

# The Myth of the Young Revolutionary: The Case of Nicolae Ceaușescu

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*“The question at issue is not whether or not there should be a cult of the individual, but rather whether or not the individual concerned represents the truth. If he does, then he should be revered.” (Mao Tse-tung<sup>1</sup>)*

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**I**N MOST cases, the cult of personality created around the famous dictators of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (such as Stalin, Fidel Castro, Mao Tse-tung, Saddam Hussein, Nicolae Ceaușescu, etc.) included among its thematic manifestations the altered presentation of some episodes of their past. These events are usually related to their initial activity within the political organizations that gradually propelled them to the highest echelons of party or/and state power.

In spite of the normal differences generated by local conditions, the dictators' official biographies display a common, general feature that explains the deliberate proliferation of biographical pieces of information: the personal need to legitimate their exceptional power positions by highlighting their extraordinary revolutionary activity directed against the old regime.

I have distinguished two main methods of underlining the major role given to the future leaders by their political organizations in their strategic battle against the old regime: 1) the exaggeration

ration of the prospective leaders' roles during various political activities, or even the invention of such situations in order to highlight their exceptional, "correct" qualities (for example, Stalin's role during the 1917 October Revolution<sup>2</sup> or Saddam Hussein's contribution to the failed assassination attempt against the Iraqi leader Abd al-Karim Qassem)<sup>3</sup>; 2) the diminution or the omission of other historical characters that could have cast a shadow on the leaders' revolutionary deeds (see, for example, Mátyás Rákosi's case).<sup>4</sup> In some cases, the exaggerated version on a dictator's biography presents not only his person and activity, but also the impact of his actions on others. For example, the attitude of Sierra peasants towards Castro was not as spontaneously enthusiastic as the later propaganda led people to believe.<sup>5</sup>

Nicolae Ceaușescu's revolutionary biography includes a mixture of omissions and inventions when it comes to its main episodes. In my opinion, their fabricated character is meant, on the one hand, to hide the actual insignificance of the Romanian leader's revolutionary activity and, on the other hand, to highlight the predestined character of the grandiose achievements of the future great leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu. Ceaușescu's biographical narrative was also used to legitimize his special position within the party and state apparatus. This position was invariably presented as a well-deserved reward for his previous revolutionary activity against the old regime and for his full dedication to the cause of communism in Romania.

The qualitative analysis of biographical sources provides relevant data for the analysis of the manner in which Nicolae Ceaușescu's revolutionary biography was reconstructed, following the typology drawn up by Sorin Șerban<sup>6</sup> and considering the following elements: 1) the existence of a pattern and of variations in the rewriting of the main moments in Ceaușescu's activity as a professional revolutionary, by comparing the official version with information from various sources; 2) the illustration of the changes in the depiction of these episodes from Ceaușescu's revolutionary activity occurred over time, sometimes with the same author; 3) the comparison of the way in which the personal history of Nicolae Ceaușescu intersected that of the Romanian Communist Party (hereafter abbreviated as RCP); 4) an insight into the motives behind the selection, re-interpretation, or even the alteration of the significance of some events of RCP history, in order to introduce Nicolae Ceaușescu as a main character.

In his Ph.D. thesis, Adrian Cioroianu analyzes the relation between Romanian society and Nicolae Ceaușescu, including the phenomenon of the Romanian communist leader's cult of personality. He distinguishes seven main *mythical features* of Nicolae Ceaușescu: the young revolutionary, the theorist, the architect of modern Romania, the hero of national independence, the champion of peace, the protector of national unity, the father of the nation.<sup>7</sup> According to the same

author, these mythical features constitute the basis for the so-called *representations*. These representations are the very foundation of Nicolae Ceaușescu's cult of personality. They represent the imaginary and discursive constructions created by the propaganda apparatus essentially with a legitimizing role, and they are characterized by a constant process of invention or reinvention meant to create the protean image or representation of a leader (in our case, Nicolae Ceaușescu) whom any citizen can identify with.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, I find revelatory Mary Ellen Fischer's observation that the Romanian propaganda turned Ceaușescu into a protean idol: "a peasant hero to appeal to the majority of Romanians who were born peasants; a revolutionary hero to appeal to the communist political elite; and a Romanian national hero to bridge the gap between the rulers and the ruled in contemporary Romania by identifying the RCP at long last with the national unity and sovereignty embodied in the person of Ceaușescu."<sup>9</sup>

## 1. January 26

**T**HE REVOLUTIONARY character of Nicolae Ceaușescu's biography was initially mentioned on 26 January 1978, when Nicolae Ceaușescu celebrated his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and 45 years of "uninterrupted revolutionary activity."<sup>10</sup>

In my opinion, the revolutionary aspect of Nicolae Ceaușescu's biography encompasses two main features determined by the existence of a continuous celebration of his revolutionary activity. One of them is related to the image of Ceaușescu as a professional revolutionary. Influenced by the generous communist ideals, the Romanian communist leader dedicates his youth to the cause of the workers' movement, fighting against the old regime in order to replace it with a socialist one. The other aspect concerns Ceaușescu's biography from a different point of view. He remains the same man who devotes his life to the victory of socialism, but he is doing it not by fighting against the political establishment. Instead, he is involved in theoretically and practically planning the material and the spiritual basis of the new socialist order, especially after 1965.

The official recognition of Ceaușescu's revolutionary merits came in 1983 when he received "the first jubilee medal especially instituted and granted to comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu on the celebration of 50 years of revolutionary activity and of his anniversary."<sup>11</sup> In 1988, by joint decision, the Executive Political Committee of the Central Committee of the RCP and the State Council of the Socialist Republic of Romania awarded Ceaușescu the new jubilee medal, and, for the second time (he had first received it in 1978), the supreme decoration of "Hero of the Socialist Republic of Romania" and the "Victory of Socialism" Order.<sup>12</sup>

From 1983 onwards, the press developed another way of expressing appreciation towards Nicolae Ceaușescu's revolutionary virtues on his birthday, namely, the messages and letters of praise coming from the RCP and from state, popular, and cultural organizations.<sup>13</sup>

Celebratory exhibitions were organized on the same occasion. For example, in 1987, the Dalles Hall in Bucharest housed an exhibition named "Homage," and in 1988 another display called "Under the Banners of the Party, the Republic's Pillars of Light" was organized at the Art Museum of the Socialist Republic of Romania. The various sections of these exhibitions presented the role played by the secretary general in the preparation and in the implementation of the program for the general development of Socialist Romania, the great achievements of Ceaușescu's era, photos and documents related to the most important moments in the Romanian leader's revolutionary activity.<sup>14</sup>

The Romanian National Television featured a special program narrating Ceaușescu's revolutionary youth. For example, in 1978, state television broadcast the eulogistic movie "A Life Dedicated to the Happiness of the People,"<sup>15</sup> and in 1983 another one named simply "Homage."<sup>16</sup>

Nicolae Ceaușescu's revolutionary youth was also the subject of other activities (such as symposiums, public debates and discussions, books and art exhibitions, films, contests of the "trivial pursuit" type) organized by RCP local organizations, museums, cultural and educational organizations, etc.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. The Beginning of Ceaușescu's Revolutionary Activity

**T**HE OFFICIAL discourse presented Nicolae Ceaușescu as predestined to achieve great things, constantly stressing the significance attached to his birthday and to his native place.

Nicolae Ceaușescu was born on 26 January 1918 in the village of Scornicești, Olt county. Two symbolic meanings were given to the Romanian leader's birthday. The first one was related to the fact that the year 1918 also marked the creation of Greater Romania.<sup>18</sup> The second associated the day of January 26 to the union between Moldavia and Wallachia, which took place on 24 January 1859.<sup>19</sup>

The historical value of Scornicești was also emphasized. As the press celebrated the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Ceaușescu's native village in September 1979, it was proclaimed to be one of the oldest Romanian settlements.<sup>20</sup> The Scornicești Museum featured all sorts of exhibits, from archeological pieces found in the village to documents attesting its inhabitants' participation in the revolutions of 1821 and 1848, in the 1877 War of Independence, and in the peasant uprising of 1907.<sup>21</sup>

The village of Scornicești was indirectly included in the general attempt to rewrite world history to the advantage of Romania. In 1981, a Romanian anthropologist discovered the most ancient remains of a hominid ever found on the European continent, which he named “Australanthropus Olteniensis.” The name indicated that the Olt region was the place of origin of these remains and implied that Ceaușescu’s native region was also the place where anthropogenesis had started in Europe.<sup>22</sup>

Analyzing the biographies of several underground militants, Sorin Șerban identified several common elements. The first element is the *hard life*.<sup>23</sup> Nicolae Ceaușescu was born in a family of poor peasants as one of their ten children. He lived in a small and modest house. As a child, he had to work alongside his parents in the fields, proving to be hard-working and dedicated. This was the moment when the future leader experienced “landowner exploitation” and started to develop a strong feeling of revolt against the established social order.<sup>24</sup> The young Ceaușescu also proved remarkable qualities and a strong character. During a visit to Scornicești, Ilie Purcaru—a reporter for *Flacăra* magazine—was told by one of the locals that the little Ceaușescu could not bear injustice, that he had no fear and he was never afraid of wolves when going into the forest.<sup>25</sup>

*The thirst for knowledge*<sup>26</sup> is another feature of the underground militant. All of Ceaușescu’s teachers (Constantin Grosu, Ion Bărăscu) mentioned his cleverness and intellectual curiosity.<sup>27</sup> His favorite discipline was history, and he was reportedly very fond of playing historical games involving national heroes, captains and outlaws, games in which the other children appointed him their leader.<sup>28</sup> Nicolae Ceaușescu was always “the first in his class” despite the fact that his family could not afford to buy him books and he was therefore forced to borrow them from his classmates.<sup>29</sup> In fact, his studies were limited to the elementary level (fourth grade), but his educational deficiencies would be compensated for by his native intelligence.<sup>30</sup>

At the age of 11, “the age of childhood and innocent games,” young Nicolae Ceaușescu left his native village to learn a trade.<sup>31</sup> Later, the official discourse mentioned another reason for his departure: “the child left his home in search of liberty and justice...” carrying one bag and barefoot.<sup>32</sup> His apprenticeship in a shoemaker’s shop was usually edited out by his biographers (with the exception of Michel-P. Hamelet).<sup>33</sup> This is probably due to the fact that this rural, traditional occupation was not suitable for the future leader of the RCP, a party of the working class.

Nicolae Ceaușescu found himself in Bucharest, a city torn apart by intense social conflicts as a result of the economic crisis. Leaving the shoemaker’s shop, Ceaușescu was hired as a worker in various factories. In 1930, at the age of 12, Nicolae Ceaușescu is reported to have become involved in the activity and

in the struggle of the revolutionary youth from the trade unions, in numerous strikes, meetings, and rallies organized by the working class. He also used this period in order to enrich his knowledge of socialism and Marxism.<sup>34</sup> This initial contact with the workers' revolutionary movement represented a determining and a formative experience for the young militant Nicolae Ceaușescu, "having a decisive influence on his emergence as a tireless combatant for the cause of social and national liberation,"<sup>35</sup> allowing him "to successfully pass his first exams at the most demanding school—the school of revolutionary fighters."<sup>36</sup>

The official discourse regarding Nicolae Ceaușescu's revolutionary youth is concentrated on several events: 1) Ceaușescu's participation in the National Antifascist Committee (hereinafter called NAC); 2) the 1934 Craiova trial; 3) the 1936 Brașov trial; 4) the detention period in Doftana prison; 5) the workers' demonstration of May Day 1939; 6) the prison years (1940–1944). Thus, Nicolae Ceaușescu became a *professional* revolutionary. This element is another feature of the underground militant's typology proposed by Sorin Șerban.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. The National Antifascist Committee

**T**HE NATIONAL Antifascist Committee was created in June 1933 by the RCP. Its declared purpose was to create "a large united front of antifascist struggle" that was to reunite all "social, democratic, progressive and patriotic" forces in Romanian society, in order to expose and fight against Hitlerism and fascism. The rise of the European extreme right was perceived by Romanian communists as a direct threat to the independence and to the territorial integrity of Romania.<sup>38</sup>

The NAC included representatives of various social groups, such as workers, teachers and professors, lawyers, writers, peasants, students, artists, journalists.<sup>39</sup> Its leadership consisted of well-known public personalities such as Professor Iorgu Iordan, chairman of the Committee, Professor Petre Constantinescu-Iași, deputy chairman, Victor Gherasim, secretary, George Enescu, Mihail Sadoveanu, Scarlat Callimachi, etc., as well as the young assistant professor from Cluj, Tudor Bugnariu.<sup>40</sup>

According to the hagiographic literature, at the age of 15 Nicolae Ceaușescu participated in a conference of the Romanian antifascist militants as the representative of the democratic youth of Bucharest. In the same circumstances, Nicolae Ceaușescu is reported to have been elected in the NAC leadership.<sup>41</sup> The Romanian press cites several eyewitness testimonies confirming his presence in this organization and his remarkable qualities, as well as his early prestige among the members of the small community of the workers' movement. The most quoted

statements are those of Professor Petre Constantinescu-Iași, the deputy chairman of the NAC, and of Ion Popescu-Puțuri, the secretary of the RCP Organization of Bucharest.<sup>42</sup>

Pavel Câmpeanu denies this version of the events, using information offered by Tudor Bugnariu. The latter declared to Câmpeanu that a visit by the youth Cultural Center of Foisorul de Foc was included in the program of the NAC. The youth delegation, including Nicolae Ceaușescu, arrived and waited, but the Committee, because of some delays in its official schedule, did not receive them. Thus, the delegation left without presenting its greetings.<sup>43</sup>

The distortion of this episode in Nicolae Ceaușescu's revolutionary youth is based on a half-truth. The NAC existed as an organization, Ceaușescu's visit to its headquarters did take place, but it failed to accomplish its objective. Ceaușescu's nomination for the NAC leadership by the RCP Organization of Bucharest<sup>44</sup> or by the Central Committee of the RCP<sup>45</sup> is a pure invention. Pavel Câmpeanu mentions that this forgery was an attempt to separate Nicolae Ceaușescu from the real and anonymous world of his comrades in order to bring him into the imaginary proximity of some important national and international personalities.<sup>46</sup>

In my opinion, Nicolae Ceaușescu's involvement in NAC activities also has another explanation. The creation and the statute of the NAC as an auxiliary organization of the RCP, and especially the significance attached to its activity (organizing the fight against the dangerous fascist elements through the tactics of the united front) were used in order to highlight the so-called national character of the RCP activity during the interwar period. Its activity supposedly included—besides the organization and the coordination of the workers' protests against the old regime—"the protection of the country's major interests by preventing the extreme danger represented by revisionist Hitlerism and fascism."<sup>47</sup> Thus, the NAC episode was manipulated for a double legitimating purpose. Firstly, the interest of the RCP was to define itself as the only defender of national interests and as a national party opposed to the foreign fascism represented by the Romanian organization of the Iron Guard. Secondly, Nicolae Ceaușescu's image also benefited from his alleged involvement in the activity of the NAC leadership. This involvement was meant to anticipate two of his other representations, also part of his cult of personality, that of the strategist/hero of national independence and of the guarantor of national unity.

Nicolae Ceaușescu was also included (alongside Matei Socor, Grigore Preoteasa, Constanța Crăciun, Nicolae Pascu, Costică Albescu and others) among the leaders of the National Antifascist Youth Committee in 1933, the year of its inauguration. This new episode was artfully presented as another opportunity for Nicolae Ceaușescu to demonstrate his skills as a good organizer. He was reported as having a decisive role "in the intensification of the activity of the Communist Party among the young generation, the development of its unity of action against

the Hitlerist and revisionist threat, in defense of the country's independence and sovereignty and of its territorial integrity.<sup>48</sup>

The strikes of railway and oilfield workers marked the beginning of the year 1933. The event itself was used to present Ceaușescu's first arrest as related to these developments. He was accused of "instigation to strike" and of distributing leaflets that threatened "the security of the state." He was presented to the Prosecutor's Office of the Ilfov Court on 23 November 1933 and was released soon afterwards.<sup>49</sup>

In 1933, after his release from police custody, Nicolae Ceaușescu became a member of the Union of Communist Youth.<sup>50</sup> This represents the third element in Sorin Șerban's typology, namely, *the joining of the party*, usually made under the supervision of "the elder workers."<sup>51</sup> Pavel Câmpeanu underlines the fact that the Romanian communist leader never mentioned any details about the circumstances relating to the beginning of his underground activity, as if the party had never existed before his engagement.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4. The 1934 Craiova Trial

As I have already indicated, the description of the events related to the 1933 strikes was used only to explain Ceaușescu's first contacts with the State Security. Consequently, the role of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and of the rest of the group, active at that time, was minimized.

At the age of 16, Nicolae Ceaușescu and other delegates (Vasile Gabor, Vasile Pogăceanu, Ion Brad, etc.) were arrested on 25 June 1934 in Craiova when trying to enter the law court in order to vehemently protest against the charges raised against the organizers of the strike.<sup>53</sup>

The subsequent versions on this event reveal a major alteration. The other members of the delegation sent to Craiova by the RCP were mentioned only when their testimonies could contribute to the laudatory portrayal of Nicolae Ceaușescu as a remarkable young revolutionary. For example, one of the most cited testimonies is that of Vasile Pogăceanu. He mentioned the events leading to their arrest, pointing out Ceaușescu's behavior during police questioning: he "declared that he had come to Craiova on his own accord, as one who had helped gather signatures on the memoranda of protest and solidarity, which he had also brought with him."<sup>54</sup>

In the celebratory volume published in 1988, Pogăceanu's testimony is included without mentioning the identity of the author. The information offered by this volume left out the existence of the other members of the RCP delegation who had been sent to Craiova. Thus, Ceaușescu was allegedly the single representative of the workers' organization of Bucharest to come to Craiova to hand



in the list of signatures and to support the cause of the railway men who were on trial there.<sup>55</sup>

The content of Nicolae Ceaușescu's declaration during police questioning was also changed. The initial version states that Nicolae Ceaușescu came to Craiova of his own accord and that he participated in collecting the signatures for the motions of protest against the trial, but later accounts feature an important alteration, namely, that he was the only one who had collected those signatures. Under pressure from the public opinion, the Prosecutor's Office of Dolj county had to drop the suit, as they had no evidence, and released the young men, including Ceaușescu.<sup>56</sup>

The presentation of this new episode in Ceaușescu's biography contains an authentic event and a partial truth. Nicolae Ceaușescu was indeed caught carrying some lists of signatures in support of the men accused of organizing the 1933 strikes, but he was paid for this job and he had not participated in gathering them.<sup>57</sup> This testimony belongs to Ion Gheorghe Maurer and is confirmed by Ceaușescu's declaration made during police questioning. According to this statement, published in a volume of documents regarding the history of the workers' movement in Romania, the young Ceaușescu accepted 400 lei, a considerable sum in 1934, from "a tall, well-built, fair-haired man" in order to go to Craiova with many subscription lists and motions of protests against the trial, to protest against the court and to make a statement in support the railway workers on trial.<sup>58</sup>

In my opinion, these two episodes in Ceaușescu's revolutionary youth, his first arrest and the Craiova trial, are meant to introduce the future Romanian leader as an active participant in one of the most important events related to the inter-war activity of the RCP, granting him a central, significant role. The press accounts regarding the Craiova trial mention only Ceaușescu's action of delivering the lists of signatures. They do not reveal any information about those who were charged or about their personal identity.

## 5. New Arrests and the Activity within the Union of Communist Youth

**N**ICOLAE CEAUȘESCU was arrested on 26 August 1934 on the charge of spreading revolutionary leaflets and organizing actions against the regime.<sup>59</sup> On 20 September 1934, he was arrested again during a secret meeting of the National Antifascist Committee.<sup>60</sup>

As soon as he was set free, he was sent home and required to live with his parents in his native village of Scornicești, having to call in each day at the local post office. According to Michel-Pierre Hamelet, Ceaușescu was sent to his parents'

home situated 200 km away, and he had to walk all the way, barely eating or sleeping.<sup>61</sup>

The prestige and the significant role of Nicolae Ceaușescu within the NAC was underlined in a protest of this organization addressed to the Minister of the Interior. The fourth point of this document mentioned “the mistreatment by Bucharest Police of Nicolae Ceaușescu, a member of the NAC.”<sup>62</sup>

According to the testimony of Tudor Bugnariu, NAC secretary for Cluj,<sup>63</sup> Ceaușescu’s only contact with the NAC was an unsuccessful visit. Thus, the true motives of his arrest remain an unsolved mystery.

Suffering and humiliation did not discourage the young Ceaușescu. Disregarding the terms of his release, he decided to return to Bucharest to continue his revolutionary activities. His father sold the family’s last two sheep in order to help him.<sup>64</sup>

In 1935, Ceaușescu became the secretary of the Union of Communist Youth (hereinafter called UCY) for Bucharest and then the secretary of the Oltenia Regional Committee of the Union of Communist Youth. He quickly emerged as a “reliable organizer” and a “remarkable agitator.” In the autumn of 1935 and in the first part of 1936, he also led the UCY in the industrial region of Prahova, under instructions from the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party.<sup>65</sup>

## 6. The Brașov Trial

**N**ICOLAE CEAUȘESCU was arrested again in the village of Ulmi (Dâmbovița county) during a conspiratorial meeting.<sup>66</sup> After being sent to the Brașov jail, he and his comrades were arraigned before the Fifth Army Corps Court in the same city, in May 1936. The trial took place between 27 May and 5 June 1936.<sup>67</sup>

All the press articles related to the Brașov trial included fragments from the accusation act, especially paragraphs 19 and 23,<sup>68</sup> and from the Bucharest Prefecture Police report regarding Ceaușescu’s political activity.

The critical reading of the accusation act made by Pavel Câmpeanu questions the so-called qualities of Ceaușescu as a good organizer. In organizing the Ulmi meeting, he ignored some elementary rules for such a clandestine meeting. For example, he recklessly organized this kind of meeting with too many participants and distributed communist leaflets in the countryside.<sup>69</sup>

The most significant episode of this trial involving Nicolae Ceaușescu took place on May 30. When one of the defendants, Tarnovski, was arbitrarily evicted from the courtroom, Ceaușescu urged all the defendants to leave the court.<sup>70</sup> In my opinion, Ceaușescu’s gesture was an irrational one. He did not gain anything; on the contrary, Tarnovski was evicted from the courtroom and was charged

with contempt of court. The explanation of Ceaușescu's act resides in his need to become the main character of the trial. Moreover, the information offered by newspaper accounts and by archive documents cannot be verified, and we must not exclude the possibility of their falsification and fabrication.

At the end of the trial, Nicolae Ceaușescu was sentenced to two years imprisonment and to a fine of 2,000 lei, plus six months for contempt of court and one year of house arrest after completing his sentence.<sup>71</sup>

The event enjoyed wide publicity, because Paul Moscovici, one of the defense attorneys, had arranged a press interview for Nicolae Ceaușescu and Tarnovski. The meeting between the two and the journalist Eugen Jebeleanu was described by the latter in his article, "Impressions from a Trial," published in *Cuvântul liber* on 6 June 1936.<sup>72</sup>

Mary Ellen Fischer confirms the authenticity of this article in her volume dedicated to Nicolae Ceaușescu's biography. She mentions that she saw the original newspaper and she concludes that Jebeleanu's interview has become a part of Ceaușescu mythology.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, both the "Introduction" to the first celebratory volume *Homage to Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, Secretary General of the Romanian Communist Party, President of the State Council of the Socialist Republic of Romania* published in 1973<sup>74</sup> and Hamelet's book<sup>75</sup> contain Jebeleanu's article.

The presentation of this new episode in Nicolae Ceaușescu's revolutionary biography follows the pattern which we have previously identified: the narrative is concentrated on the person and the actions of Nicolae Ceaușescu during the trial. The importance of the event arises from the direct involvement in it of the main character, Ceaușescu. The general rule is that the identity of the other comrades is blurred; nevertheless, the militants whose testimonies can contribute to the laudatory portrayal of Nicolae Ceaușescu as a remarkable young revolutionary (for example, Ion Stănescu's or Gheorghe Dumitrache's testimonies)<sup>76</sup> are taken into account.

The importance attached to the episode of the Brașov trial in Nicolae Ceaușescu's biography is indicated by the organization of several commemorative events. Thus, the commemorations of 1981 and 1986 marked the passing of 45 and respectively 50 years since the trial in question. On 25 May 1981, in Bucharest, Ștefan Gheorghiu Academy, the Academy of Social and Political Science of the Socialist Republic of Romania, the Institute of Historical and Social-Political Studies of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, and the Union of Communist Youth organized a symposium dedicated to the anniversary of 45 years since the Brașov trial.<sup>77</sup> The county committee for political education and socialist culture organized in the city of Brașov other symposiums on the same topic.<sup>78</sup> In 1986, the commemoration of 50 years since the

Braşov trial started few days before the actual date of the event, coming shortly after the party jubilee and covering the entire period of the trial (May 13–June 5), featuring various types of commemorative activities.

The first events were held in two important towns, Braşov and Făgăraş, and consisted of meetings between writers and the general public. During these meetings, the participants underlined the importance given to the Braşov trial by Nicolae Ceauşescu's exemplary attitude, and his revolutionary behavior within the heroic struggle of the RCP.<sup>79</sup> These conferences were followed by the inauguration of an exhibition entitled "The Great Revolutionary Battles of the Working Class Led by the RCP during the Years of the Underground Struggle, the Heroism of the Working Class in the Vast Activity of Building the Communist Society" at Dalles Hall in Bucharest.<sup>80</sup>

In early June 1986, the county committees of the RCP, for example those of Arad, Argeş, Bihor, Bistriţa-Năsăud, Braşov, Buzău, Covasna, Hunedoara, Neamţ, Olt, Satu Mare, Vrancea,<sup>81</sup> Caraş-Severin, Călăraşi, Dâmboviţa, Mureş, Sibiu, Timiş, Vaslui, Vâlcea,<sup>82</sup> Dolj, Giurgiu, and Teleorman,<sup>83</sup> organized other symposiums in order to underline the importance of the Braşov trial within the RCP struggle to expose the fascist threat in Romania and to create a united front against it. Various economic and cultural institutions in Bucharest and in other parts of the country also hosted similar commemorative events.<sup>84</sup> On June 3, the Central Committee of the Union of Communist Youth, the Council of the Union of the Communist Students' Associations, and the National Council of the Pioneers organized in Bucharest a national symposium on "The Revolutionary Youth of Comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu. The Union of Communist Youth: The Continuator of the Revolutionary Traditions of the Party and of the Romanian People."<sup>85</sup>

The series of the commemorative activities ended on 5 June 1986. Thus, the National Council for Science and Education, the Romanian Academy, Ştefan Gheorghiu Academy, and the Institute of Historical and Social-Political Studies of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party organized the celebratory conference entitled "50 Years Since the Trial of the Communist and Antifascist Militants in Braşov. The Revolutionary Activity of Nicolae Ceauşescu, Brilliant State and Party Leader, an Example of Patriotic Dedication to the Cause of the People, to the Independence and Sovereignty of the Country."<sup>86</sup>

All these commemorative events emphasized the importance of the 1936 Braşov trial as an essential part of RCP's battle against the fascist threat, the strategy of the united front, Nicolae Ceauşescu's contribution in this respect, his exemplary attitude during the trial, and the continuation of his revolutionary activity, especially after 1965, during the construction of socialism in Romania.<sup>87</sup>

## 7. Detention at Doftana

**N**ICOLAE CEAUȘESCU was jailed in Doftana prison, also known as the “Romanian Bastille” because of the harsh treatment given to its inmates. Comparing the accounts concerning Nicolae Ceaușescu’s periods of detention, one notices the special attention given to the Doftana episode. This fact cannot be explained without a proper and a complete understanding of the significance of Doftana prison in the interwar history of the RCP.

Doftana was the only prison turned into a museum after 1944. In my opinion, this special position is the result of several factors. Doftana was the jail where the majority of communist political prisoners were detained after 1936. It was also the symbol of the old regime’s oppression of communists, and thus the symbol of communist resistance. The communist resistance succeeded in transforming the prison into a “Marxist university” where the prisoners could learn the fundamental notions of Marxism-Leninism. Doftana was the place of the political struggle against the state representatives, as inmates sought to gain recognition as political prisoners as well as other rights. The prison was also the symbol of the supreme sacrifice of the Romanian communists, the place where many of them died during the investigations, during hunger strikes against the abuses of the prison administration, or during the earthquake that destroyed the prison on 10 November 1944.<sup>88</sup>

The official accounts of this period in Ceaușescu’s revolutionary biography included substantial distortions of the actual facts, in an attempt to ascribe to him an important role in the organization of the party group in Doftana.

The two volumes about the Doftana Museum, the first one published in 1960 and the second in 1968, refer to the militant Nicolae Ceaușescu as one of the imprisoned RCP leaders and to the presence there of a well-organized communist organization, the product of a collective effort of the inmates. There is no information regarding any unusual or exceptional actions of the future Romanian leader.<sup>89</sup>

The press articles and the celebratory volumes published in the late 1970s and in the early 1980s presented Ceaușescu’s detention in Doftana from a different perspective. They underline his important role in the life of the party cell which had been set up there. Ceaușescu’s activity in the harsh environment of Doftana included his “essential contribution” to the (re)organization of the entire activity of the communist militants. He resorted to indoctrination and organized protests against beatings, maltreatment, the isolation regime, starvation, etc. Nicolae Ceaușescu was also entrusted with other important tasks, such as that of recruiting new supporters of the communist cause and of getting news and information from the outside, which he passed on to the other communist detainees.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the young militant Ceaușescu became a role model for the other

communist detainees, who “affectionately and admiringly called him the quicksilver of Doftana.” He also became known as a “recalcitrant” element, “a dangerous communist agitator,” suspected by the prison administration of “subversive activity in the prison.”<sup>91</sup> He was also recognized as one of the most active “instigators,” because of his constant condemnation of the abuses of the prison staff.<sup>92</sup>

My investigation of the related press articles and laudatory volumes revealed the fact that Nicolae Ceaușescu was the only individual specifically mentioned in the otherwise amorphous mass of communist militants imprisoned in Doftana. The laudatory discourse deliberately overlooked the existence of the real leaders of the interwar RCP, such as Gheorghiu-Dej, Chivu Stoica, Emil Bodnăraș, A. Moghioroș. In fact, the collective inmate protests were not Nicolae Ceaușescu’s invention. They were an instrument used by the communist political prisoners of Doftana against the abuses and aggressive methods of the prison guards, and they had become the symbol of the communist resistance in Doftana long before Ceaușescu’s arrival there.<sup>93</sup>

The most important fact usually omitted is the central role played by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the real leader of the communists in Doftana, and Nicolae Ceaușescu’s position as a simple member of this group.<sup>94</sup>

I have identified one commemorative event related to the symbol of Doftana and to the representation of Nicolae Ceaușescu as a young revolutionary, namely, the anniversary of 50 years since his imprisonment in Doftana. The *Scînteia* newspaper, in its 14–16 August 1986 issue, published several articles about the life of the communist detainees in Doftana, about their struggle for recognition as political prisoners and for other rights, and about Ceaușescu’s exceptional and “multilateral” activity within the party cell of Doftana.<sup>95</sup> At a later time, the same newspaper described the visit of the presidential couple at the Doftana Museum, on 25 September 1986. The organization of this visit to Doftana represented another opportunity for the development of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s cult around the iconic image of the young revolutionary.<sup>96</sup>

The official version of this episode in Ceaușescu’s revolutionary biography is based on one authentic fact (his detention in Doftana), but it omits several disturbing elements (his true position within the party cell), exaggerates his role by overlooking the existence of other characters (Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and others) and credits him with the initiative of preparing important revolutionary actions (for example, the collective inmate protests).

On 8 December 1938, Nicolae Ceaușescu left Doftana. The party entrusted him with two main tasks: the reorganization of the Union of Communist Youth and the continuation of the “revolutionary” activity within the workers’ associations.<sup>97</sup>

## 8. May Day, 1939

**T**HE WORKERS' rally on May Day 1939 was another event used by the propaganda apparatus to complete Nicolae Ceaușescu's portrayal as a young revolutionary. In 1939, May Day celebrations were to coincide with the first congress of the workers' associations. The event was organized under royal patronage at the initiative of Mihail Ralea, the labor minister. This congress was to be followed by the workers' public demonstration<sup>98</sup> in support of the monarch and his regime.<sup>99</sup>

The tactic of the RCP was to turn the workers' manifestation organized by the royal administration into an antifascist one. Thus, the party entrusted this task to a conspiratorial party commission composed of the best communist militants, people like Ilie Pintilie, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Constantin David, and A. Iliescu.<sup>100</sup> It had to prepare the rally on behalf of the RCP and organize meetings with workers, intellectuals, and students.<sup>101</sup>

At the end of the first congress of the workers' associations,<sup>102</sup> the participants and other inhabitants of Bucharest took part in a rally in front of the Royal Palace.<sup>103</sup> When the king appeared at the balcony in order to receive the ovations of the guilds, twenty thousand people started shouting slogans of the RCP: "Down with Fascism!," "Down with War!," "We want a Free and Independent Romania!"<sup>104</sup>

The importance of this episode in Nicolae Ceaușescu's revolutionary biography is emphasized by the organization of commemorative activities celebrating 45 and respectively 50 years since the workers' rally of May Day, 1939.

In 1984, the celebration of May Day 1939 included one major event. On 28 April 1984, the Romanian Athenaeum hosted a national scientific conference on "The Position of the RCP regarding the Historical Significance of the Unity of Action of the Working Class, of All Progressive Forces in the Battle against Fascism and War, for the Victory of the Revolution and the Construction of Socialism. The Position of Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu regarding the Fundamental Role of the Unity of the Democratic, Anti-imperialist Forces in the Struggle for Progress and Civilization, in Defense of the Independence, the Freedom, and the Life of the People." The subjects of the papers presented during this conference included the contribution of the RCP to the accomplishment of the unity of the working class in the anti-fascist struggle, as well as Nicolae Ceaușescu's contribution in this respect in the context of the workers' manifestation of May Day 1939.<sup>105</sup>

In 1989, the festivities were diversified so as to include various events: debates,<sup>106</sup> exhibitions of books,<sup>107</sup> of documentary photos,<sup>108</sup> art exhibitions,<sup>109</sup> documentary films,<sup>110</sup> a national scientific conference organized on 26 April 1989 and entitled "The Historical Significance of the Patriotic, Antifascist and Antiwar De-

monstration of May 1, 1939, the Decisive Contribution of Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and Comrade Elena Ceaușescu in Its Organization. The Heroic Revolutionary Activity of Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu Dedicated to the Party and the People, to the Triumph of Socialism and Communism in Romania.<sup>111</sup> Similar events were organized in Beijing, Berlin, Ulan Bator, Hanoi, Madrid, and Moscow.<sup>112</sup> The official program dedicated to the anniversary of May Day 1939 also included a festive assembly in the Great Hall of the Republic Palace in Bucharest,<sup>113</sup> plus a new exhibition of photographs, documents, and books opened on 30 April 1989 at Dalles Hall in Bucharest.<sup>114</sup>

Pavel Câmpeanu explained the circumstances and the purpose of this rally. He confirmed that the rally took place on May Day 1939 and that it was one of the biggest manifestations of this type in the interwar period. The royal apparatus organized it, and it was meant to gain popularity for the Crown. The same author mentioned that during the preparations for this rally and during the actual event, he personally did not see Ceaușescu at all. He concluded that the future Romanian leader was neither the organizer of this mass action as the RCP representative, nor one of the few communist militants participating in this popular rally.<sup>115</sup>

In my opinion, the May Day 1939 rally completes the representation of Nicolae Ceaușescu as a young revolutionary by ascribing him an important role in changing the character of this event (turning the workers' manifestation organized by the royal apparatus into an antifascist one). He did not do this alone, but with the help of the party commission and following the party line.

From our point of view, the significance attached to Nicolae Ceaușescu's participation in the preliminary activities of this meeting is also very important. Thus, his nomination to the party commission was considered an official recognition of his revolutionary achievements and merits and a guarantee of the success of the communist action.<sup>116</sup>

The official interpretation on this event only sporadically mentions the party commission and ascribes a significant role to the future presidential couple in preparing the May Day 1939 rally.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, the existence of the party commission is exclusively related to the activity of Nicolae Ceaușescu. This organizational framework and Ceaușescu's central role give him an opportunity to demonstrate his exceptional qualities and his revolutionary enthusiasm. The other members of the party commission are barely mentioned in the press articles and in the books devoted to this event.<sup>118</sup>

Ceaușescu's success, reflected by the major consequences of the demonstration and by the international echoes of this event,<sup>119</sup> comes to demonstrate the growing influence of the RCP within the working class,<sup>120</sup> the establishment of the unity of action between the two parties of the working class (the Social Democratic



Party and the RCP)<sup>121</sup> and the intensification of the antifascist activity within the militant associations of the Social Democratic Party and of the RCP.<sup>122</sup>

In my opinion, the falsification of this event must be included in the general strategy of the “nationalization” of the RCP image and of its interwar history, especially after the first signs of a Romanian-Soviet conflict began to appear in the early 1960s. Banking on its image as a defender of the major aspirations for national independence, sovereignty and unity, in the conflict with its main ideological enemy, fascism, the RCP (RWP) sought to make its way into Romanian history. Thus, the so-called involvement of the RCP in turning the May Day 1939 rally into an action of protest against fascism and its Romanian agents (the royal regime and the Iron Guard) is a relevant example of this “national” strategy of the RCP and of the need to hide its interwar political and revolutionary insignificance. The 1 May 1939 rally is also an example of the manipulation of an event for the purpose of legitimizing the communist rule in Romania by invoking one of the main episodes of the RCP ceaseless struggle against the old political regime and against fascism.<sup>123</sup>

The introduction of this May 1939 meeting in the revolutionary biography of Nicolae Ceaușescu bears a connection with my previous considerations related to the RCP. His participation in this event is used, on the one hand, to demonstrate his exceptional qualities and his unusual revolutionary enthusiasm, which recommended him as a future leader. On the other hand, the nature of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s action, namely, its antifascist and implicitly national character, represents a prologue to and the beginning of his future actions as a defender of national independence and territorial integrity.

## 9. Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Contribution to the Reorganization of the Union of Communist Youth

**I**N THE summer of 1939, between 26 June and 26 July, Nicolae Ceaușescu attended the classes of the first party school set up in a secret house in Ploiești, where courses were taught by Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and other party leaders.<sup>124</sup> After his graduation, Nicolae Ceaușescu led the Central Commission for the reorganization of the UCY. The Conference for the reorganization of the UCY took place in Bucharest, in October 1939, in a secret house on Giurgiu Street. Nicolae Ceaușescu presented a report on the reorganization of the UCY. Other delegates analyzed the national and international political situation. The conference established an activity plan, defined the main tasks of the UCY, and elected the first Central Committee of the UCY, composed of Miron Constantinescu, Constanța

Crăciun, Stere Nichifor, Alexandru Demeter, etc. Nicolae Ceaușescu was elected UCY secretary<sup>125</sup> or, according to other opinions, he was a member of the Central Committee Secretariat of the UCY.<sup>126</sup>

The Romanian police arrested Nicolae Ceaușescu on 27 May 1939 and released him for lack of sufficient evidence. Soon afterwards, the same authorities decided to place him under arrest and prosecute him under the charge of “communist agitation.”<sup>127</sup> Thus, the young Ceaușescu continued with the reorganization of the regional and county committees of the UCY in various parts of the country as a hunted man.<sup>128</sup>

Because the police could not find him, he was tried in absence. The Second Army Corps Court of Bucharest sentenced him to 3 years in prison and a fine of 20,000 lei. The police caught Ceaușescu on 29 July 1940 while he was preparing a demonstration against the war. He was sent to jail and forced to carry out the sentence passed against him in his absence.<sup>129</sup>

Nicolae Ceaușescu’s contribution to the reorganization of the UCY was also the subject of several commemorative events, namely, two scientific conferences organized in 1979<sup>130</sup> and 1982,<sup>131</sup> respectively.

Without offering any additional information on this subject, Vladimir Tismăneanu mentions that Miron Constantinescu, and not Nicolae Ceaușescu, was in fact the leader of the group entrusted with the task of reorganizing the UCY.<sup>132</sup>

## 10. The Detention in Jilava, Caransebeș and Târgu-Jiu

**N**ICOLAE CEAUȘESCU was imprisoned in Jilava (August 1940–20 February 1942), in Caransebeș (21 February–21 July 1943), and Târgu-Jiu (19 August 1943–4 August 1944).<sup>133</sup> The information related to this period in Ceaușescu’s biography is rather general and only mentions his contribution to the reorganization of the party cells in prisons (for example, that of Caransebeș) and to the improvement of his educational and ideological activities.<sup>134</sup>

Several observations can be made about the way in which the official discourse on this period is structured. Nicolae Ceaușescu is the only character mentioned by name within the community of the communist militants kept in the above-mentioned prisons (including, among others, Gheorghiu-Dej himself).<sup>135</sup> The second observation is related to Ceaușescu’s organizational activity in these prisons. Pavel Câmpeanu offers a detailed description of the community of communist detainees in Caransebeș, showing that the future Romanian leader found in this prison a well-organized communist group and that there was no need for further organization.<sup>136</sup> The same author paints a moral and physical

portrait of the young Ceaușescu that contradicts the romantic and exceptional image created for Ceaușescu by the official propaganda.<sup>137</sup>

A special episode in Ceaușescu's period of detention took place in Jilava prison. On 26–27 September 1940, a group of Iron Guard members broke into Jilava and killed most of the dignitaries of the former regime who had previously opposed their movement, but when the murderers reached the communists' cells, the soldiers protected these prisoners. The salvation of the communist militants was considered the result of Ceaușescu's dialogue with the army guards of that prison.<sup>138</sup>

In my opinion, there is little chance that the salvation of the communist militants was the result of Ceaușescu's initiative to win over the military guards. In the first place, if indeed he had really tried to have discussions with the guards on ideological matters, it would have been very difficult for him to discuss them with all of the guards in such a short period of time (a month and a few days). Then, it was unlikely for a political communist prisoner to try and have a conversation with a guard, the representative of an oppressive system against which he fought and whose victim he was. Second, the Iron Guards entered Jilava to kill the former politicians who had opposed the Iron Guard. Thus, this Iron Guard's action was merely an act of revenge against these former dignitaries.<sup>139</sup> Admitting that the Iron Guards had tried to kill the communist militants in Jilava, the intervention of the prison guards was a normal reaction. The task of the guards in any prison is to maintain order inside the jail and to guard the detainees until they complete their sentence.

Mary Ellen Fischer does not exclude the possibility that Ceaușescu actually managed to establish a certain relationship with the guards, but she finds other possible explanations for the Iron Guard's sparing the communists imprisoned at Jilava: the Guard members had already quenched their thirst for blood and/or the soldiers managed to fight them off as the violence neared the communist prisoners.<sup>140</sup>

## 11. After 23 August 1944

**A**FTER 23 August 1944, Nicolae Ceaușescu was appointed secretary general of the UCY,<sup>141</sup> and in October 1945 the National Conference of the RCP elected him member of the Party's Central Committee.<sup>142</sup>

Pavel Câmpeanu offers some pieces of information related to the real activity of the future Romanian leader after his release from the Târgu-Jiu camp. The author mentions that the RCP did not appoint Nicolae Ceaușescu as secretary general of the UCY. In fact, the party decided that a collective body, the

Secretariat of the UCY Central Committee, should form the leadership of this organization. The Secretariat of the UCY included Ceaușescu among its members. After a few months, another organization, The Progressive Youth, replaced the UCY. Its secretary general was not Ceaușescu, but a young intellectual, Călin Popovici. Câmpeanu adds that Ceaușescu's election to the Party's Central Committee was an unexpected fact: the candidate for this position, also a shoemaker, had decided to back out.<sup>143</sup>

In conclusion, the official interpretation of these last two episodes in Ceaușescu's revolutionary biography (the detention periods, his activity after August 1944) is based on a real situation. The presentation of this period in Ceaușescu's life omits several details (his secondary position within the party cells in prison, the fact that he was not appointed leader of the UCY) that would have cast doubts over his exceptional qualities as a potential leader and especially over the official recognition of his revolutionary work. It also tries to present from a different point of view the nature of Ceaușescu's activity during the detention period (his exaggerated role in reorganizing the party cells and his alleged political and ideological activity).

## 12. Nicolae Ceaușescu's Portrayal As a Young Revolutionary: Sources and Methods

**T**HE FABRICATED character of Nicolae Ceaușescu's revolutionary biography is based on a pattern. The official hagiography usually omits certain unfavorable details (such as the fact that he was never appointed leader of the UCY). Thus, it embellishes some aspects of Ceaușescu's activity (for example, during the detention periods, or especially the Jilava episode of September 1940) or even erroneously ascribes to him the organization of certain actions (the organization of the May Day 1939 rally).

I also notice an obvious tendency to present several events related to the inter-war history of the RCP (the Craiova trial or the 1933 one of the railway and oilfield workers) from Ceaușescu's point of view, in order to individualize him and to confirm his exceptional qualities. The propensity towards giving Nicolae Ceaușescu the main role during an event is demonstrated by the failure to mention the real RCP leaders and the other communist militants imprisoned with him. The exception are those militants whose testimonies can contribute to the laudatory outlining of Nicolae Ceaușescu's portrait as a remarkable young revolutionary. The RCP has a double role in his biography. Firstly, the RCP was the supreme instance legitimating his revolutionary actions and the reasons behind his deeds. Secondly, the RCP offered young Ceaușescu a flexible institutional framework (for

example, the UCY, the NAC, etc.) that stimulated and demonstrated his exceptional native qualities in extreme situations.

In my opinion, Nicolae Ceaușescu's portrayal as a young revolutionary is exclusively done from an indirect perspective. This perspective is exemplified by several elements: 1) various types of articles/books regarding Nicolae Ceaușescu's past as an underground militant; 2) the structure of these materials; 3) seminars, exhibitions, debates having a commemorative function.

The articles on this subject can also be divided in several categories: a) articles regarding Ceaușescu's entire revolutionary youth<sup>144</sup>; b) articles on a specific topic (such as the Brașov trial<sup>145</sup> or the May Day 1939 rally<sup>146</sup>); c) articles about Nicolae Ceaușescu's periods of detention.<sup>147</sup>

The data related to Ceaușescu's revolutionary youth are included in books dealing with the history of the communist movement in Romania<sup>148</sup> and in the celebratory books.<sup>149</sup>

These articles and books contain the testimonies of various eyewitnesses to the events involving Ceaușescu (see for example, those of Petre Constantinescu-Iași<sup>150</sup> or Vasile Vilcu<sup>151</sup>), fragments from police reports<sup>152</sup> or prison guards' reports,<sup>153</sup> parts of articles published by the press of that time (see for example, Eugen Jbeleanu's article<sup>154</sup> or an article published in *Arena* and republished by *Scînteia*<sup>155</sup>). In my opinion, these documents are introduced in the respective articles or books in order to reinforce the veracity and the credibility of the information therein.

Nicolae Ceaușescu's revolutionary youth was also the subject of several literary productions. *Lucafărul* published between 1978 and 1980 a fragment of the play *Drumul* (The road) by Valentin Munteanu<sup>156</sup> and two fragments from the novel *Tineretea unui erou* (The youth of a hero) written by Petru Vintilă.<sup>157</sup> This novel was finally published in 1980,<sup>158</sup> and a fragment of it was included in a celebratory volume.<sup>159</sup> The same celebratory volume also included a part of Marin Preda's novel *Delirul* (The delirium), in which the biography of one character, Ionică, also a young underground militant, resembles that of Nicolae Ceaușescu.<sup>160</sup>

Not only the entire revolutionary biography of the Romanian leader became the subject of literary productions, but also some isolated events from it. For example, a small volume containing verses about the 1 May 1939 rally was published in 1989.<sup>161</sup>

In my opinion, the organization of several activities (such as seminars, scientific conferences, exhibitions, etc.) celebrating Ceaușescu's birthday or the passing of a significant number of years since an event was another opportunity for promoting and consolidating his cult. My conclusion is based on several elements, such as the title of these commemorative events, the laudatory content of the works presented and of the telegrams sent by the participants, the manner in which exhibitions and celebratory performances were organized.

Sorin Şerban mentions that a professional revolutionary distinguishes himself by his *special traits*.<sup>162</sup> Nicolae Ceauşescu also distinguishes himself from the rest of the communist militants through his dynamism: his “unusual energy, firmness, undaunted will to fight,” his “energy and revolutionary passion,” and his omnipresence. “Exceptional” was the appropriate word used to define Ceauşescu’s character: he “was a revelation from the beginning,” “an exceptionally gifted young man,” “an exceptional force organizing and mobilizing the masses.” His physical and intellectual qualities, also exceptional,<sup>163</sup> granted him a special position within the community of communist militants.<sup>164</sup>

### 13. Conclusion

**T**HE REVOLUTIONARY component of Nicolae Ceauşescu’s biography encompasses two main aspects, determined by the existence of a continuing celebration of his revolutionary activity. One is related to the image of Ceauşescu as a professional revolutionary, and the other to the representation of the communist leader as the architect of modern Romania, involved in theoretically and practically planning the material and the spiritual basis of the new socialist order, especially after 1965.

The main episodes in Nicolae Ceauşescu’s revolutionary biography include a mixture of omissions and fabrications. In my opinion, their fabricated character is meant, on the one hand, to conceal the insignificance of the Romanian leader’s revolutionary activity, and, on the other, to demonstrate the predestinated character of the momentous achievements of the future Leader, Nicolae Ceauşescu. □

### Notes

1. Mao Tse-tung, *Talks at the Chengtu Conference*, March 1958, [http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8\\_06.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_06.htm), accessed on 27 September 2006.
2. See for example, Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 162–163, 165; Roy Medvedev, *Despre Stalin și stalinism*, trans. (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991), 18–19; Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 61.
3. For more details, see Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 17–18.
4. See also Balázs Apor, “Leader in the Making: The Role of Biographies in Constructing the Cult of Mátyás Rákosi,” in Balázs Apor, ed., *The Leader Cult in Communist*

- Dictatorships: Stalin and the Eastern Bloc* (Houndmills–New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 72–76.
5. Leicester Coltman, *The Real Fidel Castro* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2003), 118 and Richard Weitz, “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Latin America 1960–80,” *Political Science Quarterly* 101, 3 (1986): 402.
  6. See Sorin Șerban, “Ilegaliștii,” in *Miturile comunismului românesc*, ed. Lucian Boia (Bucharest: Nemira, 1995), 133–136.
  7. Adrian Cioroianu, *Ce Ceaușescu qui hante les Roumains: Le mythe, les représentations et le culte du Dirigeant dans la Roumanie communiste*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, L’Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, 2005), 182–209.
  8. *Ibid.*, 36–38, 182.
  9. Mary Ellen Fischer, *Nicolae Ceaușescu: A Study in Political Leadership* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), 34.
  10. Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *The Ceaușescu Cult: Propaganda and Power Policy in Communist Romania* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 2000), 22.
  11. *Flacăra* 32, 4 (28 January 1983): 3.
  12. *Flacăra* 37, 4 (29 January 1988): 7.
  13. See, for example, “Mesajul Comitetului Central al Partidului Comunist Român, Consiliului de Stat și Guvernului Republicii Socialiste România,” *Flacăra* 32, 4 (28 January 1983): 2; “Scrisoarea omagială a Comitetului Politic Executiv al Partidului Comunist Român, Consiliului de Stat și Guvernului Republicii Socialiste România,” *Flacăra* 36, 5 (30 January 1987): 2–3; “Mesajul de felicitare adresat tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu de Comitetul Central al Partidului Comunist Român, Consiliul de Stat, Guvernul Republicii Socialiste România, Marea Adunare Națională și Frontul Democrației și Unității Socialiste,” *Flacăra* 37, 4 (29 January 1988): 6–7; “Mesajul de felicitare al Uniunii Scriitorilor din Republica Socialistă România,” *România literară* 16, 4 (26 January 1983): 1.
  14. Virgil Mocanu, “Omagiul artiștilor,” *România literară* 20, 5 (29 January 1987): 18; *id.*, “Efigii,” *România literară* 21, 4 (21 January 1988): 18.
  15. “Omagiu cîrmaciului națiunii noastre,” *Flacăra* 27, 6 (9 February 1978): 3.
  16. Horia Pătrașcu, “Biografia exemplară a unui om exemplar,” *Flacăra* 32, 5 (4 February 1983): 2.
  17. For details and examples, see *Scînteia* 51, 12258 (21 January 1982): 5; 12259 (22 January 1982): 4; 12261 (24 January 1982): 7; 12262 (26 January 1982): 4; *Scînteia* 55, 13507 (26 January 1986): 6; *Scînteia* 58, 14442 (25 January 1989): 2; *Scînteia* 58, 14443 (26 January 1989): 4.
  18. Michel-P. Hamelet, *Nicolae Ceaușescu: Biografie și texte selectate* (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1971), 9.
  19. “Fiu al poporului român,” *România literară* 15, 4 (21 January 1982): 1.
  20. E. Dumitru, “Tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu împreună cu tovarășa Elena Ceaușescu au făcut o vizită în comuna Scornicești, cu prilejul împlinirii a 400 de ani de atestare documentară a localității,” *Flacăra* 28, 39 (27 September 1979): 2–3; Lucian Avramescu, “Scornicești, un sat în lumina istoriei,” *România literară* 12, 39 (27 September 1979): 12.

21. Ilie Purcaru, “La Scornicești, în satul natal al tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu ‘Conducător, sătean și tovarăș: așa îl știm spre bucuria și spre mândria noastră,’” *Flacăra* 27, 3 (19 January 1978): 5.
22. Gabanyi, 163–168.
23. Șerban, 136–137.
24. *București—Omagiu marelui erou* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1988), 37.
25. Purcaru, “La Scornicești,” 5.
26. Șerban, 137–138.
27. Hamlet, 10–11; *Omagiu tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu, secretar general al PCR, președintele Consiliului de stat al RSR* (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1973), 10.
28. Purcaru, “La Scornicești,” 5.
29. John Sweeney, *The Life and Evil Times of Nicolae Ceaușescu* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), 13.
30. Pavel Câmpeanu characterizes Nicolae Ceaușescu as follows: “Because of this handicap [his incapacity of learning a trade, as well as the Romanian language], his natural and remarkable intelligence would operate in different domains not with proper knowledge, but with rudiments.” Pavel Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, anii număratorii inverse* (Jassy: Polirom, 2002), 24.
31. Purcaru, “La Scornicești,” 5. *Omagiu tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu*, 10.
32. Vasile Băran, “Nicolae Ceaușescu—o biografie eroică,” *România literară* 16, 3 (20 January 1993): 12.
33. Hamlet, 13.
34. Ibid.
35. *București—Omagiu marelui erou*, 38.
36. *Omagiu tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu*, 10.
37. Șerban, 139–140.
38. Augustin Deac, “Constituirea și activitatea Comitetului Național Antifascist,” in *Comitetul Național Antifascist Român* (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1985), 138–139.
39. Stelian Neagoe and Silviu Achim, “Moment memorabil al luptei poporului, condus de partid, pentru democrație și pace, pentru apărarea libertății și integrității patriei,” *Scînteia* 52, 12697 (19 June 1983): 2.
40. Deac, 41; Câmpeanu, 34.
41. Băran, 12.
42. For example, Cristian Popișteanu, “Comitetul Național Antifascist Român,” *România literară* 19, 4 (23 January 1986): 8. The same testimonies are also cited by Deac, 140–141.
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44. Olimpiu Matichescu, *Tinerețea revoluționară a tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu: Exemplul eroic al luptătorului neînfricat pentru triumful idealurilor comuniste* (Bucharest: Scînteia Tineretului, 1981), 4.
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  47. Deac, 141.
  48. Constantin Petculescu, “Comitetele naționale antifasciste ale tineretului și femeilor, organizații de acțiune și luptă contra pericolului fascist,” in *Comitetul Național Antifascist Român*, 213–214.
  49. Băran, 12; *București—Omagiu marelui erou*, 38.
  50. Ion Ardeleanu, “O activitate eroică, patriotică, revoluționară,” *România literară* 21, 4 (21 January 1988): 12.
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  52. Câmpeanu, 33.
  53. Ion Spălățelu, *Izbînzi prin veacuri: Comuniștii—o istorie trăită* (Craiova: Scrisul Românesc, 1981), 80.
  54. Neagoe and Achim, 2.
  55. *București—Omagiu marelui erou*, 38.
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  57. Lavinia Betea, *Maurer și lumea de ieri: Mărturii despre stalinizarea României* (Arad: Ioan Slavici, 1995), 171.
  58. ISISP Archive, collection no. VII, file no. 1801, folder no. 21, apud Florea Dragne and Ioan Scurtu, *Culegere de texte privind istoria mișcării muncitorești din România* (Bucharest: Ed. Didactică și Pedagogică, 1981), 119.
  59. Hamlet, 18.
  60. *București—Omagiu marelui erou*, 38; Neagoe and Achim, 2.
  61. Hamlet, 19.
  62. Petre Constantinescu-Iași, *Pagini de luptă din trecut* (Bucharest: Ed. Politică, 1972), 280.
  63. Ibid.
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  65. *Nicolae Ceaușescu: Builder of Modern Romania and International Statesman* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1983), 29.
  66. Hamlet, 22.
  67. Mircea Mușat, “50 de ani de la procesul militanților comuniști și antifasciști de la Brașov: Înalț patriotism, responsabilă maturitate față de viitorul națiunii noastre,” *România literară* 19, 23 (5 June 1986): 12.
  68. Emil Poenaru, “Procesul de la Brașov din 1936—o aleasă pagină din lupta revoluționară a tineretului comunist român,” *Anale de istorie* 32, 3 (1986): 39–40.
  69. Câmpeanu, 28–29.

70. Ilie Purcaru, "Un tânăr curajos vorbea în numele viitorului," *Flacăra* 35, 21 (23 May 1986): 7; Poenaru, 48; Câmpeanu, 29.
71. Nicolae Ceaușescu: *Builder of Modern Romania*, 30.
72. Ion Ardeleanu, ed., "Cuvântul liber": *În apărarea independenței și integrității României* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1982), 650–652.
73. Fischer, 275.
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75. Hamlet, 26.
76. "Am înțeles că nu ne apărăm pe noi, ci partidul, idealul comunist," *Scînteia* 50, 12055 (27 May 1981): 3 and Maticescu, *Tinerețea revoluționară*, 19, 21.
77. "Momente memorabile ale unui drum eroic de lupte și victorii. Sub conducerea PCR—ampla și viguroasă mișcare antifascistă: Simpozion consacrat împlinirii a 45 de ani de la procesul militanților comuniști și antifasciști de la Brașov," *Scînteia* 50, 12054 (26 May 1981): 4.
78. N. Mocanu, "Manifestări evocatoare," *Scînteia* 50, 12054 (26 May 1981): 4.
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92. “Doftana—înalță școală de educație revoluționară: Eroica activitate a partidului, a tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu în slujba cauzei libertății și demnității poporului, a independenței și suveranității patriei,” *Scînteia* 55, 13678 (14 August 1986): 3.
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### Abstract

The Myth of the Young Revolutionary: The Case of Nicolae Ceaușescu

Despite the normal differences generated by local conditions, the dictators' official biographies display a common, general feature that explains the deliberate proliferation of biographical pieces of information: the personal need to legitimate their exceptional power positions by highlighting their extraordinary past achievements. The present study investigates the components of the myth built around the figure of the alleged young revolutionary Nicolae Ceaușescu, from the mystical significance of his birthdate and birthplace to the exceptional qualities and achievements of his youth, and from his alleged anti-fascist and militant activities to his persecution by the bourgeois regime.

### Keywords

Nicolae Ceaușescu, political myth, cult of personality, revolutionary youth, communism