Controlling high culture and public sphere from Romania during the state communism – general description and minority aspects

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My research on state-communist censorship has two major aims: description of controlling mechanisms for the above-mentioned period, and revealing its minority aspects. In other words, completing the less documented history of the phenomenon and analyzing how was control operating in the ethnic Hungarian cultural field.

In lack of a an over compassing study, describing basic systemic features of state-communist censorship, a few important features of control mechanisms should be revealed; such enterprise in now completed by defining major aims for my thesis and a short overview of each chapter.

In accordance with the official documents, institutions of censorship are subordinated to the Communist Party, having its main task to guide, how cultural products and public sphere are adjusted to the official party ideologies. Subsequently, institutions of control usually look like birocratic machines, a mere follower of prescribed rules given by a superior forum. It is so, because censorship is just part of a matrix of power made of a many elements. „Capturing" the Writers' Union during the 1980ies by its protocronist wing that blocked publishing cultural productions of many, sultanism of party birocrats had nothing to do with censorship as such, though these were responsible for reducing liberty of expression and speech. Lacking sufficient data to understand a depict such complex of power, my work reveals but fragmentally restrictions and limitations state socialism operates with in order to subordinate millions of citizens. Thus, instead of culture consumption, institutions of control and techniques of the ethnic Hungarian elites to outwit it are foci for this research.

First chapter, on communism and anthropology of communism tends to underline, how duplicity was embedded in state communist systems, making possible transgressing censorship, elite's negotiations with censors. Subchapter on intellectuals and communism tries to reveal, that certain aspects of intellectual habitus, such as resistance against the communist regime, or marginalization after 1989, are but part of self-perception, instead of analytical categories. Chapter two is a stock-taking of the most important theories on ethnicity, nationalism, identity. Intentions of stressing on anthropological approaches, stating contextuality of ethnicity and identity, claim of nationalisms to „create" ethno-national groups, tried to provide a relevant framework for analyzing minority aspects of censorship.

One subchapter on identity also analyzes its relation to the cultural field, conceptualized through Bourdieu's works: according to such post-structuralist approach, it is a totality of hierarchical positions, similarly to the social structure, conferred to authors by artistic products they create.

Three chapters are dedicated to describe the Hungarian cultural elite: interwar period with its dominant discourse on transilvanism, 1960ies and 1970ies as competition between esthetical and nationalist views and symbolical resources, 1980ies, dominated by the assimilation politics of the Ceauşescu system. This part ends with "moment of 1989", creation of the Hungarian Democratic Alliance that turned intellectuals outwitting the censors into political leaders for a few years. Describing transition meant to reveal, how symbolical and cultural capital conferred during state communism was converted into political one.

Description of censorship is the subject of the next chapters. Institution of control, The General Directorate of Press and Printing, is presented here through the existing literature, as well as through personal collection and proceeding of archive materials, completed by institutional fragilities and efficiencies of control are presented. Through a case-study on controlling press during the 1960ies, minority aspects of censorship are followed: similarities and differences in interventions on Romanian and Hungarian daily newspapers from Oradea. In doing so, I tried to enlist what topics were forbidden to the minority group. In lack of archive materials, censorship of the 1980ies is reconstructed through case studies on controlling the Philharmonics from Oradea, and the two sections (Romanian and Hungarian) of the local theater. In order to understand minority aspects of censorship, presentation and restrictions applied to two (a Hungarian and a Romanian one) are analyzed; in case of the Philharmonics their presence on the international scene, relations to foreign musicians and the way these were controlled by the state. Main conclusion of these chapters is the contextuality of ethnicity and national identity: although some general restrictions were invented to marginalize the Hungarian institutions, language and cultural rights, presence of Hungarian-ness in the communist public sphere, minority condition was not a totalistic one: in some cases it was evidently an inferior condition, in other cases it was not.

Abstract

Evoking moments of the Romanian censorship during state communism, and revealing its minority aspects are the twofold aims for this work. Description of controing mechanisms is based on two sources: existent scholarly production (for the 1940s and 1950s), as well as first-hand collected archive materials and conducted interviews (for the 1960s and 1980s). These data are put together, in order to underpin duplicity in mechanisms of control, its systemic efficiencies and inefficiencies. Beside a stock-tacking and analysis of the most relevant cleavages in the Hungarian cultural field from Romania, case studies on censoring different Hungarian cultural institutions are also sub-chapters of this thesis.

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