

Science and Politics During the Cold War – The Controversial Case of Sexology in Communist Romania

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Abstract: The paper investigates how formal/informal networks of scientists, while facilitating the scientific West-East transfer in the Cold War context, shaped the scientific field of sexology by imposing personal scientific credos, in a particular national context. The paper shows that in the Cold War context, sexual science was present in Communist Romania, but neither as imitation of the regional scholarship, nor as a simple reproduction of western advancements in the field. The post-war Romanian scholarship in the field of sexology was the result of scientific interests of Stefan Milcu – long time party protégée and respected member of the international scientific community – and of its personal circle that included remarkable personalities such as Victor Săhleanu or Tudor Stoica. Presenting the public with information about sexual and reproductive functions, and sometimes even elaborated descriptions of sexual techniques, certainly was never meant to enhance the individual gratification or provoke any form of sexual revolution. The Romanian production of sex/educational manuals and of sexology works was part of a state policy towards a better, stable, family life, aiming for collective and social happiness.

Keywords: Romania, Sexology, Stefan Milcu, Scientific transfer

The fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the opening of the archives in the former socialist states led to new research hypotheses while analyzing and/or using the Cold War concept. The new findings, whether we refer to a West-East or North-Global South perspective, privilege the transnational approach and a more dynamic perception of

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geographical/ideological/political borders. The newest research on the circulation of *Knowledge*, and the agents that animated scientific, cultural and professional networks, questions the impenetrability of the Iron Curtain and shows that once the frame of analysis distance itself from a strictly political history, the relations intra and inter ideological bloc are much more complex than what has been presented in classical Cold War studies. The Romanian case is part of this new scholarship. In 2017, the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile and Université d'Angers organized the international conference *Breaking the wall: A national and transnational perspective on East-European Science (1945-1990)* (Jong-Lambert 2018) and, in 2018, a team of Romanian scholars published *State Socialist Experts in Transnational Perspective. East European Circulation of Knowledge during the Cold War (1950s–1980s)*¹, underlying the individuality of historical actors, the diversity of agency in multiple non-national environments, and the fluid geographies of interaction along the East–West and North–South axes.

My research follows these last conclusions by investigating the evolution of sexology, as a scientific field, in communist Romania, starting with the publication of the first works in the field, in the late 1960s until the fall of the regime, in 1989.

The paper investigates how formal/informal networks of scientists, while facilitating the scientific West-East transfer in the Cold War context, shaped the scientific field of sexology by imposing the personal scientific credos, in a particular national context. The question is not *if*, but rather *how* eastern scholars mobilized the same scientific advancements as their western colleagues. Our hypothesis is that while the “bourgeois,” western scientific disciplines are officially abandoned once the soviet science is politically imposed, Romanian scientists, respected members of international organizations, but also high rank party officials, not only maintained an intellectual dialogue with their peers from western countries, but also managed to promote, implement and adapt western disciplines in which they personally took interest. By doing so, the field experienced a double influence. On one hand, there is the scientific expertise of its “godfather(s),” on the other is their ability to get across, professionally and politically, the muddy waters of a totalitarian regime. For the case of Romanian sexology, the scientists that had a crucial role in its implementation and evolution are the endocrinologists guided by Stefan Milcu.

While presenting her latest work, the American ethnographer and Professor of Russian and East European Studies, Kristen Ghodsee, argues that despite the stereotypes, “*plenty of sex was happening on the other side of the Iron Curtain, although the openness of the public discussion around it varied dramatically from country to country and at different periods of time*” (Ghodsee 2018, 145). If countries such as Bulgaria, Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and the German

Democratic Republic had sex manuals and even the erotic magazine that copied the capitalist *Playboy*, the Soviet Union was more prudish and “*the worst place to be a woman was Romania where state socialism did little to challenge a despotic, patriarchal culture.*” Ghodsee’s opinion echoes the answer I received from an experienced librarian while documenting the present research: “*Miss, there were no such publications back then. During communism, we were serious people. You, researchers, should know better!*.” Indeed, the research concerning the Romanian gender regime(s) during communism ignores the subject, or limits – and not without good reason – the discussion on Romanian sexuality during communism to the pronatalist policies and its consequences (Jinga 2015 ; Jinga et Soare, 2011; Olteanu; Gheonea and Gheonea 2003).

All the contributions (Massino 2019; Bucur et Miroiu 2018; Kligman 1998; Băban 1996) that privileged an oral history approach stressed out the struggle of Romanian couples in general and of women in particular to avoid (or deal with) unwanted pregnancies in a country that, starting with 1966, strictly limited the access to contraception and implemented ferocious control over its population in order to prevent all illegal abortions. Apparently, in Romanian communist society, a happy, fulfilled sexual life was inconceivable, despite the existence of sex manuals (Biebuyck 2010), and the same grim perspective surrounded a real scientific interest for the study of human sexual behavior – the definition of sexology I use in this paper – inside a political and ideological block, behind the infamous Iron Curtain.

How did sexology make the scientific and public agenda in the most prudish country of the Eastern Bloc? In terms of scientific production on sexology, what is the specificity of the Romanian case? In a Cold War, totalitarian context, who benefitted the most from the knowledge circulation: the population, the scientific community or the national communist agenda?

To answer these questions, the paper will first consider the Romanian political and scientific evolution in the larger Cold War context, the definition of sexology in Communist Romania and the public perception on sexuality in general. The second part of the paper consists in an analysis of the literature dealing with the medical field of sexology. I substantiate through the case of the scientists coordinated by Stefan Milcu how a scientific discipline could ignore, at least partially the Cold war restrictions by showing that : 1) the Romanian publications on sexology exclusively used the western available knowledge; 2) Romania’s demographic priorities shaped the scientific work on sexology, having a greater role than the ideological, geographical and political limitations enforced by the Iron Curtain, 3) The evolution of the discipline is linked to their academic and political career.

The very first layer of the present research was to bring out into the open Romanian sexology works and to retrace the circulation and use of scientific knowledge across the Iron Curtain. My research was an extensive one

and included the most important Romanian scientific collections including the Romanian Academy Library and the Central University Library of Bucharest. I identified over 30 publications that include elements of sexology. The contents showed that only four titles were exclusively dedicated to the medical field of sexology: T. Stoica, *Sexologie normală și patologică* [Normal and Pathological Sexology], Bucharest, Editura Medicală, 1970; T. Stoica, *Sexologie* [Sexology], Bucharest, Editura Medicală (1972, 1975). V. Săhleanu and I. Macavei *Vita sexualis*, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică Română, 1972; Tudor Stoica, *Pubertate normală și patologică* [Normal and Pathological Puberty], Bucharest, Editura Medicală, 1982. The remaining majority fit the category of sex manuals², or educational manuals as I prefer to reference it. In order to discriminate between the two categories, I analyzed the content according four major criteria: the scientific approach, the use of newest western scholarship on the field, elements of the official communist propaganda concerning sexuality, general profile of the publishing house that accepted the manuscript. Secondly, I identified and used the available archival materials and secondary sources, to look into the scientific activity and political involvement of the Romanian sexologists, cross-referencing their scientific production with the official documentation concerning the state and party positions they held. I mostly relied on Stefan Milcu's personal archives, an impressive collection covering 20 linear meters, available at the Romanian National Archives in Bucharest.

Last, but not least, in order to test the response of the Romanian general medical practice towards sexology works, I used an oral history approach. The survey was carried out between October and December 2018. The participants, 27 medical doctors that completed their medical studies in the 1970s and 1980s have been asked, over phone or email, if during their medical studies during the 1970s and 1980s they took courses on Sexology and if/how they used this knowledge for the benefit of their patients. The group included alumni from all the most important Romanian schools of medicine (among which Iași, București, Cluj-Napoca), that graduated between 1972 and 1988.

The comeback

Going back to Ghodsee's statement that women had better sex under socialism and what made that possible, her argumentation relies on three major observations that characterize the entire Eastern Bloc. First, the governments implemented a wide range of policies that led to a greater economic independence for women which allowed them to more easily leave an unsatisfying relationship. According to the sexual economics theory, in countries with a general higher degree of economic independence for women, like the eastern Bloc, sex would no longer be a commodity, therefore men would have more

incentives than their western counterparts to improve their behavior in order to have sex (Ghodsee 2018, 133). In a second time, from an ideological, or just strategic reason (to distract people from the avatars of a monotone, sometimes full of privations life), socialist states encouraged the emergence of sexology as distinctive discipline meant to improve the sexual life of their citizens, and therefore the general feeling of happiness. In the same time, the public authorities allowed and even encouraged the publication and circulation of a whole series of “incentives,” going from more or less explicit sex manuals to erotic magazines that copied the capitalist *Playboy*. Third, the women’s sexual pleasure, as in the Cold War context, feminine pleasure also had an ideological content. Capitalism was criticized for disadvantaging women, who could not fully enjoy sex since they were fully dependent on men (Lišková 2016). The general discourse on the socialist side of the Iron Curtain was that “sexuality should be disentangled from economic exchange’, making relationships more ‘authentic’ and honest than in West” (Ghodsee 2018, 148). In a relationship based on real friendship and mutual respect, men were supposedly more eager to go the extra mile for the happiness of their partner, by instructing themselves on the basics of the female anatomy or by taking an equal share of household responsibilities. Sexologists insisted that the physical aspect is just part of the problem, and that a rested, relaxed woman will be more eager to have and to enjoy sex. Here again, official state propaganda firmly stated the superiority of the socialist system that, unlike the capitalist one, provided child care facilities for its citizens in order to enhance the already proclaimed equality between men and women in all areas, including the bedroom. Of course, most gender scholars agree on the positive influence socialist equality politics had on the feminine population, but I argue that such an analysis should also take into consideration the discontinuity of such measures, both geographically and chronologically. If the feminine employment was a priority of the first post war decade, the scholarship on sexuality was lacking at the time in most East Central European countries, with the exception of Czechoslovakia (Lišková 2018, 24). If we add the national particular background (pronatalist interests, role of Church, general level of urbanization/literacy), the resulting map in terms of gender regimes and the usage of sexuality and sexology is a quite a contrasting one.

As part of the Eastern Bloc, the Romanian case is no different when talking about acquiring women’s emancipation through economic independence and the birth of a socialist sexual morality. During the first decade after coming to power, the communist regime introduced policies in order to open all fields of activity to women, while promoting them in traditional masculine positions, including politics. But the Romanian communist regime did not see gender equality as an ongoing, gradual process. From the state’s point of view, once the legal framework granting equal rights for all the citizens was in place, the

effects were guaranteed. Therefore, all the subsequent policies concerning the Romanian couple and sexual life in communism were tailored on the assumption that within a couple, the relationship between man and woman was guided only by “authentic love, true friendship, mutual understanding and respect” (Șerbănescu 1963, 24) . This new image of the couple was integrating the definition of the socialist morality according to which sexual pleasure, albeit not prohibited, was to be explored only with the heterosexual spouse:

Inside the bourgeois system, money dictates the relations between men and women. In the socialist system, where all forms of exploitation ceased to exist, the sexual life is regulated by norms and principles of ethical and moral conduct, completely different from the bourgeois ones. These new rules have been elaborated according to the new conception of socialist morality on sexual relations. By doing this, we are moving from the capitalist monogamy to the real monogamy, possible only in socialism. Socialist ethical and moral conduct implies a perfect harmony between the interests and aspirations of each individual and the interests of his community (Stoica 1970, 12).

Following the soviet model and general trend present throughout the Eastern Bloc, all possible temptations, such as paid sex, homosexuality or adultery were severely punished:

In support of the socialist sexual morality comes the legislation of our country, which protects the sexual inviolability of every citizen and sanctions the offenses. The sexual life does not only concern the individual, sexual relations are related to the function of reproduction, which for humans is not only a biological phenomenon, but primarily a social one. Because of this, the Penal Code deals with sexual problems and marital-family relationships, supporting marriage and family. It sanctions family abandonment, child abuse, rape, sexual perversion, prostitution. The social consequences of these brutalities are known in the capitalist countries where they lead to the degeneration of the population and undermine the very base of the society, the family (Stoica 1972, 252).

In the post war turmoil, the communist government, still in its consolidating phase, had good reasons to support the traditional, patriarchal family model. The rapid industrialization and urbanization processes involved significant population migration, not only between countryside and cities, but also between Romania's different regions. The government feared that the displaced, mostly young population, once liberated from the scrutiny of their community, will enter a promiscuous life, with all the expected consequences: venereal diseases unplanned pregnancies, underground payed sex. For the

totalitarian regime, marriage was the perfect solution to (re)establish and enhance the control over an important population segment.

The communist propaganda towards the sanctity of family as “the true nucleus of society” increased after the adoption of a fierce pronatalist policy. The decree 770/1966 severely limited the access to abortion for women under forty-five years old and with fewer than four children, reversing an earlier law permitting abortion on request.³ At the same time, also by decree, divorce became the exceptional solution for dissolving a marriage. The communist regime sweetened the pill by slightly increasing family allowances, building new nurseries, and last, but not least, providing professional help for a happy, fulfilled sexual life. The Romanian communist regime had little, if any, concerns for the sexual satisfaction of its subjects but hoped, subsequently, for a possible victory on the ideological war with the “decadent” West. The feminine orgasm was considered important and particular attention was given to the subject, but only because they feared the consequences of a less functional married couple:

If premature ejaculation is the norm, the wife will not reach orgasm, therefore she will not be satisfied and her delicate physiological mechanism is damaged, leading to consequences such as inhibitory mechanisms, and even frigidity. This situation is disastrous for a marriage, even if the relationship between partners is not based just on sex. One day, the husband will discover that other female partners are available. As for the wife, in most cases she will give in, she will bear with the situation or secretly hold resentment against the husband. But there are cases when the wife finds out she can be a normal, satisfied woman, but with another man. In some other cases, happily less frequent, she ends up changing more partners, looking for sexual fulfillment (Stoica 1970, 178).

The Romanian medical practitioners identified three important causes for sexual disharmony: the lack of proper information on human anatomy and the physiology of coitus (for the Romanian experts, this was the first cause for a clumsy technique or lack of awareness on the pleasure mechanisms during intercourse); the persistence of “bourgeois” mentalities: a husband insensitive to the needs and feelings of his wife, a wife trapped in a marriage of convenience, teenagers that reproduce the rigid and/or unhappy marriage experience of their parents; a medical condition, usually due to endocrine diseases. In order to educate the citizens in the matter, communist authorities encouraged, first the publication of educational manuals for adolescents and married couples, and secondly, sexology books, benefiting from both the general trend in the region and the birth of western modern sexology.

In Romania, at the end of the Second World War, under the conditions of military occupation by the USSR and a first pro-communist government, science was targeted by propaganda, but the radical changes came after the Romanian Communist Party took power. In 1948, the Romanian Academy was dissolved and replaced by the Academy of the People's Republic of Romania, subordinated directly to the Council of Ministers and controlled by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Its mission was the deployment of the scientific policy which consists of the adoption of the "Soviet model." All disciplines were concerned, but the life sciences were even more exposed than the others, because of the ideological war surrounding them. In biology, the change consisted in the imposition of Lysenkism and the criticism of genetics (and subsequently eugenics), described as a bourgeois and sterile science. In medicine and psychology it was the introduction of Pavlovism, based on the work of Ivan Pavlov on conditional reflexes. This Soviet model in science was imposed in a general climate of repression and intimidation: purges, arrests, surveillance by the organs of political censorship of publications and even forced labor (Oghină-Pavie 2018, 115).

Not all the scientists were subject to communist repression. Each major field had at least one top scientist, leader in his field, that officially endorsed soviet science while occupying high ranking party positions. For the life sciences, the two communist patrons were Traian Savulescu⁴, well known biologist and the first president of the newly created Academy of the People's Republic of Romania (1948), and Constatin I. Parhon⁵, founder of the Romanian school of endocrinology, head of the first communist state, and the most influential man in Romanian medicine during the first two post war decades.

When communism came to power, sexology and sexuality was quite fashionable subjects among Romanian endocrinologists, involved during the interwar in research on the human hormones and how they influence sexual motivation, but also among urban, middle class Romanians who could enjoy press articles and educational brochures on the subject.⁶ Even if *sexology* was never officially included on the list of "bourgeois" disciplines, and therefore banned, the word suddenly disappeared after 1945 from all mainstream publications, including the Romanian dictionaries. Sexology made its return in 1976, as an entry in a very specialized dictionary of neologisms, when it is identified as a word of French origin, defined as "*the study of sexuality and of psychophysiological troubles.*" The mainstream Romanian language dictionaries waited until 1985 to include the definition (Marcu et Maneca 1978). This evolution in the use of the term may indicate a direct consequence of the Iron Curtain and of the ideological conflict during the Cold War. I argue differently. Without minimizing the importance of the regional political context, where a similar situation can be observed, a possible explanation lies in the traditional scientific influence on the field. Interwar Romanian sexology

followed closely the French model. After an intense use in the 1930's, France experienced the same almost exhaustive disappearance⁷ of the term, only to reemerge during the 1970's, at the same time with the birth of modern sexology, including its revival in Central and Eastern Europe.

From an epistemic point of view, the Romanian scientific context in the 1970s kept few of the elements that characterized the "Obsessive decade"⁸. Western genetics made its return in research. Pavlovism, after two decades of extensive use, lost its forefront in the medical field. From a political point of view, Nicolae Ceausescu, the Party's First Secretary and later president of the country, was at the peak of his international popularity, after Romania did not take part in the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces. Taking full advantage of this political evolution, Romania became the dissident of Central Eastern Europe and therefore, the favorite international partner behind the Iron Curtain (Betea 2018). The Romanian academic community fully benefited from this privileged international status and used the (for once) encouraging Cold War dynamics in its favor, by fully engaging in international exchanges. The access to the newest scholarship, corroborated with substantial professional training in European and Anglo-Saxon universities, helped the Romanian scientists to overcome any possible discontinuation due to the soviet science hiatus.⁹

Characteristics of Romanian sexology

The general Romanian public started reading publications containing elements of sexology in the second part of the 1960s, when the first Romanian educational manuals were produced. Authored by medical practitioners, most of them endocrinologists, the clear purpose of the manuals was to educate the population on how to understand and deal with the sexual component of their married lives. The contents give the impression of a heteroclit puzzle that mix important information on the human reproductive system, anatomy, conceiving and pregnancy, with the official propaganda on the role and place of family inside the socialist system. The spouses owe each other mutual love, respect, help, and together they have the moral duty to raise a family, as "children are the true richness of a married couple." Usually the last chapters included practical advice regarding best sexual positions, an analysis of the possible contraceptive methods and their hazards, with a clear intention of dissuading potential users, the risks of illegal abortions and venereal diseases (Dumitru 1972, 146). If some authors include the idea of the new, egalitarian status of women in socialism, the general advice leans toward the patriarchal family model, where women remain the main caregivers (Albulius et Gheorghiu 1971).

After this first step, sexology, as medical specialization, made its official comeback in 1970 when the endocrinologist Tudor Stoica published *Sexologie normala si patologica* [Normal and pathological sexology]. Soon after he published *Sexologie* [Sexology] (1972, 1975). In 1972 two other doctors, Victor Săhleanu and Ion Macavei published their work on sexology under the title *Vita sexualis*.

All three publications are authored by professionals that were at the peak of their research careers in endocrinology, specialized in sexual hormones, members of a larger group of scientists working for the Institute of Endocrinology, also authors of the first educational manuals (Săhleanu 1967) (Deculescu, et al. 1968). A closer look into their medical publications reveals an interrupted interest in the interwar research on sexual hormones. Victor Săhleanu coauthored *Probleme de sexologie masculina* [Elements of masculine sexology] (with Madeleine Maicanescu and Bogdan Ionescu, 1958) and *Introducere in sexologia masculina* [Introduction to masculine sexology] (with Madeleine Maicanescu, 1966). Tudor Stoica coauthored *Mecanisme neuroendocrine ale comportamentului sexual. Rolul sistemului nervos in comportamentul sexual* [The neuroendocrine mechanisms of sexual behavior. The role of the nervous system in sexual behavior] (with Stefan Milcu, 1966).

Undisputedly, these works reflect the close professional relationship both Victor Săhleanu and Tudor Stoica had with the scientific leader of the group, Stefan Milcu, himself with a strong interest in sexology and author of publications such as *Andrologie clinica* [Clinical Andrology] (with Madeleine Maicanescu, 1970) and *Formele Clinice de intersexualitate si clasificarea lor* [Clinical forms of intersexuality and their classification] (with B. Ionescu and C. Maximilian, 1971).

Born in 1903, Stefan Milcu started his academic career during the 1920s under the supervision of Constatin I. Parhon who later become his mentor (and father-in-law), circumstances that came to dictate Milcu's scientific and political career after the communist regime came to power. Milcu persevered in a frenetic research career, that included important breakthroughs in the field of endocrinology and more than 1000 publications.¹⁰ He became a member of the Academy of the People's Republic of Romania in 1948 and later president of the Romanian Academy of Medical Sciences. Despite the Cold War, and the apparent impenetrability of the Iron Curtain, not to mention the ideological and scientific incongruities, Milcu's work was published and recognized at an international level. His presence at important international scientific events on endocrinology, and membership in prestigious professional associations in his field¹¹, allowed Milcu to maintain the research of his team from the Institute of Endocrinology at a competitive, international level. Milcu's mobility, even during the 1950s, was a direct consequence of his political commitment. Like his father in law and other interwar scientists,

Stefan Milcu joined the high ranks of the communist Nomenklatura, a position that protected him and his team from blunt political and ideological obstruction. I argue that rather than duplicity, such an attitude is proof of a specific form of *diplomacy* developed by the Romanian scientists in order to temper the ideological aggression and protect both the research teams and the core of their activity. Was this a form of altruism? I agree with the conclusion of fellow historians that different interest groups and individuals used the conflict surrounding the Pavlovian heritage in Romania in order to protect their own career and access positions of power, to the detriment of their opponents (Oghină-Pavie 2018, 128).

The adoption of a pronatalist policy in October 1966 gave Milcu the perfect opportunity to promote the work of his closest collaborators, putting forward the field of *sexology*, as an interdisciplinary research that included endocrinology, psychoanalysis, genetics. The publications on sexology, according to the authors, offer the necessary sexual education to all citizens, according to the socialist morality, by “building and maintaining one’s morality,” in total opposition to capitalist countries where “the bourgeois theorists, longtime oppressed by the Church, jumped to the other extreme and started using pornography in order to explain sexual problems.” Sexology was seen as useful both for the married adults, as “Having the appropriate knowledge on the physiology of sexual organs, sexual hygiene, normal and pathological sexual phenomena, helps the couple to maintain its health and harmony,” but also for adolescents, as a means of social control “If young people have timely all the knowledge concerning the body’s transformations during puberty, they will be less likely to act in a chaotic manner. If we guide them on the right track, the teenagers will refrain their instincts and they will wait, calmly, to join the proper norms of society” (Stoica 1970, 12). The elements of ideology present while explaining the characteristics and the role of sexology in communist Romania are only to be traced in the last chapter of the publications, dedicated to the punishment of sexual offenses, including homosexuality and rape. The rest of the text shows almost no warnings on the ideological and political context in which it was produced. I argue that the abrupt ideological inserts are most likely the necessary adaptation in order to get the text approved by censorship, if not the work of censorship itself. In the case of more sensitive issues, like homosexuality, the logic of the text suffers due to certain paragraphs that seem pasted, without much consideration, in the original, very equilibrated text.

Although tributary to the medical specialty of the authors, in the Romanian communist context, *sexology* is defined as a “multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field, a ‘synthetic’ specialty that goes beyond the framework of biology,” practiced by medical doctors that understand the particularities of the discipline and are ready to use, alongside their initial training in

gynecology/urology, other disciplines such as endocrinology, genetics, psychology, sociology (Săhleanu et Macavei 1972, 178).

The contents, however, follow less this definition, with almost half of the material covering the human sexual hormones and the possible causes for infertility. The other half is equally divided between masculine and feminine sexual dysfunction. The three publications rely almost exclusively on western scientific works¹², therefore, the approach is similar to modern sexology, with an interdisciplinary method that looks into physical, psychological and environmental factors. The chapters dedicated to the treatment of sexual dysfunctions are very solid, guiding the medical practitioner through the necessary steps to deal with sexual disorders. The anamnesis suggests tests that covered all possible physical motives, but also a psychiatric evaluation. In fact, the Romanian sexologists appreciated that in most cases of sexual dysfunctions, the real cause of the suffering is of psychological origin (forgotten events, dissimulated conflicts, reluctance, remorse, fear of consequences, obsessions or even expression of homosexual tendencies), or that psychological troubles aggravate the urological or endocrine problems (Săhleanu et Macavei 1972, 114). Therefore, the treatment involves both classic modern medicine and alternative medical solutions such as physiotherapy, reflexology, acupuncture, homeopathy. But above all, both Stoica and Săhleanu recommended the Psychoanalytical therapy in order to expose deeply buried thoughts and feelings to the conscious mind, so that repressed experiences and emotions, often from childhood but also from the couple's everyday life, could be brought to the surface and examined. According to Romanian sexologists, the most important link in the chain, while treating sexual dysfunctions, was the patient – therapist relationship, as only a “medical professional would be able to comprehend how these repressed early memories have affected the patient's thinking, behavior, and sexual relationships in adulthood” (Săhleanu et Macavei 1972, 113-115). Tudor Stoica also presented an alternative therapy, the Behavior Therapy. The method had been developed by the American and English psychology schools in the late 1960s and can be defined as an attempt to alter human behavior and emotions, based on the laws established by Pavlov. Although more suitable within the context of Romanian Pavlovian medicine, Tudor Stoica showed the limits of this method, recommending it only for a particular type of feminine sexual pathology (Stoica 1970, 231).

Using Freud was not new to the Romanian sexologists, who previously included his theories of the personality and sexuality in the educational manuals published in the 1960s. But in these first publications, Freud's theories were used either without proper referencing, or for illustrating a faulty approach towards sexuality. So, how was such an important epistemic evolution possible in a very short time?

I argue that the case of psychoanalysis is yet another example that supports the theory of fluid (ideological, scientific, political) fields across the Iron

Curtain. Indeed, the crucial moment for Romanian psychoanalysis during the communist regime was in 1952, when, during a meeting of the Romanian Academy, which aimed to analyze the medical sciences from the perspective of Ivan Pavlov's theories, psychoanalysis was described as a reactionary science and in opposition to the Marxist-Leninist conception of the world, responsible for the decline of medicine in Western countries such as the United States (Zamfirescu 2012, 48). During this meeting, Ștefan Milcu had been publically accused for attempting to conciliate Freudianism and Pavlovian theories in a paper where he discussed the compensation of the sexual dissatisfaction with the eating instinct. In his defense, Milcu stated "that he was never truly interested in the Freudian theory, which he considered to be wrong, because it approaches physiology and physiopathology only in terms of sexuality" (Petrin 2017, 65-69).

Was Milcu telling the truth? According to the Securitate, the infamous communist secret police, the endocrinologists working in Parhon's team, at the institute for Endocrinology, were not very keen to adapt their research to the new Pavlovian theories. Parhon himself scolded a fellow colleague that insisted on the use of soviet science, harshly asking her if she "is also a lost cause, or her imbecility is due to aging." Other researchers, including Milcu, publically manifested their discontentment with the new official scientific paradigm that compelled them to completely change the scientific method they used in the field of endocrinology. He was also accused of "trying to reconcile the Romanian medical tradition with the Soviet model and showed no categorical position in favor of Michurinist Pavlovism" (Oghină-Pavie 2018, 146). According to their *mémoires*, published after the collapse of communism, during the 1950s, Romanian psychologists and psychoanalysts played the game of publically condemning the "bourgeois" disciplines, while keeping a very private, secret personal scientific agenda (Petrin 2017, 71). Without such an underground scientific activity, it would be difficult to explain the sudden resurface of the discipline at the beginning of 1970s, when some of Sigmund Freud's books were translated into Romanian, while several other works were published. The same year he co-authored *Vita sexualis*, Victor Săhleanu also published the first important, post war, work on psychoanalysis, *Introducere critica în psihanaliză* [A critical introduction to psychoanalysis].

Not only was Romanian sexology conceived as an interdisciplinary field, but the very authors that published on the subject had scientific interests that simultaneous touched endocrinology, anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis and last, but not least, genetics.

Using sexology as a medical discipline able to ensure the selection of suitable citizens allowed to procreate is another ideological incongruity present in the works of Stoica and Săhleanu. If Stoica is rather lapidary in his explanations, mentioning just the necessity for geneticists to be closely interested in

erotic, conjugal and parental couples, in order to detect the generational transfer of diseases inherited from ancestors or seemingly healthy parents (Săhleanu et Macavei 1972, 155), Victor Săhleanu develops the idea, starting with the use of contraception. According to him, for the fertile couple, conceiving is just an option if the proper contraception methods are used, as the justification for using contraceptive methods can be very diverse, either the expression of political considerations or purely a personal decision. Săhleanu stressed that contraception is always justified for eugenic reasons in the families carrying hereditary conditions or when the parents can't secure the optimal conditions for raising a family: they suffer from acute and chronic illness, chronic fatigue, alcohol intoxication (Săhleanu et Macavei 1972, 149). In a true project of genetic revitalization, Săhleanu also suggested using the genetic material of high intelligent individuals (only men), *at least* for the cases of assisted reproduction for infertile couples. By telling the couples they have the choice to have children or not, as a personal decision, Săhleanu was totally contradicting the official party line that clearly stated the social and moral (even patriotic) obligation to have at least 4 children.

But Săhleanu was not the only one in the field of sexology sharing a different vision on the pronatalist program. Stefan Milcu had a similar approach. As a member of the National Commission for Demography and the Supreme Sanitary Council, the two organisms formally in charge with the direction of the pronatalist plan¹³, Milcu had the opportunity to share his vision and apprehension regarding a demographic plan that showed no concerns for the "quality" of children that were to be born. Stefan Milcu was interested in demographic consequences of different genetic syndromes (Down especially), and made the official recommendation to have, if possible, all future parents tested, procedure that should be mandatory for those with a history of genetic abnormalities and all pregnant women over the age of 40. Based on this research, Milcu also made the bold statement that the vast majority of "incomplete abortions" – category that included both genuine miscarriages and illegal abortions – were in fact the result of the genetic abnormalities of the fetus. In a country where each maternity ward had its own prosecutor ready to investigate all miscarriages, such a medical opinion was undoubtedly a revolutionary one. To summarize his opinion on the subject, Stefan Milcu stated that

we have the obligation to protect the genetic destiny of the future generations. We must develop a network of genetic prophylaxis. Nowadays an intrauterine diagnosis of congenital malformations is possible. It is also true that the results of this are not always conclusive. We know it is not the ideal solution, but it is the only one we have. In other words, we understand the need to sacrifice healthy embryos in order to avoid the birth of handicapped children.¹⁴

Milcu also considered other possible causes for the degeneracy of future Romanian generations, such as alcoholism, social diseases (tuberculosis, venereal diseases), inappropriate family dynamics (incest, adultery and even divorce). For Stefan Milcu and his research team, both genetic and social dangers could be avoided by teaching the population the fundamentals of Sexology. The long desired effect was a profound change of retrograde, patriarchal mentalities in Romanian society. By linking eugenic concerns with the science of sexuality, while insisting on the role of sex education, Milcu was renewing the interwar link between eugenic concerns and the science of sexuality (Lišková 2018, 26). Undoubtedly, Milcu was encouraged by a general, post 1968, reemerging interest in eugenics, noticeable among doctors and scientists (Bucur 2002, 229).

The official documentation surrounding the pronatalist program never included specific eugenics elements, but the law itself can be considered the reflection of interwar eugenics (Bucur 2002, 228). The introduction of premarital medical examination (not just blood tests) described in the sexology books and the compulsory gynecological exams show how the everyday medical practice absorbed eugenic concerns. I argue that sexology publications and the sexology elements present in the educational manuals had a much more significant impact among the population than the sexologists anticipated, facilitating what I consider to be a specific form of eugenics performed by the communist regime, namely the encouragement of child abandonment and forced institutionalization for certain categories of population that included those caring highly debilitating mental and genetic conditions.

The Romanian public showed a vivid interest in the first book published by Tudor Stoica, *Sexologie patologica* and bought all 100.000 copies within a couple of months. The success encouraged Stoica to publish *Sexology* in 1972, with a second edition in 1975. The Romanian sexologists were pleased by the positive feedback, but criticized the lack of interest showed by the communist authorities and especially those working in education:

Human sexuality is a complex subject. In order to advance in popularizing this field, first we have to educate the educators: teachers, doctors, parents. Sadly, sexology is taught in a limited number of faculties of medicine and psychology and the courses for adults (newlyweds or future parents) are still almost non-existent (V. Stoica 1972, 12).

Indeed, the results of my survey among 27 medical doctors that completed their medical studies in the 1970s and 1980s show that sexology was, in the best case, a 2-month special course. Sexology was never officially included in the curricula of any faculty of medicine in communist Romania, the decision to have a brief education in sexology being the result of personal interests and

network, rather than an official endorsement of the field. After the fall of the communist regime, Stoica, talking about his work as a sexologist, remembered:

We fought windmills. I fought windmills. I remember how difficult it was for me to publish *Sexologia* in 1972. The second edition was severely amputated by the official censorship. This was not new to me. In 1964, when I wrote the first book on sexual education, the manuscript was destroyed just before the final print. For decades, in Romania, the sexual life had been completely misunderstood and sexual intercourse fiercely connected to the reproductive function. The woman had no liberty and the rightful choice to end a pregnancy, as for contraception, none was available (Stoica 1993, 4).

The last important publication in sexology was published in 1982, Tudor Stoica, *Pubertate normală și patologică* [Normal and pathological puberty]. I argue that the shift was the direct consequence of Stefan Milcu's political purge following his involvement in the scandal *Meditația Transcendentală* (MT) [Transcendental Meditation], a purge that triggered a domino effect, eventually harming sexology as scientific field.

Meditația Transcendentală was introduced in Romania after 1977, by Nicolae Stoian, a French citizen of Romanian origin. He presented MT as an educational technique, capable to forge more productive, efficient workers. The ministry of education agreed to have the technique tested by the psychologists working for the Institute for Psychologic and Pedagogic Research of the Romanian Academy. The final, positive, report recommending the use of MT in Romanian high schools was cosigned by Stefan Milcu, as vice-president of the Romanian Academy, and Victor Săhleanu, as director of the Romanian Institute of Anthropology.

In 1982, an investigation by the Securitate, the Romanian Secret Police, concluded that MT is a dangerous international organization which aimed to attack the Socialist regimes and the initiator of the movement had been accused of espionage for the capitalist bloc. Nicolae Ceausescu decided to purge all those involved, communist officials and academics alike (Jela, Albu and Strat 2004).

For the field of sexology, the repercussions were severe. Stefan Milcu and Victor Săhleanu lost their positions within the Romanian Academy, but also in the Romanian Communist society. Stefan Milcu retired, but Victor Săhleanu was excluded from the scientific life, his works were withdrawn from libraries and his name could no longer appear in books or publications (Ciuhuța 2014, 9).¹⁵ As a result, any activity connected to psychology and pedagogy had to be stopped for a long period of time. The field of sexology, albeit not directly incriminated by the communist authorities, was particularly impacted by the turn of events. Without the protection of its main promotors and with a

therapeutic foundation that, once again, became marginalized (if not banned), sexology went again underground, only to reemerge after the fall of the communist regime.

Conclusions

The case of Romanian Sexology shows that a first, necessary step, while analyzing the evolution of sciences behind the Iron Curtain, is to cross the line of the anticommunist, classic Cold War studies discourse, and dare to revisit controversial subjects.

In the Cold War context, sexual science was present in Communist Romania, not as imitation of the regional scholarship, nor a simple reproduction of western advancements in the field. The reemerging of Romanian sexology, starting with the 1960s, is the result of a complex web of factors that included a favorable political international context for Romania -that helped to alleviate the national totalitarian, pronatalist, profamilist obsessions-; the presence of a similar trend in the other countries of the Eastern Bloc and the development of modern sexology in the West. Romanian sexology brought together the interwar national expertise with the activity of formal and informal networks of scientists that managed to preserve and promote western disciplines despite the political and ideological ban. The price was complicity with the regime's priorities as these transformed over time. The postwar Romanian scholarship in the field of sexology was the result of scientific interests of Stefan Milcu – long time party protégée and respected member of the international scientific community – and of its personal circle that included remarkable personalities such as Victor Săhleanu or Tudor Stoica. The political fall of the major contributors had as side effect a decline of the discipline, although a formal ban was never imposed by the communist authorities.

The permeability of the Iron Curtain in terms of knowledge transfer, however, did not obliterate the ideological hiatus in regards to the place and use of sexology. Presenting the public with information about sexual and reproductive functions, and sometimes even elaborated descriptions of sexual techniques, certainly was never meant to enhance the individual gratification or provoke any form of sexual revolution. The Romanian production of sex/educational manuals and of sexology works was part of a state policy towards a better, stable, family life, aiming for collective and social happiness. Rather than showing the superiority of the socialist system in terms of egalitarian policies for women (including in the sexual sphere), communist Romania insisted on the dominance of socialist society in terms of quality of life of its citizens, protected from all forms of western degeneracy.

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Endnotes

- 1 *East Central Europe*, 45 (2018), nos 2-3, Thematic issue: State Socialist Experts in Transnational Perspective. East European Circulation of Knowledge during the Cold War (1950s–1980s), Brill, 29 Nov. 2018.
- 2 Examples of manuals include: A. Deculescu, C. Păunescu, T. Stoica and T. Trutzer, *Carte pentru tineri* [Book for youth], Bucharest, Editura Medicală, 1968; N. Mitrofan, *Dragostea și căsătoria* [Love and marriage], Bucharest, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984; I. Vinți and R. Negulescu, *Sfaturi pentru tineri căsătoriți* [Advice for newlyweds], Constanța, Romania, 1978. V. Săhleanu, *Omul și sexualitatea* [The human being and the sexuality], Bucharest, Editura Medicală, 1967; M. Alecu-Ungureanu, *Viața sexuală și căsătoria* [Sexual life and marriage], Bucharest, 1968; D. Albulius, A. Gheorghiu, *Cartea tinerilor căsătoriți* [The Handbook of newlyweds], Bucharest, Editura Medicală, 1971. R. Dumitru, *De vorbă cu tinerii. Probleme de educație a sexelor* [Dialogue with the young generation. Problems in the education of sexes], Bucharest, Editura Tineretului, 1972, M. Peteanu, *Educația relațiilor dintre sexe. Pregătirea tineretului pentru viața de familie* [Education of the relationships between sexes: getting the young generation prepared for family life], Bucharest, Editura Medicală, 1973, C. Ursoniu, *Igiena Sexuală* [Sexual Hygiene], Timisoara, Facla, 1980; Gh. Litinschi, *Sexualitatea la vârsta adolescenței*, Bucharest, Editura Medicală, 1988.
- 3 On demand pregnancy terminations remained possible for health reasons, but also if the pregnancy was the result of a sexual aggression (rape, incest). Corina Doboș (coord.), Luciana Jinga, Florin Soare, *Politica demografică a regimului Ceaușescu*, vol. I - Iași, Polirom, 2010.
- 4 Traian Săvulescu (1889-1963): Romanian biologist specialized in systematic botany and phytopathology, he served during interwar as Professor at University of Bucharest, Director of the Romanian Institute for Agronomic research, member of the Romanian Academy since 1936. Once Romania joined the USSR, as ally, during WWII, Traian Săvulescu invested himself in the Association of Friendship with the USSR and subsequently embarked in a political career inside the Romanian Communist Party, as deputy minister (1946), minister of Agriculture (1946-1948) and vice president of the Government. C. Oghină-Pavie, “Biologie et Agronomie en Roumanie sous l’empire du Lyssenkisme (1945-1965). Questions de Méthode,” in *New Europe College Yearbook 2015-2016*, p. 175.
- 5 Leading medical researcher, founder of the Romanian school of endocrinology, member of the Romanian Academy, Constantin I Parhon was a fellow-traveler of the Romanian Communist Party and the initiator (with twenty other intellectuals, half of whom were biologists and doctors) of the first Association of Friendship with the USSR, entity which soon become the main channel for the dissemination of pro-Soviet propaganda in Romania. In Constantin Parhon’s case, his political activity quickly showed effects. In 1946 an Institute of Endocrinology is established and he becomes the first director. Soon after, in 1948, Parhon is elected President of the Presidium of the Great National Assembly, thus becoming Romania’s head of state (albeit the position carried no real political power).

- C. Oghină-Pavie, “Le fil rouge. Pratiques mémorielles dans les sciences de la vie en Roumanie communiste (1945-1965)” ..., p. 117, C. Dobos, “Psychiatry and Ideology: The Emergence of ‘Asthenic Neurosis’ in Communist Romania,” in Mat Savelli & Sarah Marks, *Psychiatry in Communist Europe*, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015, pp. 94-95.
- 6 *Biblioteca Sexuală. Publicațiune pentru educarea sexelor și popularizarea sexologiei* [The Sexual Library. Educational Publication for both sexes and the popularization of sexuality], *Cartea Căsătoriei* [The handbook of marriage], *Problema educației sexelor* [The problem of sexual education], *Dragostea Sexuală* [The sexual love].
 - 7 With the notable exception of two medical publications: *La sexologie normale et pathologique* published by the A. Hesnard (1959, 1962) and *Cours de sexologie* authored by Serge Mongeau (1967).
 - 8 The *obsessive decade* refers to the abuses committed by the Romanian communist authorities in the 1950s.
 - 9 Exchange academic programs such as Fulbright firstly become available for Romanian scholars at the beginning of 1960s.
 - 10 Arhivele Naționale ale României [Romanian National Archives] – ANR, collection “Ștefan Milcu,” file X/101.
 - 11 L’Association des Médecins de Langue Française, Academia delle Scienze di Roma, Société Internationale de Médecine Cybernetique, Société Française d’endocrinologie, International Fertility Association. ANR, collection “Ștefan Milcu,” files: IV/80, p. 11, IV/209, p. 34, IV/29, p.4, IV/28, p. 120-161, IV/16, p. 1-14, III/34, III/30.
 - 12 The other works cited belonged to the Romanian school of endocrinology.
 - 13 ANR, Collection “Ștefan Milcu,” file II/18, p. 1-46.
 - 14 ANR, Collection “Ștefan Milcu,” file X/162, 98-99.
 - 15 M. Ș. Ciuhuța, «Victor Săhleanu, personalitate de prim rang în antropologia românească», in A. Kozma, C. Glavce, C. Bălăceanu-Stolnici, *Antropologie și mediu*, Bucharest, Editura Niculescu, 2014, p. 9. consulted online [https://www.antropology.ro/doc/carti/ONLINE%20PDF%20%20Antropologie%20si%20Mediu%20\[2014\].pdf](https://www.antropology.ro/doc/carti/ONLINE%20PDF%20%20Antropologie%20si%20Mediu%20[2014].pdf) (27.09.2018).