> <li>• All the difficult problems, on battlefield and factories were solved by the workers;</li> <li>• In general, they are hardworking people;</li> <li>• The workers from factories were all of them communists and seem to be in memory of history at the beginning of Romanian people evolution.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The action of workers, as communists was presented in connection with action of the workers from Europe.</li> </ul>
<b>Socialists and communists</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are the ‘builders’ of the future;</li> <li>• The presence of communists in Romanian history must be understand as a permanent one. They are not a result of a special fact; they make the history.</li> <li>• In the most cases, they were present at the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Romanian communist took part in the events of revolution in 1848 (Hurezeanu et al., 1988, p. 93)</li> <li>• The impression of importance of communists in history is done by the number very higher of them involved in the</li> </ul>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>important national and European events;</li> <li>• They fight against social injustices, imperialists and for national liberty;</li> <li>• The communist characteristics are identified with ‘Romanian nation’. In this respect, it is developed the love of country unseparated by the love for communism and adhesion to it;</li> <li>• The communists were the principal fighters against the fascism and, for this reason; they were badly punished for it. They suffered the worst pain, streaming in jail, but they did not renounce on their ideas and action.</li> </ul> | <p>events. However, this impression is a false one, because is missing the examples of them.</p> |
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**b. Individual character – ‘the hero’**

Even if some persons were presented as an individual human model, they are included in a ‘collective story’. In this respect, the value of him is done only from a collective perspective.

In the following Table 2, we underline some ‘heroes’ characters.

Table 2. Individual character as a communist typology

Individual character	Generalized representation in history textbooks	Particularities, examples in history textbooks
<b><i>Political and military leader</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the middle age they were ‘lords, provincial governors, local princes, voivodes and princes;’</li> <li>• The lord/prince qualities can be inventoried as the following: ‘Fighter for political and national sovereignty’, ‘defender’ of European civilization, ‘good’ and ‘able’ ‘diplomat,’ ‘good organizer of country’, ‘diligent’, ‘brave man’, ‘good soldier’, ‘fearless’ and ‘freedom-loving’;</li> <li>• The textbooks contents did not propose any arguments or explanations needed for understanding why they must be venerated; the words used for venerate of them were not focused on the any arguments;</li> <li>• Their qualities were appreciated by people; their gestures had for their people only positive intentions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their lives were dedicated to people (Hurezeanu et al., 1988, p.57, 182);</li> <li>• Lord did his political duty to his country and, in this way, he is buried in monastery, in a nice place (Almaş, 1986);</li> <li>• When the lord call for army, all people come to him (Almaş.&amp; Fotescu,1971, p.80);</li> <li>• Stephan Great the Lord had guided to villagers to have more grain (Almaş.&amp; Fotescu,1971, p. 99);</li> </ul>
<b><i>Social and professional leaders</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their mention is oriented to underline the importance of one social and professional (workers) category;</li> <li>• In additional texts, the actions of them were presented like a real and educative fact.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes, they are mentioned without any explanation, only like a ‘famous’ example;</li> <li>• Dimitrie Cantemis is ‘a famous scribe and patriot’ (Almas et al., 1985, p. 26).</li> </ul>
<b><i>Romanian communist leader</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was a supervisor of events, of people past and future;</li> <li>• He is mentioned more frequently in additional texts, in the scientific content, making different observations, giving solution and final conclusions;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some editions there are not any leader communist picture on the first page (Georgian et al., 1983; Almas &amp; Nicoara, 1989; Pascu et al., 1985);</li> <li>• In the other editions, on the first page there is the picture of the president of the Socialist</li> </ul>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All his affirmations in the textbook seems to be a result of scientifically thinking and a right judgement;</li><li>• The authors of textbooks used eulogises phrases talking about the Romanian political leader;</li><li>• It was a habitually using the quotes from Nicolae Ceasescu speeches, as a guaranty of the historical trues, right and positive example, correct behaviour.</li></ul> | <p>Republic Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu, the same picture;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The picture of Nicolae Ceausescu does not exist in the Universal History textbooks.</li></ul> |
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Therefore, the students could be educated in the communist ideology using the textbook. Having models of how they need to be and to do, the students could become the 'trusted people' for the communist regime.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

In the literature, some studies comparing history textbooks are found. In these studies, the appropriateness of the content in the books to the development level of the student was investigated. 'Examination of the 1938–1960 years history curriculum and textbooks that used in Turkey' of the content of textbooks and teaching programs on study were examined (Yilmaz, 2006).

The textbook, in special the history textbook is a good example for understanding what means a communist ideological tool.

First, it was important respecting the level of the development of students, according to their schooling phase, but not to particular potential of each student. For the students from first classes and for national history textbooks, there are many pictures and drawings, if ever a few of them make confuses understanding events. Furthermore, the scientifically contents were done as a story or dialogue. In case of universal history textbook were the contents were more scientifically, with a few plastic expressions. Second, the conclusions of each objects were not explained, the students had to learn by heart these phrases, not in a critical way. In addition, knowledge is turned into conviction and becomes the norm of everyday behaviour, a guide to quotidian activity. For this reason, 'talking' about human models, values and correct attitudes, the students starting to feel like them, to desire to be like them and to do the same brave things. The principles and believes of these models had to be considered true and needed to be entirely accepted by the people as norms, as the best way of knowing, thinking, feeling and actioning.

As we can notice, the history textbooks were an instrument of development of student's communist conduit, attitudes, thinking and conscious. Using textbooks, the students were trained in a communist spirit as acted the ideological propaganda and indoctrination.

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