

# Books, Libraries, Reading & Publishing in the **COLD WAR**

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# Library Secret Fonds and the Competition of Societies

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The competition between the socialist/Communist social system and the capitalist social system elicited a need for secrecy. This ideological battle took place during the Cold War, which is conceptually defined as “the *unarmed* development of a competition between antagonistic social systems” where the goal is to “suppress” or “liquidate” the competition. This organized secrecy played a part in structuring life within each of these systems. The secret collections in Romanian libraries consisting of banned books contributed directly to this secrecy. Library secret fonds were used to control the circulation of information within a system or throughout other systems. These prohibited materials were withdrawn from circulation and kept confidential. Libraries kept lists of these fonds separate from the regular collection, and these lists were kept and updated throughout the years. During the Communist regime in Romania, the lists of forbidden books were considered “an efficient instrument for the political struggles from the inside of the Communist party.” Library secret fonds are a symbol of the antagonism between the two political systems of the Cold War.

In this essay I intend to analyze, using Romania as an example, the secret fonds as specific products of the societies of real socialism founded—by project and from the beginning—in competition with capitalism and with Western democracies.

When they use the term “Cold War,” historians mean quite different periods, processes, and events. I will not debate their theories. I am interested in the *conceptual essence* of this term. I will try to define it in view of finding the extent to which it is able to present the internal and external structuring generated by competitive relationships between two antagonistic social systems.

As an expression, “Cold War” defines in its conceptual meaning the unarmed development of a competition between antagonistic social systems, that is, a competition where the permanent and essential stake

has been and has remained an expectation of suppressing and liquidating the competitive partner. Though this competition was structured and restructured in various manners and intensity in space and time, the stake, that is, the prospective objective of one system's liquidation by the other one, has still remained unaltered in its essence.

When speaking of social systems, I do not refer to a certain number of countries and states but instead make reference to projects of social organization that are put into practice in such a way that, in their structuring, the tendentious articulation of their relationship with a competitive partner defined by ideology and perception is fixed. From the first country, and simultaneously with the victory of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, socialism was set up with the view of liquidating capitalist society's injustice throughout the globe. Additionally, the last countries that have remained bastions of the socialist regime cannot renounce their global judgment on the nature of the capitalist system. For this reason, the relation is, on the one hand, interiorized and, on the other, exteriorized by actions, ideologies, and perceptions arranged in a definite way by the relation's nature itself as well as by the conjuncture politics of "administering" conflictual matters. The main elements of this structuring are perception of the self, perception of the competitive partner (enemy), and perception of the competition's determined situations. The same structure yields "glissando" but in a different direction, both toward the inside and toward the outside. And the competition's results, as we can see it nowadays, when the Soviet block has disintegrated, are not decided, in fact, as depending on given situations but on the ability of the two systems to have integration, during historical and situational oscillations, the essential stake itself of the competition. That is, depending on the extent to which they could or could not integrate on all levels (economic, political, ideological, and so on each time), they could be subjected to this essential stake. Although, for example, the politics of "peaceful coexistence" between systems seemed to succeed in its ideological integration (by "delay")<sup>1</sup> and, to a certain extent, on the plan of external politics (by "realism"), the countries of real socialism failed in the economic integration of the stake. And renouncing partially the stake under the form of Gorbachev, *glasnost* and *perestroika* have rapidly resulted in the block's integration and, in fact, in its disappearance.

Toward the inside, the same structure of perceptions is directed to avoidance and disconnection of system crises. For the West, this matter became evident during the crisis of 1929, which, together with problems inherited as a result of the First World War and together with competition from the U.S.S.R., resulted in unleashing the Second World War. For the U.S.S.R., the problem of its own system's

crises is raised concomitantly with the NEP (Novaia Economiceskaia Politika) politics, being afterward strongly ideologized and occulted.

Library secret fonds, as the characteristic library fonds of a socialist system, are connected to all elements and all directions of the structure of competition between systems. They carry out and determine the perception of the self, that of the enemy and the conjunctural perception of the competition's "state," both for the internal construction and for the external relationships and oppositions of the system. They are tools and means of controlling the circulation of information, on the one hand, in the inside of the system and, on the other hand, between the systems. So they are, under the conditions of the Cold War, instruments of ideological struggle, of propaganda, and of ideas, that is, the very essential means of achieving a competition between systems.

But beyond their purely competitive nature, library secret fonds are connected, ontologically speaking, to another principle that, in its turn, occupies a specific place and role in building the global reach of the socialist system. In question is the principle of the secret's category, which has acquired such a central and essential role in the internal structuring and relationship of real socialist society, that it cannot be found anywhere but in history?

## **Secret and Socialism**

The specific place occupied by the category of secret in structuring the global reach of real socialism has deep roots in the history of the Communist movement itself. Almost all Communist parties that have emerged as being the dominant political force in a socialist country have had a period of illegality in their history. Illegality, for a political movement, means a secret organization and a proper contact, organizational and practical, with the category of secret.

Emerging as victorious, arriving with or without external aid, at power, and legal as well, the Communist parties resuscitate the accumulated experience of their contacts with the category of secret. All this is done under the form of a competition and under that of an inclination toward its utilization. They have characterized and accompanied all Communist parties, along all the road covered by their domination and in all countries in which they have been or are in power.

Communist parties pass through the experience of their contact with the category of the secret, having at their basis a certain particular ideology as well. This ideology, the Marxist-Leninist one, is totalitarian in essence, aiming, on the one hand, at the liquidation

of social relationships of the capitalist system and, on the other hand, at assuring an "aware" control of all spheres of social life. This is supposed to build a state party that disposes of all means for controlling the society conceived as an indivisible integer, found in a historical competition.

Binding themselves in a total restructuring of political, economic, administrative, and cultural entities of the societies they dominated, Communist parties were able to utilize the category of secret, and the proceedings of concealment, in an extremely extended and varied way. From secret policies and political processes conceived and conducted in secret, to the system of generalized denouncement of the hypertrophied system of state secrets, to the complicated mechanisms needed to maintain the function of these secrets, Communist parties proved competent in and an uncommon inclination for the utilization of the secret.

The engagement of the category of secret in structuring a social globalism induces, however, at the same time, a typical fixation in the categorial organization of the secret itself. So in spite of the utilitarian, surprising variety of secrets, in the countries of real socialism a systemic tendency of these societies exists in order that, within them, the typically characteristic and dominant form should become state secret. This tendency is explained not only by the preponderance of state properties but, rather, by the preponderance of the part played by the socialist state as a source of absolute subjective right in organizing and controlling social life.

The tendency of state secret to become a dominant and, later on, the uniquely recognized form of secret in socialist society may be very clearly demonstrated by following the progress of Romanian legislation. It shows very clearly, both in special legislation and in the more applicative zones of the *Criminal Code*, that the direction of all forms of the secret, legally recognized in society (for example, also the professional secrets, those of service), should become something other than parts of state secret. The latter term came to cover the entire sphere of all nondestined data from the beginning of publicity. All that is not destined for publicity from the beginning becomes the secret that directly interests the Romanian socialist state.

This Communist legislation—in this particular case, the Romanian one—has opened the category of the secret toward the horizon of a proliferation, inconceivable under other conditions, and, at the same time, the sense itself of the legislation that, instead of settling secrets with regard to their content's spheres, becomes a means of assuring their defense. In other words, this legislation is not, in its essence, something other than the public interdiction form of state secret itself.

I do not have sufficient space to analyze the evolution of this legislation. I have done so on another occasion.<sup>2</sup> It is very important, however, for the theme of my discussion to emphasize that the tendency is to proliferate, clearly totalizing the state secret as a typical form of secret in socialism, perfectly covering the period 1953–68, during which the legislation had an important role in avoiding a de-Stalinization in Romania. Then, passing through the cardinal points 1969, 1971, 1973, and 1976–77, this legislation accompanies—as a dark alter ego—the so-called politics of peaceful coexistence between systems as well as Romania’s approach to the movement of nonaligned countries presented as an apparent alternative to the “politics of blocs.” It is the same legislation that, on the one hand, paves the way for emphasizing the non-Stalinist tendencies that dominated Romanian politics and life at the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s.

The more the system seems to appear “toward outside,” so much the more in reality it shrinks in the secret, that is, in the secret that is proper to it and congenital. It regulates both the external and the internal relationships of the system.

### **Romanian Libraries’ Secret Fonds**

By library secret fonds, I mean the library fonds constituted as a result of the secret interdictions of publications. Functioning and administration of such fonds also supposes the building of a multi-level secret structure by which such interdictions are applied and preserved.

In Romania they appeared through a discrete and gradual process together with the Sovietization of the country. This fact justifies the hypothesis that the “practice” of the library secret fond was actually born long before in the crucibles of cultural politics and libraries in the U.S.S.R., being then instrumentalized in all countries under Soviet influence. Having, however, insufficient information on the birth of library secret fonds, I will concentrate on their analysis in Romania.

The above-given definition of secret fonds has to be maintained as a rule for both interpretation and utilization of the term. They are a product formed and articulated not only during time but also in a more discreet, maybe even ingenious way and, therefore, possibly a misleading one.

In Romania and, perhaps, in the other former Communist countries of Europe, library secret fonds appeared in the foundations of some fonds of interdicted publications. These fonds had been constituted on

the basis of Article 16 of the Armistice Convention signed between the Romanian government and the governments of the United Nations on 12 September 1944. As a result, by a decree signed by King Michael I on 4 May 1945, the publications printed in Romania between January 1917 and August 1944, containing Iron Guardist, fascist, Hitlerist, chauvinistic, and racist ideas, were interdicted. The libraries had to withdraw these publications from circulation, store them, and make their separate inventory. To consult them it was necessary to obtain a special approval from the head librarian, and they could be viewed only in the library.

Until 1949 several lists appear consecutively, the most sizable that of 1948, having about five hundred pages. But what is characteristic, however, of these prohibitive lists is the fact that they are entirely documents of public settlement, specifying the criteria of their being made up but also the sanctions brought about by their being encroached upon. But in 1949, a new volume of lists appeared, entitled "Undiffusible Publications," which, unlike the public character of the previous lists, became "of internal circulation," advising in its foreword that the withdrawal of publications from circulation should be made "tactfully and with discretion."

In 1949 the interdiction became of "internal use," and the operation of withdrawing publications became a discreet and confidential act. Obviously, the application of such interdictions supposes setting up a confidential administrative network as well, that is, creation within the framework of the librarians' professional community of a group based on criteria of confidence and devotion.

The creation of this ideological and administrative apparatus, as well as the withdrawal operation, lasted years. The list no longer referred to publications of the extreme right, but it included, on the basis of the Stalinist theory of internal and external intensification of the struggles between antagonistic social classes and systems, any "reactionary," "directly or indirectly hostile" publication.

In parallel with and as a result of the 1953 modification of the legislation regarding state secret, in 1955 a new list appeared by which professional secrets in the working place were assimilated, at a lower degree, to state secret. It no longer contained either justifications or instructions, since the confidential mechanism of application was already well known. The content of this list aimed mainly at printed literature from capitalist countries as well as anti-Marxist and anti-Communist publications. At the same time, all lists mirrored the internal situation and conjuncture of Communism, being—in Romania—an efficient instrument for the political struggles from the

inside of the Communist party. In 1957 the last list appeared in which the year of its start-up is mentioned. It was followed by six notebooks, the last one being perhaps "edited" in 1963.

In conclusion, from a historical point of view, the fact itself of printed works' interdiction gradually loses its public character and becomes a completely secret operation. In this process one can trace the deepening and gradually sinking depths of secret. By this, however, the secret not only deepens but actually extends. The lack of "instructions" annexed to the lists does not mean their disappearance but their transfiguration. By detaching themselves from the determined lists, the instructions cease being mere orientations of application for certain lists, but they become secret documents of organization and separation of the whole structure of libraries, sketching both their public physiognomy and their secret one.

The tendency by which some secret instructions come to structure some public institutions is extremely significant for understanding the direction toward which the role of secret evolves in real socialist societies. In fact, all fundamental documents regulating the structure and functioning of libraries in Romania bear the stamp of secret by instructions and categories of all library fonds (usual, documentary, special). In other words, the whole public sphere of libraries is drawn in secret and is delimited by secret. There will be no relaxation of this tendency; on the contrary, it becomes more emphasized, going toward aberration, up to the last moment of the existence of socialism.

In the same way, the publications coming from abroad, together with those contravening the external or internal politics of the Communist party, as well as those attacking the socialist system, were, and have remained until the end, permanent targets of the process of secretization. From the beginning to the end, library secret fonds have remained means and tools of the struggle and competition between systems, both on an ideological level and on the level of information circulation.

## Notes

1. Victor Sapeykov, *La Coexistence pacifique à qui elle est profitable* (Moscow: Editions de l'Agence de Presse Novost, 1979): "They [the reactionary politicians] state that socialist countries consider pacific coexistence as a means of cheating the Occident's vigilance, of gaining time for increasing their military potential, with the aim of, let's say, extending their sphere of influence in the world" (11), and then, "The ideology of the working class presents as unavoidable the passing to Communism throughout the world, it points out personal means and methods for performing this passing" (50).



2. Together with Ionut Costea and Doru Radosav, in 1995 I edited a volume entitled *Fond Secret. Fond "S" Special. Contributii la istoria fondurilor secrete de biblioteca din Romania. Studiu de caz. Biblioteca Centrala Universitara "Lucian Blaga", Cluj-Napoca, 1995* [Secret fond. Special "S" fond. Contributions to the history of library secret fonds in Romania. A case study. "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library, Cluj-Napoca] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1995). The volume contains 160 pages of documents from the secret archives of the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library in Cluj, on the basis of which the library secret fond was constituted and functioned.