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# The Politics Of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction In Ceausescu's Romania



## Synopsis

The political hypocrisy and personal horrors of one of the most repressive anti-abortion regimes in history came to the world's attention soon after the fall of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. Photographs of orphans with vacant eyes, sad faces, and wasted bodies circled the globe, as did alarming maternal mortality statistics and heart-breaking details of a devastating infant AIDS epidemic. Gail Kligman's chilling ethnography of the state and of the politics of reproduction is the first in-depth examination of this extreme case of political intervention into the most intimate aspects of everyday life. Ceausescu's reproductive policies, among which the banning of abortion was central, affected the physical and emotional well-being not only of individual men, women, children, and families but also of society as a whole. Sexuality, intimacy, and fertility control were fraught with fear, which permeated daily life and took a heavy moral toll as lying and dissimulation transformed both individuals and the state. This powerful study is based on moving interviews with women and physicians as well as on documentary and archival material. In addition to discussing the social implications and human costs of restrictive reproductive legislation, Kligman explores the means by which reproductive issues become embedded in national and international agendas. She concludes with a review of the lessons the rest of the world can learn from Romania's tragic experience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Essentially an ethnography about politics, public policy, and lived experience, this timely analysis of

the Orwellian tragedy of Ceausescu's Romania is superbly researched—a cross-disciplinary contribution of immense value and wide interest that in places almost reads like a novel."—Henry P. David, author of *Born Unwanted*

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Everyone who works politically only to ban abortion by law because of the laudable moral intent of viewing all life as sacred should read this book. The Ceausescu government of Romania, because of Catholicism, banned abortion completely. I guess the dictator went to bed with a clear conscience every night, which probably was enough for him. The results - those orphanage filled with toddlers untouched, untaught, and unnurtured, standing in cribs with their arms out every time a non-profit person trying to help entered the room; young women with ruined reproductive systems because in desperation they sought to end a pregnancy but found none but butchers to end their situation, which might have included being killed by their families for honor (they will never be mothers when they want to be, as a result) - and a culture in which everyone lied about everything out of fear and need to cover-up the most private shame - were morally disastrous. Abortion is not the only drama. Saving the planet and caring for one another, even to the point of sacrificing some of our own "pure" conscience, and comfortable lifestyles, is what true morality requires of us if we dare respond with love. This book was brought to my attention by my son who read it as an undergraduate at Brown University. It's a bit of a slog. But a necessary one. The "abortion wars" in the US have been manipulated by a cruel oligarchy who thinks nothing of letting living people die if they can't afford health care, or of turning our children into cannon fodder for wars by which they, not people here or abroad, profit.

Although the history that Kligman is writing about is horrific, this is an excellent resource for those involved in the global struggle for women's reproductive justice. This is the best book I have found that explains the shocking unintended consequences when a government bans all contraception and forces women to become baby factories. The resulting appalling conditions for the citizenry and the social fabric of a nation are well described and should be a lesson to natalists around the world who interfere with women's' intimate decisions. Buy this book, read it and share it.

This book speaks of the heartaches of scores of women due to a misguided 1966 Decree that was meant to create a new generation of socialists by removing birth control from the options available to the people. Although this is a book about women and their special struggles, as a man I found it interesting. My wife is Romanian and can corroborate many of the stories of these women to be true (or at least reasonable). But I'm also grateful that Gail Kligman didn't dwell on the sensationalism that the popular Western press loved to print following the Decree. In fact, she denies much of the fanciful stuff written to sell newspapers. There weren't masses of perverted bosses standing there watching gynecological exams. But the author does stress the heart-wrenching, personal stories of women who were forced to deal with this foolish Decree 770, many times to the detriment of their health or life.

Although this is a book about a specific place during a specific period, what makes it so chilling is how it describes a descent of little steps into a nightmare world. For those who may even have lived through it thinking "it wasn't that bad," this book provides the opportunity to take a step back and realize "it was worse than we even imagined." Ms. Kligman's account is clarion call for the importance of taking a stand in every society in order to preserve the values we hold dear, but which are in fact as fragile as the weakest among us.

I'm an American woman living and working in Romania, and I have to disagree with Alexandru. From all I hear from my friends both male and female, this book isn't off-target at all. It IS true that many people say Ceasescu's policies didn't affect their lives "all that much", but the people who did have unwanted pregnancies or were harassed because they didn't have enough children were and are real people. I enjoyed this book and would recommend it to anyone interested in reproductive issues -- in either Romania or the U.S.

None of the data are believable! The statistics are made up and it lacks objectivity as if written by an emotional and nervous wreck. Originally from Romania, I can testify that data on births and abortion could not and cannot yet be obtained, also the reasoning behind data is consequently false. It is a collection of false assumption. Too bad something like this (of substandard quality) has been published!

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