



# The Pursuit of Post-Authorship: The Ascending Ecology of the World-Author

Alex CIOROGAR

Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Letters  
Corresponding author emails: alexandru.ciorogar@ubbcluj.ro

---

## The Pursuit of Post-Authorship: The Ascending Ecology of the World-Author

**Abstract:** This paper develops a world-systems and theoretical analysis of the mechanisms of production and uneven distribution of authoriality in the global literary field. Its title is therefore intentionally duple in its ambiguity: the pursuit of authorship will be shown, simultaneously, as the action of pursuing something as a career (the writer who wishes to become a professional author, for instance, by writing and publishing a text or what I will call the author's work) and, in parallel, as an activity of a specified and specialized kind (the entire range of elements and processes involved in the social production of authorship or what will be defined as the work of authorship). To this end, the function of world-authorship and its emergent model of ascension will be both situated within the neoliberal regime of capitalist production and the sphere of world literary studies by pursuing the contours and implications of a materialist, posthuman, and ecological approach, while also hinting at its value and processes indexed in terms of forms, figures, functions, and forces. Finally, then, understood within the post-theoretical conjuncture unfolding today, post-authorship will be defined as both a commodity and a world-apparatus.

**Keywords:** world-authorship, authorial ecology, world-dispositif, the ascension of the author, post-author, world-systems analysis, the work of authorship, the function of authorship.

**Citation suggestion:** Ciorogar, Alex. "The Pursuit of Post-Authorship: The Ascending Ecology of the World-Author" *Transilvania*, no. 09 (2024): 1-13.  
<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2024.09.01>

---



Our contemporary world is confronted with a global polycrisis<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, we all know the disaster-ridden mantra: neoliberalism's seizing up, the ongoing environmental slump, and the depletion of all previous ideological, cultural, and theoretical arrangements. The widening gap between the rich and the poor has led to constant social unrest and inequality, and a sense of injustice, especially among marginalized communities. In addition to these challenges, there are increasing geopolitical tensions and conflicts unfolding on the global stage, the savage pursuit of power showing a total disregard for human rights. The erosion of international cooperation, the rise of misinformation, fake news, and echo chambers have also made it increasingly difficult to navigate our contemporary moment and to sustain productive and informed debates about these critical and pressing issues.

As the term polycrisis itself suggests, these challenges are not, however, isolated incidents but rather interconnected and interdependent. With the slow but steady disintegration of the dominant economic ideology (associated with centrist liberalism), literary and cultural studies will have to struggle to adapt to these changing neoliberal (post-neoliberal?) times by developing equitable conceptual frameworks and innovative analytical tools that move beyond traditional humanism, liberalism, and individualism. Of

---

1. For a discussion on mitigating known and unknown risks and approaching stability see Luiz Awazu Pereira da Silva, "The broad Context in January 2023 for financial Stability and the Risks in a poly-crisis World," in *The Next Systemic Financial Crisis – Where Might it Come From? Financial Stability in a Polycrisis World*, ed. Andreas Dombret and Patrick Kenadjian (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), 175–178.

course, these concerted events have hindered our ability to find effective solutions to the multifaceted catastrophes within which we find ourselves. However, even if, as Achim Szepanski writes, 'the future will be human in posthuman discourses'<sup>2</sup>, we must distinguish between dystopian transhumanist thought and critical or reflexive<sup>3</sup>. We could do worse than showing that writers and their adjacent authoriality are historical and cultural constructs rather than transcendental concepts free from ideology that need to be placed within larger contexts like evolving ecosystems of media and technology.

But for a concept like authorship, which seems to bask in morbid paradoxes, here is the slightest: the volume and complexity of academic work that authorship has entertained since the late 1960s presents a fundamental problem for literary scholars, since few other research terms have been so historically crucial to the field<sup>4</sup>. Authorship studies could be thought of as a theoretical and empirical subdiscipline, suffering, nonetheless, from a lack of institutionalization and professionalization that contrasts with the omniscience of authoriality in every type of literary research<sup>5</sup>. Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault were, of course, fully aware of the contradictions surrounding the authorial figure's sudden disappearance and its equally haunting reappearance.

What one can assume nowadays is that everyone has had some familiarity with said dynamic since poststructuralism and deconstruction have both restructured the field of literary and cultural studies and hollowed-out the humanities themselves which are now currently being once again replaced or at least encompassed within materialist, affective, and ecological forms of thinking. Nevertheless, there is a striking contradiction here since most, if not all, scholars still take for granted Barthes and Foucault's fundamental arguments, even while the developments in our posthuman, global and digital world and the neoliberal refashioning of the University are, on the one hand, indebted to but have, on the other, raised significant questions about the validity and underlying assumptions of their hypothesis<sup>6</sup>.

It is also true that, over the last couple of decades, comparative and postcolonial studies have been also utterly transformed not only by the debates within the literary field, but, as previously suggested, by the reconfiguring organizational issues stemming from the broader agenda of today's publishing industry, and the agenda of international cultural and political economy<sup>7</sup>. These overwhelming disciplinary and institutional crises simply add new layers of uncertainty and instability to ongoing challenges, such as the contestation of nationalistic outlooks in a globalized world or the utility of transnational comparison itself.

---

2. Achim Szepanski, *Capitalism in the Age of Catastrophe. The Newest Developments of Financial Capital in Times of Polycrisis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 5.

3. Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism. A Critical Analysis* (London-New York: Bloomsbury), 3: 'The word 'critical' here has a double function: it combines, on the one hand, openness to the radical nature of technocultural change, and, on the other hand, it emphasizes a certain continuity with traditions of thought that have critically engaged with humanism, and which, in part, have evolved out of the humanist tradition itself. The task is, therefore, to re-evaluate established forms of antihumanist critique, to adapt them to the current, changed conditions, and, where possible, to radicalize them.'

4. The following is just a selection of academic books dealing with the death and return of the author and it does not cover the French or German-speaking scene: Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992); Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller, eds., *What is an Author?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Eugen Simion, *The Return of the Author* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996); William Irwin, *The Death and Resurrection of the Author?* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002); Carla Benedetti, *The Empty Cage: Inquiry into the Mysterious Disappearance of the Author* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2005) Michelene Wandor, *The Author is Not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else: Creative Writing Reconceived* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Jane Gallop, *The Deaths of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Philip Sayers, *Authorship's Wake. Writing After the Death of the Author* (New York-London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

5. Seán Burke addresses this deficiency and imagines the coming into being of an 'Institute of Advanced Authorial Study'. See Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), xx.

6. See Yves Citton, *Lire, interpréter, actualiser. Pour quoi les études littéraires?* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2007); Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton University Press, 2010); François Rastier, *Apprendre pour transmettre. L'éducation contre l'idéologie managériale* (Paris: PUF, 2013); Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Petite écologie des études littéraires. Pourquoi et comment étudier la littérature?* (Vincennes: Editions Thierry Marchaisse, 2011).

7. Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).



Even if the notion of ‘world literature’<sup>8</sup> has been subject to intense scholarly debate and various forms of contestation, it is nevertheless clear that it has succeeded in reorienting the focus of the entire discipline towards international, inter-imperial, decolonial, and post-Eurocentric dynamics that Monika Fludernik, for instance, was pointing towards some couple of decades ago<sup>9</sup>.

My ambition, then, is to resituate the problem of authorship both within this new neoliberal regime of capitalist production and the sphere of world literary studies by pursuing the implications of a materialist and ecological approach. Authors are part of cultural networks and conceptual frameworks where literary practices intertwine with international actors and institutions<sup>10</sup> which, as Gisèle Sapiro argues, comprise the sphere of production and the status of the writer<sup>11</sup>. This paper develops a world-systems and theoretical analysis of the mechanisms of production and uneven distribution of authoriality in the global literary field. Its title is therefore intentionally ambiguous: the pursuit of authorship will be defined, simultaneously, as examining the action of pursuing someone or something (the writer who wishes to become a professional author, for instance, by writing and publishing a text) and, in parallel, as an activity of a specified kind (the entire range of elements and processes involved in the production and commodification of authorship itself on a global scale).

The crisis or death of authorship was contained, as previously mentioned, through the institutionalization or widespread formalization of poststructuralist and deconstructive reading strategies that have simply put aside not only the writer’s intentions but the entire panoply of biographical, social, economic, and historical contexts and their relevance to literary exegesis. As Seán Burke has argued, the great crisis of postmodernism were crises of authorship ‘even if they still disdain to announce themselves as such’, adding that ‘the difficulties of envisaging how and where contemporary thought might relocate the authorship that is everywhere in its midst may only be outweighed by the necessity of the calling and should in no wise deter us from the attempt’<sup>12</sup>. I also further agree with Burke that ‘the concerted return to context which we have [...] witnessed in the discourses of New Historicism, Cultural Materialism and Postcolonialism suggest the restoration of a working concept of authorship if only to provide a point of access to historical, cultural, and colonial contexts’<sup>13</sup>. If the conceptual premises of authorial disappearance are now long gone, the premises of its return have nonetheless somehow perversely survived. Nonetheless, contemporary theory appears to be dependent on the death or killing of the author, since its spectral reappearance was redeemed as a diffuse yet ideological reappropriation in both political and ethical terms.

Now, to counter both these lingering and outdated forms of conceptualization, I will be using Raymond Williams’s work<sup>14</sup> to explain how and why these various authorial models coexist: the death of the author (residual theory), the returns of the author (dominant theories), and what I deem to be *the ascension of the author* - the emergent theoretical outlook proposed in my paper and in my work more generally. The author’s ascension is defined, therefore, as a speculative instrument which affords the examination of various modes of contemporary authorial performance<sup>15</sup>. As a conceptual tool, this critical metaphor affords a more flexible and dynamic understanding according to which, as a historically determined phenomenon, the author is not so much (or not only) a linear, one-dimensional function of subjectivity, pace Foucault, but, as this paper will further show, *a vertical and distributive*

---

8. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton University Press, 2003); Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Harvard University Press, 2004); Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (Verso, 2005); Emily Apter, *Against World Literature. On the Politics of Untranslatability* (Verso, 2013).

9. Monika Fludernik, ed., *Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Common Traditions and New Developments* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003).

10. Here, I am keeping with Jacques Dubois’ definition of the literary institution as an ensemble of normative social facts and practices, especially because the French scholar is interested in examining the relationship between literature, as such, and Althusser’s famous ISAs. See Jacques Dubois, *L’Institution littéraire* (Brussels: Labor, 2005).

11. Gisèle Sapiro, *The Sociology of Literature*, translated by Madeline Bedecarré and Ben Libman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024), 30.

12. Seán Burke, *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: a Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), xxix.

13. Seán Burke, *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern*, xxvii.

14. See ‘Dominant, Residual, and Emergent’ in Raymond William, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977), 121–128.

15. For an updated definition of authorial performativity see Sonja Longolius, *Performing Authorship: Strategies of Becoming an Author in the Works of Paul Auster, Candice Breitz, Sophie Calle, and Jonathan Safran Foer* (Berlin: transcript Verlag, 2016).

*ecological complex* which constantly redesigns itself according to the particularities of a (poly)system, culture, and even ecology.

Further building on the work of Roger Chartier, wherein he distinguishes between the *mise en texte* (writing or textual strategies found within the work itself) and the *mise en livre* (the tactics of the publishing industry)<sup>16</sup>, my paper will add to the leader of the so-called fourth generation of *Annales* historians' taxonomy yet another mode or system of literary staging which I will call the *mise en auteur*. The kernel of my argument is that authorship indexes and critiques the *forms* (autofictional genres, for instance), *figures* (the writer reveals themselves, typically in interviews or other paratexts, as a hipster, hacker, DJ), *functions* (the idea of literary value, symbolic capital or even style), and *forces* (political, economic, ethical) of (and therefore against) the neoliberal capitalist system.

To forgo poststructuralist or deconstructive operations we simply need to adopt a post-linguistic, hence post-semiotic, understanding of authorship which will steer us away from grand narratives (Lyotard), myths (Barthes), l'écriture (Derrida), and discourses (Foucault) and to redefine (post) authorship as a multidimensional phenomenon and its vertical ascension as the movement of a *literary commodity* in the modern system of cultural production. What I mean to convey through this *vertical ascension* is the rising or even supplementary excess of neoliberal authorial (re)production. This paper's overall purpose, then, is to relocate and propel authorial investigations beyond postmodernism in a yet uncharted territory, trying to figure out what exactly this axial and dynamic reemergence of authorship entails. Now, while accepting the core demonstrations and, indeed, the necessity of a global reconceptualization of authorship put forth by Boes, Braun, and Spiers<sup>17</sup>, or even the need of as suggested by Berensmeyer, Buelens, and Demoor in their *Cambridge Handbook*<sup>18</sup>, my WReC-inflected approach significantly differs from both propositions in that it does not represent a practical update on Michel Foucault's 'author function' but, once more, as a genuine reframing of the notion based on post-semiotic, materialist, and ecological foundations.

Taking its cue from Immanuel Wallerstein's theories on world-systems analysis, this paper is additionally interested in decolonizing contemporary modes of cultural production and their adjacent literary institutions through which authoriality unfolds in a globalized social environment<sup>19</sup>. As a result, the relatively recent reorganizations of the disciplines of comparative literature and postcolonial studies should be further complemented by exposing and analyzing the power relations, clashes, negotiations and collaborative tactics between the rhetorical and media actors involved in what is claimed to be an integrated yet uneven literary world<sup>20</sup>. Authorship should be determined and conceptualized through its dependency on the modern world-system.

In consequence, this paper contains three interlocking themes: analytical, socio-historical, and experiential. Firstly, as has already become obvious, the article is intended as a materialist, posthumanist, and ecological critique of previous language-based authorial theories. Our immediate problem concerns the current morphology of authorship, not the absence or reappearance of authorship per se, as has been the case since the late 1960s, simply because these issues disregard historical and material developments of cultural production. Closely following this lead, my second line of argumentation is, therefore, historical, since I am interested in focusing specifically on situations or contexts in which neoliberal, digital, and global forms of authorial practice prevail. I want to highlight, then, the features of present-day authorship and how it differs from mid- and late-twentieth century models and conceptualization of capitalist production. Authorship will appear to be wedged, much like ideology itself, in the interstices between individual texts and the social and economic structures determining or (re)producing their conditions of existence. Embroiled deep within the economic and cultural practices of the literary field, we will also show how authorship reappears as an institutional continuum or a social spectrum which unfolds through and delivers images and practices of combined unevenness.

The final theme follows on from the first two as it involves the redefinition of authorship in terms

16. Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

17. Tobias Boes, Rebecca Braun, and Emily Spiers, eds. *World Authorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

18. Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor, eds. *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

19. Haun Saussy, ed., *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

20. WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool, 2015).



of how and why it is brought into existence, rather than its Foucauldian function by closely following a Marxist logic of dialectic argumentation (surprisingly absent from the field of authorship studies until this day). To that end, the author will be first defined, à la Benjamin, as the producer of a certain consumable commodity (a book, a text, a poem, a novel, a play, etc.). However, I will also argue that the same producer will simultaneously produce and morph within his or her own form of authoriality. Most importantly, this material and intermedial process of producing one's authoriality is codependent on other elements and agents. I am equally interested, then, in 1) *the author's work* (the text itself – which, of course, also contributes to the development of an authorial ethos although not as an active rhetorical element but, to use a Marxist turn of phrase, as fossilized form of labor inscribed within the work), which I will distinguish from what I will from now on call 2) *the work of authorship* (all sorts of resources but, most importantly, the productive and, as we shall see, reproductive labor that goes into building the public or social and even commercial image of the author).

To further unpack this idea of the public image of the author, I will resort to Michèle Bokobza Kahan, who rightly distinguishes three relational dimensions of the author's image: a) the author's image in relation to the text (self-portrait), b) the author's self-image in relation to the biographical self (ethos) and c) the author's image in relation to society and others (producer)<sup>21</sup>. In a relatively similar manner, but approaching the topic, however, from a North American tradition (and, therefore, different from that of field theory), Nathalie Heinich proposes, following in the footsteps of Erving Goffman and Howard Becker, respectively, another ternary model, according to which the author's identity is at the confluence of three moments or temporalities: 1) self-perception, *i.e.* the way in which the person perceives himself; 2) representation, *i.e.* the way in which he presents himself to others; and 3) *designation*, or the way in which he is perceived by others. Heinich emphasizes, however, that different forms of temporality characterize these relationships, and that inconsistencies or discrepancies can arise in their configuration and, consequently, distort the overall image of an author<sup>22</sup>. To understand more clearly, however, how these types of mediated relationships can be instrumentalized, I propose to turn our gaze now towards Dominique Maingueneau, who divides authorship itself in at least three parts<sup>23</sup>: a) the historical writer (the real person), b) the author in the possible space of the literary field (the writer) and c) the grammatical subject of the enunciation (the inscriber or the voice in the text)<sup>24</sup>.

Coming back to my previous distinction between *the author's work* and *the work of authorship* I would now add that this difference is easily illustrated by thinking, once again, with Marx, about what we typically experience in the literary field and working our way backwards to understand the causes of authorship. Our everyday experience of authorship, then, as it comes to us through reading, conversations, books, texts, messages, emails, discourses, rhetorical strategies, styles, interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs, awards, prizes, book reviews, national and international literary festivals, courses and lectures, workshops and seminars, book readings, parties, conferences, Q&As, book signings, gestures, looks, photo shoots, and other cultural elements represent the locus or the site of considering the intricacies of literary production and authoriality. All of these elements mediate, in fact, one's interaction with the author and can therefore be systematized as follows: taking into perspective the social conditions of production we notice, first, the structure of the literary field itself (and all its antinomies), second, the workings of literary and other cultural institutions, third, political and aesthetic ideologies, and, last but not least, the economic constraints of capitalism. However, the difficulty of our inquiry lies in the absence of professional or institutional organization of productive

---

21. Michèle Bokobza Kahan, "Image d'auteur," in *Le lexique socius*, ed. Anthony Glinoe, Denis Saint Amand. <http://ressources-socius.info/index.php/lexique/21-lexique/197-image-d-auteur>.

22. Nathalie Heinich, *La sociologie à l'épreuve de l'art* (Bruxelles: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2015), 68.

23. José-Luis Diaz also similarly distinguishes three levels within the notion of author: 1) the author the real or civil person (the life or autobiographical fragments contained in the memoir), 2) the textual author (the ethos or narrative voice constructed through the prism of the memoir), and, finally, 3) the set of representations of the author in the public space. This latter ensemble represents what he calls a collective-historical totality and, therefore, imaginary or even anthropological authorial scenographies that can be used or actualized by everyone participating in the literary field. To make things clearer, the level at which one might situated auctorial scenographies (and to connect them with the idea of auctorial posture) would be, on the one hand, at that of the literary field, precisely because they prefigure certain stylistics or combinatory possibilities of the field and because, at a certain transpersonal level, it allows authors to activate certain possible positions. See José-Luis Diaz, *L'Écrivain imaginaire. Scénographies auctoriales à l'époque romantique* (Paris: Champion, 2007).

24. Dominique Maingueneau, *Le discours littéraire. Paratopie et scène d'énonciation* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004).

authoriality and its temporal, geographical, and technologic developments, and even more so when it comes to its ethico-legal (the French conception of literary property or *droit d'auteur*) and economic frameworks (the Anglo-American copyright).

If my hypothesis is correct, namely that authorship is itself a valuable and consumable commodity, it also means that it is partially alienating and dehumanizing. As celebrities and public personas, authors are branded and transformed into marketing mascots through the segmented labor of other parties working in the book industry. Dislocated or displaced from the means of its own production, the star-author nevertheless remains central and spirally ascends within the entire panoply of promotional services. The ascension of the author, then, comes surprisingly close not to Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of obscuring myths, which supposedly hollow out an original<sup>25</sup>, as one would expect, but rather to Guy Debord's spectacle<sup>26</sup> or Jean Baudrillard's definition of a late-capitalist or third-order simulacra<sup>27</sup>.

Consequently, another conceptual distinction I would like to employ, therefore, is the one between I) *the author-function*, as defined by Michel Foucault, as an offshoot of discursive and cultural arrangements, and what I will from now on call II) *the function of authorship* (which is commercial or market-oriented, wherein the prestige or distinction, to use a Bourdieusian turn of phrase, of the signature is also implied). By applying the basic distinction between use-value and exchange value to authorship, it becomes immediately obvious that the latter concept (*i.e.* the function of authorship) can only be determined through the literary market. The paradox that quickly becomes apparent lies in the contradictory nature of the simultaneously extrinsic (commercial success) and intrinsic value of authorship (a literary manuscript that agents, editors, and publisher find valuable in the first place). This gap might also explain why authors are usually involved in related or parallel (sometimes even alienating) activities that sustain their literary work: typically, they are also paid for translations and other similar jobs, such as teacher on creative writing programs or residencies, whether these side jobs will also be redeemed or not within the social construction of authoriality.

To solve this contradiction, we will say that, if *the function of authorship* is dependent or influenced by the neoliberal capitalist literary market, its value is not necessarily determined by consumption but by *the work of authorship* (defined above). Importantly, then, *the work of authorship* does not belong to the writer in question. Human and non-human efforts (*i.e.*, displaced labor), such as the activities of journalists, editors, and book reviewers (or any other type of assistance staff), on the one hand, and the workings of machines, institutions, and other social bodies (ideological state apparatuses), on the other, are always included in the production of this authorial commodity. *The work of authorship* is, in a Marxist sense, ghostly because it is the result of an ethereal deposit of interconnected elements and actions that went into its material production and objectification. Therefore, one could gauge *the value of authorship* by measuring or tracking the social magnitude of practices and materials that went into its production.

Sarah Brouillette is illuminating in this regard. She writes that 'literary production is influenced by the development of authorship as a profession and by the process through which writers consume images of themselves and reinterpret those images in order to negotiate and circulate different ones'<sup>28</sup>. She also emphasizes that the material construction or self-construction of authorial images are dependent on marketing techniques. Moreover, Brouillette further discusses the communicative circuit of textuality and how authorship travels through it but does not extend so far as to suggest, as this paper does, that authorship itself might work as any other commodity chain, seeing as she limits her work and conceptualization within the range of Bourdieu's field theory. Yet, as illuminating as her work initially appears to be, an inexplicable conceptual darkness quickly falls upon her discursive land. Without any mention of Foucault's name, Brouillette seems to believe in the existence of a so-called 'Barthesian function of discourse', probably taking Juliet Gardiner's word for granted<sup>29</sup>, and therefore virtually ignoring S. Burke's essential contributions to the authorial debate (while paradoxically referencing his work), since she seems to garner up similar conclusions, namely that the disappearance of the author was in no way countered by its surging postcolonial marketable function<sup>30</sup>.

25. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972).

26. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

27. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

28. Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.

29. See Juliet Gardiner, 'Recuperating the Author: Consuming Fictions of the 1990s,' in *PBSA* 94 (2000).

30. Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11–12.



Pierre Bourdieu himself has, indeed, shown that 'the logic of commercial production tends more and more to assert itself over avant-garde production'<sup>31</sup>. However, the sociologist was describing the literary field itself and the book market per se, and not the contemporary commercialization or commodification of the notion of authorship as such. Of course, we might even presuppose that, at this point, Bourdieu would have himself argued, nevertheless, for the dialectical existence of an interstitial, relative autonomy within world-authorship. Now, even if 'the author's name and attached personae have become key focal points'<sup>32</sup> in marketing strategies, as Brouillette acknowledges, this is typically done and researched for the benefit of the book (the novel, the collection of poems, essays, etc.) and not the other way around. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, Beck, Luhmann, and Bhabha, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen shows how 'migrant writers have a more complex relationship to the book markets and literary institutions'<sup>33</sup>, while also modeling possible trajectories of canonization but, alas, falls short in explaining how the external market conditions concretely affect authorship itself.

Consequently, it becomes evident that *the function of authorship* partly ignores individual talent, skill, and other stylistic or, let us say, innate differential resources which have quintessentially defined the Romantic/transcendental tradition. *The work of authorship* therefore represents the totality of social, cultural, and economic forces that hover alongside or above the human and non-human actors and actions involved in its making, such as the technical complexity of the writerly equipment, the use of social media or other digital platforms, the social organization of the workflow, and so on. However, with the risk of repeating myself, if the magnitude, efficiency, and productivity of *authorial work* determines *the value and function of authorship*, it is so only if and when it appears to be socially and culturally useful or valuable to the other agents involved in the cultural field and literary market, whether as a commodity (an author builds his or her own public persona), the fruit of labor (an author's brand is the result of the action and labor of various agents such as editors, publishers, booksellers, prize juries, etc.), or as a service (authors' political or moral responsibilities in relation to state power or the market).

This further entails that the social presence of a writer and his self-identification<sup>34</sup> as such are burgeoning themselves into a commodity, acquiring or ascending to the status of authorship, if and only when these forms of manifestation are exchanged with a different group (typically a group of readers or consumers, whether academics or amateurs) that has certain needs and values that can be satisfied through the consumption of authorship. Consumers typically relate to the market presence of authorship in the literary field and less so to the real writer behind the work and, even then, the authorial meeting is typically staged (think about the setup of a book launch, for instance). I would therefore say that the contemporary literary scene is defined by its unremitting, if not excessive, production of authorial value, rather than a genuine, axiological gratification of author-functions.

As a commodity, then, authorship is the result of a series of transformative labor processes, and it should be understood as the totality of social relations between human and non-human actors ascending on a global scale. In a sense, authorship is the result of an uneven combination of various public interests and economic relations and, indeed, as Sarah Brouillette has argued, 'capitalism's relationship to cultural production is fundamentally politic'<sup>35</sup>. The way in which authorship is typically perceived, though, is as an almost abstract force. It is a carrier, if you will, of fetishized significance, an alienating vector, to use Marx's dialect again, which dissolves and supersedes the real-life practices of authorial work. It is these concealed interactions that transform authorship into a cultural commodity with its own logic.

However, we need to acknowledge once more that, while *the function of authorship* is, indeed, influenced, determined and affected by the contemporary capitalist system, the research instruments academics have at their disposal represent, unfortunately, a Fordist-era grab-bag of belated poststructuralist, postmodern and, at best, postcolonial tools. This problem isn't immediately perceivable (so therefore left unaddressed) because the tendency or focus of literary academics

---

31. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 345.

32. Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 67.

33. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures* (London: Continuum, 2008), 62.

34. See the concept of 'self-presentation' in Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974).

35. Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 75.

today 1) tends to steer away from the individual to the system, 2) to move towards post-theory, post-critique, or the digital post-humanities, 3) to skip or disregard biographically oriented types of literary history and adopt trans-individual, genre-, or form-based approaches that privilege the computational crunching of numbers and the production of visual or graphical renderings of statistical data over long *durées*, 4) and, finally, to give way to the study of political and ideological underpinning of literary culture. Instead of abandoning the biographical author altogether, this paper has been striving to conceptually reconvert authorship in ideological, ecological and materialist terms.

Consequently, it could be argued that, within contemporary world-literature studies and the arena of theoretical debates, authorship was backed into a corner, becoming a peripheral concept<sup>36</sup>. The core is typically represented by Casanova's republic of circulating letters (not people or writers), Moretti's system of dislocated narrative forms or Damrosch's great literary works gaining more in and through translation (who carries these works?). Which is to say that world-literary studies also require a conceptual equivalent or update in examining the movement of authorial ideas and practices on a global stage. To show how literature is produced and transmitted around the globe and through time, one can, therefore, resort to literary sociology (its French variety in particular) to get a sense of how world-authorship might look like. In the past few decades, nevertheless, most important scholarly works have restricted their discussions on an epistemological or even archetypal level: literary scenarios (José-Luis Diaz<sup>37</sup>), career trajectories (Jérôme Meizoz), the relatively autonomous literary space (Gisèle Sapiro<sup>38</sup>), the mystery of literary creation (Bernard Lahire<sup>39</sup>), or identity issues (Nathalie Heinich<sup>40</sup>).

Jérôme Meizoz, to closely examine just one such example (probably the most useful and simultaneously influential), unimaginatively describes the emergence of modern authorship as an emancipation from the 'masters'<sup>41</sup>. Following Bourdieu's work, authorship should be studied, he argues, in terms of its possible positions and the trajectories a writer occupies in the literary field. The singularity of authoriality is therefore determined through its relationships to other pre-existing ways of inhabiting an authorial position. Reappropriation of literary postures from the past or from other cultures are, he suggests, at the very heart of the mechanism of reproduction or literary renewal. Through the concept of posture, Meizoz successfully brings rhetoric and media analysis under one roof.

In this respect, it would seem that even the famous postmodern critique of literary history and criticism and the attack on the author was, indeed, a result or an effect of the resurrection of archaic models of authorship or postures made possible through the juxtaposing of fresh circumstances (*i.e.*, poststructuralism and deconstruction) with more traditional concepts (medieval taxonomies used to describe different types of writers, *i.e.*, the scribe or modern scriptor in Barthes' work or Foucault's resort to Saint Jerome's attributional criteria). The theoretical innovations of these scholars, who were, indeed, accustomed to the central scholarly practices of their day, looked back or sideways towards the margins/peripheries to differentiate their work from the established status quo concretized in the positivistic and biographical type of literary history and criticism, as practiced by Gustave Lanson or Sainte-Beuve, for instance. The likes of Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault transformed or transposed what already seemed like pseudo-scientific or proto-ideas<sup>42</sup> not only into symbolic leverage but a theoretical orthodoxy: they mixed contemporary features with residual rudiments to create new, counter, or alternative views of authorship.

What is lacking, though, in Meizoz's brilliant account of modern authorship is precisely the materialist and even contextualist comparison of the concrete environments and modes of cultural productions that ideologically articulate and predetermine the emergence and functioning of authorial postures.

36. Referring, most probably, to M.H. Abrams' famous theoretical taxonomy in *The Mirror and The Lamp*, Burke insists that the theory of authorship has arisen peripherally and as an offshoot of more general positions.

37. José-Luis Diaz, *L'écrivain imaginaire. Scénographies auctoriales à l'époque romantique* (Paris: Champion, 2007).

38. Gisèle Sapiro, *La Responsabilité de l'écrivain. Littérature, droit et morale en France (XIXe–XXIe siècle)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2011); Gisèle Sapiro, *The French Writers' War. 1940-1954* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

39. Bernard Lahire, *Franz Kafka. Éléments pour une théorie de la création littéraire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).

40. Nathalie Heinich, *Être écrivain: création et identité* (Paris: La Découverte, 2000).

41. See Jérôme Meizoz, "Modern Posterities of Posture. Jean-Jacques Rousseau," in *Authorship Revisited. Conceptions of Authorship Around 1900 and 2000*, eds. Gillis J. Dorleijn, Ralf Grüttemeier, Liesbeth Korthals Altes (Leuven-Paris-Walpole: Peeters, 2010).

42. See Ludwik Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, edited by Thaddeus J. Trenn and Robert K. Merton, Translated by Fred Bradley and Thaddeus J. Trenn, with a foreword by Thomas S. Kuhn (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979).





World-authors (whether they are novelists, poets, or critics) typically borrow, in a similar move to Moretti's argument pertaining to the narrative transplanting of central novelistic forms to marginal materials, superseded or antiquated ways of voicing frustrations regarding their local conditions of production. This means they are repurposing or translating older models of authorial figuration into new coordinates, through overlapping ontological, economic and behavioral regimes. What's more, though, Meizoz's intervention also loses sight of the dynamic and interactive processes involving social and historical contexts and real-life practices and configurations of a non-human type. World-literature studies therefore need to grasp the authorial level from both a posthuman and ecological perspective.

Authorial figures and strategies, as I have tried to show, register the signs and effects of how capitalism itself has developed and was transcribed in and through the system of world-literature. Dostoevsky's social location, for instance, as the Warwick Research Collective has shown, was 'fundamental to his ability to invent a new form that, by registering the particular dynamics of social life in the Russian semiperiphery in its nineteenth-century moment'<sup>43</sup>. Marko Juvan similarly pointed out, that 'peripheral authors [...] have a sense of the world literary space and a desire to take a position in this space'<sup>44</sup>. Paradoxically, he goes on to show, semiperipheral authors might sometimes be better suited to firmly establishing themselves on the international stage, he suggests, even though getting there could, indeed, prove more difficult for most of them. The concept of world-authorship should be viewed, then, as a struggle between different participants, a struggle that, conducted along literary and non-literary coordinates alike, reflects the political, social, and even moral relevance of critical-literary discourses at large<sup>45</sup>.

All these seemingly random examples of world-authorship do, indeed, indicate there is a constant swivel between melancholic reminiscence and vivacious emancipatory discharge when one is supplying and supplanting his or her symbolic power through the experience of movement from a peripheral or semiperipheral area to central hubs. Educated in the spirit of classical or traditional types of literary postures and suddenly overwhelmed by new systemic modes of economic and political existence, the world-author typically renders linguistic and cultural experiences as a breach or a caesura in the line of communal habit, power and knowledge. Peripheral and semiperipheral writers trace a harrowing and hypothetical trajectory of social dislocation and collective segregation, while forging into being primitive yet opulent styles of authorial subjectivity and it is exactly this underwhelming prestige that international prizes (the Booker Prize, the Prix Goncourt, or even the Nobel), luxury translations, and international festivals capitalize on. Indeed, Gisèle Sapiro argues that international literary festivals structure the current transnational literary field and, thus, play an important role in the making of world-authorship, while also mirroring 'the unequal conditions of access to world authorship and the power relations that structure the world market for translations'<sup>46</sup>.

Furthermore, as Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett, and Stephen Shapiro argue, a world-systems approach needs to further understand not only the waged but, more importantly, 'the intrinsic role of the unwaged' or reproductive labor in gendered, racialized, and ethnicized forms of world-authorship. This is where I would add, though, that a clear mapping of reproductive, non-institutionalized (or non-remunerated authorial labor) should be examined through the lens of what is generally called symbolic interactionism, since it is better suited to deal with 'relationships within the family, friendships, love interests, group formations, relations with peers' or any other 'relationships within the production chain [that] are personal'<sup>47</sup>. Howard Becker has, indeed, examined productive networks based on personal interaction and distinguished between core producers (writers, per se) and intermediaries: publishers, translators, copyeditors, proofreader, literary agents, sales representatives, PR professionals, friends, first readers<sup>48</sup>.

Bruno Latour would later add a further distinction here in the role of mediators - as opposed to neutral, non-intervening intermediaries, mediators are actors who transform or affect the process of

---

43. WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool, 2015), 61.

44. Marko Juvan, *Worlding a Peripheral Literature* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 2.

45. Gillis J. Dorleijn, Ralf Grüttemeier, Liesbeth Korthals Altes, eds., *Authorship Revisited. Conceptions of Authorship Around 1900 and 2000* (Leuven-Paris-Walpole: Peeters, 2010), vii.

46. Gisèle Sapiro, *The Sociology of Literature*, 136.

47. Gisèle Sapiro, *The Sociology of Literature*, translated by Madeline Bedecarré and Ben Libman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024), 37.

48. See Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

signification or, in our situation, the chain of authorial production<sup>49</sup>. Finally, network theory, as exemplified, for instance, in the work of Ronald Burt, might also be useful in explaining various other strands of reproductive authorial labor, such as social connections or networks<sup>50</sup>. *Authorial commodification* is, thus, a complex and multifaceted conglomerate of elements and practices belonging to the capitalist world-system and its cultural, social, and ecological parameters requiring what Clifford Geertz would have called 'thick description'<sup>51</sup>. While geographically and historically bound, every manifestation of world-authorship therefore represents a transgenerational convergence of symbolic reproductions of cultural identities and literary relations, on the one hand, and the gamut of economic and material reactions against capitalist arrangements, on the other.

All writers of the modern period (modernity is typically defined by the Warwick School as beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of a capitalist world-economy and my paper closely follows their lead here) are world-authors of the capitalist world-system, which means that global authors are not uniquely restricted to a 20<sup>th</sup>-century understanding of globalization<sup>52</sup>. World-authorship, then, develops both locally and temporally through successive patterns and relational processes of relative stabilization and explosive developments, 'simultaneously human and extra-human, material and symbolic'<sup>53</sup>. As a result, a theory and exegesis of world-authorship must be attentive not only 'to the aesthetic mediation of the hierarchical differentiation and inequities of the world-system'<sup>54</sup> but, as previously suggested, to 'the role of labor divisions [...] in the formation of cultural production'<sup>55</sup>, and, finally, to the inequalities which arise through combined and uneven relationships between class, gender/sex, and race/ethnicity. The move towards what I call a fifth era of modern authorship<sup>56</sup> and the sixth face of modernity<sup>57</sup>, is best understood as the coming into being of a *world-dispositif* consisting of various agents, institutions (academies, schools, universities, unions, authors' societies, circles, groups or clubs), objects (such as instruments of writing), and practices (reading, writing, feedback, etc.). The workings of authorship represent a mix between social subjectivities and forms of cultural production within the self-evolving dynamics of today's neoliberal capitalism.

If the death of the author gave birth to both a fictional and critical proliferation of aestheticized and discursively bound authorial images, the return of the author was an attempt to relocate literary power and authority into the political reality of gender, race, ethnicity, and other identitarian dimensions foregrounded by many critical movements that revised the notions of agency and ethics (especially feminism and postcolonialism). Recent epistemological updates on this issue include, most famously, Bruno Latour's project of expanding the notion of agency into a full-blown network. Nevertheless, his friction-free relational approach disregards, as Stephen Shapiro shows in the footsteps of Wallerstein, an entire series of production processes that are geographically extensive and contain many kinds of

---

49. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 37–42.

50. See Ronald S. Burt, *Neighbor Networks: Competitive Advantage Local and Personal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

51. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

52. Stephen Shapiro, 'What Is World-Systems for Cultural Studies?' in *Tracking Capital. World-Systems, World-Ecology, World-Culture*, eds. Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett and Stephen Shapiro (New York: SUNY Press, 2024), 10: 'the phrase "world-system" does not mean an immediate assumption that the entire world was included from the outset, but rather that the capitalist economy initially made for itself a relatively self-enclosed world, even while it constantly sought to expand its borders.'

53. Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett and Stephen Shapiro, 'Introduction,' in Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett and Stephen Shapiro, eds., *Tracking Capital. World-Systems, World-Ecology, World-Culture* (New York: SUNY Press, 2024), 4.

54. Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett and Stephen Shapiro, 'Introduction,' in Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett and Stephen Shapiro, eds., *Tracking Capital*, 5.

55. Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett and Stephen Shapiro, 'Introduction,' in Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett and Stephen Shapiro, eds., *Tracking Capital*, 6.

56. 1) the birth of the (modern) author, 2) the sacralization of the author, 3) the death of the author, 4) the return of the author, 5) the ascension of the author.

57. See Alex Ciorogar, 'THE 6th FACE OF MODERNITY - POSTMILLENNIAL ROMANIAN POETRY AND METAMODERNISM: SUPERNATURAL NATURALISM, OR THE POETICS OF PROVISION,' in *Caietele Echinox*, Vol. 47, 2024 (forthcoming).



production units and various modes of remunerating labor<sup>58</sup>.

World-authorship is carried from its producers to its consumers through the knots of economic circulation and is, of course, transformed in due course, being propelled through the geo-historical and socio-political particularities of certain forces and tensions which together construct what I would like to call a specific *authorial ecology*. Consequently, my suggestion is that, as a cultural commodity, world-authorship 'retains traces of its creation in ways that can be tracked backwards and forwards in the process', conveying, as Shapiro further explains, 'the continuing presence of the original elements of labor, energy inputs, and mode of production'<sup>59</sup>. If our current condition is that 'of an emerging post-liberal moment, and possible third secular trend', as Shapiro also maintains, analyses dedicated to the notion of world-authorship would also need to move further away from the principles of centrist liberalism, disrupting the 'episteme that made culture seem commonsensical through national and subjective differences'<sup>60</sup> and opening up, instead, a new space for international authors and systemic similarities.

The production of a more complex conceptualization of world-authorship could therefore be rendered as overcoming the crisis within which the field was cornered by the prolonged geometry of poststructuralist or generally postmodern critical discourses and hermeneutic practices. As a transcultural and travelling concept, world-authorship can, even if in an admittedly distorted manner, register not only the historical and global changes of our current post-critical/post-theoretical moment in connection to the fluid pressures of world-literature, but also the affective structures of contemporary cultural nodes. This post-liberal emergence of world-authorship (or, the post-author) works by exploring the elements of various interdependent ecosystems. And, within these contextual frameworks, world-authors and their literary careers are inscribed or inscribable, of course, as Bourdieu, Casanova and Sapiro have demonstrated, within certain strategic trajectories (a series of position-takings), dependent both on their aesthetic choices in the cultural field but also their social determinations and internal predispositions (*habitus*).

By revamping *the work and function of world-authorship* as a *commodity chain* circumscribed in a specific spectrum of ecological and capitalist periodicity, we can show, as Stephen Shapiro writes, that 'each cultural commodity has its own particularity based on location within the relational geographies of the capitalist world-system and its nested temporalities'<sup>61</sup>. To sum up, then, we might say that, as a commodity chain, world-authorship represents a combination of social relations, literary hierarchies, distributed labor processes, and the transformation of cultural resources. First, a materialist critique of world-authorship requires, as I have argued, a sociological perspective wherein we realize that not one but multiple actors or a sense of distributive agency is involved. Second, to continue one Marxist tradition of thought, the author will be reconceived of as representative of a social group and of an ideology to study how social issues are represented within authoriality. The various social and cultural groups to which an author belongs (based on class, gender, sex, or ethnicity) determine or influence its conditions of production/writing (time, location, commissions, etc.). Indeed, Lucien Goldmann introduced these ideas via Georg Lukács to discern the role of collective efforts behind individual writers' works. It was a way of relating the literary work to the conditions under which it was produced and, more importantly, a solution in apprehending the activity of literature as labor<sup>62</sup>. Historically speaking, mediations between authors and their work, between authors and the social world, between authors and readers, and authors and themselves have been materially and ideologically conditioned or determined. Authorial ideologies therefore reflect cultural and historical conditions as much as they are constructed within certain contextual frameworks.

If the sociological and neo-Marxist understanding of world-authorship replaces the individual with systematic relations of production and communication in determinate conditions, then world-authors will be seen as belonging to social and professional spheres and institutions. Recomposed through the

---

58. Stephen Shapiro, 'What Is World-Systems for Cultural Studies?' in Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett and Stephen Shapiro, eds., *Tracking Capital. World-Systems, World-Ecology, World-Culture* (New York: SUNY Press, 2024), 20.

59. Stephen Shapiro, 'What Is World-Systems for Cultural Studies?' in Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett and Stephen Shapiro, eds., *Tracking Capital. World-Systems, World-Ecology, World-Culture* (New York: SUNY Press, 2024), 24.

60. Stephen Shapiro, 'What Is World-Systems for Cultural Studies?' in Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett and Stephen Shapiro, eds., *Tracking Capital. World-Systems, World-Ecology, World-Culture* (New York: SUNY Press, 2024), 43.

61. Stephen Shapiro, 'What Is World-Systems for Cultural Studies?' in Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett and Stephen Shapiro, eds., *Tracking Capital. World-Systems, World-Ecology, World-Culture* (New York: SUNY Press, 2024), 68.

62. Lucien Goldmann, *Pour une sociologie du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

looking glass of literary sociology, world-systems analysis and posthumanism, world-authorship will be finally revealed as a condensed ecological amalgamation of contrasting elements. World-authorship is nothing but a *world-dispositif* and, as with any other transnational commodity chain which presupposes an extended social division of labor, its geographical movements tend to be centripetal in form, moving from the peripheries or semiperipheries to the core. This unequal exchange is ideologically hidden by the seeming separation of the economic and the literary spheres (Sapiro and Casanova's works are representative in this regard). Nevertheless, world-authorship remains bound within both economic and social forms of cultural production while evincing an ideological function within the literary field.

To study authorship from a political and materialist perspective is to examine the historical and gendered authorization of lives, texts, and literary productivity. The future of authorship theories lies in a speculative yet situated approach and, as Donald Pease argued a couple of decades ago, the notion of authorship remains essential to the success of a positive materialist critical practice<sup>63</sup>. Consequently, this paper has tried to systematically address a deficiency in showing the need to overcome the conceptual (theoretical or aesthetic) debates around authorship and moving, therefore, into a contextual debate. World-authorship, then, registers how the literary scene relates to the global circulation of cultural discourses (via the use of terms such as ownership, copyright, or authority, for instance), intermedial productions of new knowledge (agency, or the source of creativity, imagination, and originality), and internationalizations of stylistic heritages (traditions, histories, identities).

Overriding, then, Walter Benjamin's artisanal definition of authorship<sup>64</sup>, together with Louis Althusser's anti-humanist interpellation of the subject<sup>65</sup>, my reconceptualization of world-authorship as a *commodity chain* and *world-apparatus* displaces and decenters individual creativity with an ecosystem of ideological, technical, material, and posthuman interconnections. My firm belief is that, for the early twenty-first century, *the ascension of the author* will have assumed an importance comparable to the death of the author more than half a century ago. This paper has charted just some of the epistemological blockades one needs to overcome or simply clear away to formulate a disillusioned theory and critique of contemporary authorship, registering and explaining its combined, uneven, and discontinuous development, and the way in which the author's ascent to global and digital dimensions might be ideologically refracted in early twenty-first century literary theory and critical practice.

This post-postmodern conception of world-authorship has resituated its affairs in the public domain (neoliberal capitalism, international institutions, the literary field and its postures) as opposed to the private moorings of expressive subjectivity. Adopting this ecological model of world-authorship, practitioners ought to be attentive to both human and non-human agents and their environment. Moving outside modern or Romantic interiority, the ascension of world-authorship is, as with most things today, distributive, situated, perspectival, gendered and embodied. As a mode of literary production, we have also seen that world-authorship is not operating within the logic of autonomy. Redesigned, instead, as a commodity, world-authorship finally congests both textual and political questions while remaining embedded within concrete historical reality, critical or ideological discursive arrangements, and the socio-economic relations of the capitalist world system.

## Bibliography

- Althusser, Louis. *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)*. In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1970.
- Apter, Emily. *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*. London: Verso, 2013.
- Benedetti, Carla. *The Empty Cage: Inquiry into the Mysterious Disappearance of the Author*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Author as Producer." In *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, edited by Peter Demetz, translated by Edmund Jephcott, 220–238. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.
- Biriotti, Maurice, and Nicola Miller, eds. *What Is an Author?* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Translated by Susan

63. Donald E. Pease, 'Author,' in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

64. Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer,' in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 220–239.

65. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)", in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*, Translated by B. Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), 121–73.



- Emanuel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Burke, Seán. *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995.
- Burke, Seán. *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992.
- Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Translated by M. B. DeBevoise. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Chartier, Roger. *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the 14th and 18th Centuries*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Citton, Yves. *Lire, interpréter, actualiser: Pour quoi les études littéraires?* Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2007.
- Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Deckard, Sharae, Michael Niblett, and Stephen Shapiro, eds. *Tracking Capital: World-Systems, World-Ecology, World-Culture*. New York: SUNY Press, 2024.
- Diaz, José-Luis. *L'Écrivain imaginaire: Scénographies auctoriales à l'époque romantique*. Paris: Champion, 2007.
- Dorleijn, Gillis J., Ralf Grüttemeier, and Liesbeth Korthals Altes, eds. "Introduction." In *Authorship Revisited: Conceptions of Authorship Around 1900 and 2000*, ix–xiv. Leuven-Paris-Walpole: Peeters, 2010.
- Dubois, Jacques. *L'Institution littéraire*. Brussels: Labor, 2005.
- Fludernik, Monica, ed. *Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Common Traditions and New Developments*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003.
- Gallop, Jane. *The Deaths of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Goldmann, Lucien. *Pour une sociologie du roman*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964.
- Heinich, Nathalie. *La sociologie à l'épreuve de l'art*. Brussels: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2015.
- Herbrechter, Stefan. *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Irwin, William. *The Death and Resurrection of the Author?* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- Juvan, Marko. *Worlding a Peripheral Literature*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Kahan, Michèle Bokobza. "Image d'auteur." In *Le lexique socius*, edited by Anthony Glinoyer and Denis Saint Amand. <http://ressources-socius.info/index.php/lexique/21-lexique/197-image-d-auteur>.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Mangueneau, Dominique. *Le discours littéraire: Paratopie et scène d'énonciation*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2004.
- Meizoz, Jérôme. "Modern Posterities of Posture: Jean-Jacques Rousseau." In *Authorship Revisited: Conceptions of Authorship Around 1900 and 2000*, edited by Gillis J. Dorleijn, Ralf Grüttemeier, and Liesbeth Korthals Altes, 199–218. Leuven-Paris-Walpole: Peeters, 2010.
- Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*. London: Verso, 2005.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Pereira da Silva, Luiz Awazu. "The Broad Context in January 2023 for Financial Stability and the Risks in a Polycrisis World." In *The Next Systemic Financial Crisis - Where Might it Come From? Financial Stability in a Polycrisis World*, edited by Andreas Dombret and Patrick Kenadjian. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024.
- Rastier, François. *Apprendre pour transmettre: L'éducation contre l'idéologie managériale*. Paris: PUF, 2013.
- Sapiro, Gisèle. *The Sociology of Literature*. Translated by Madeline Bedecarré and Ben Libman. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024.
- Sayers, Philip. *Authorship's Wake: Writing After the Death of the Author*. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2021.
- Schaeffer, Jean-Marie. *Petite écologie des études littéraires: Pourquoi et comment étudier la littérature?* Vincennes: Editions Thierry Marchaisse, 2011.
- Shapiro, Stephen. "What Is World-Systems for Cultural Studies?" In *Tracking Capital: World-Systems, World-Ecology, World-Culture*, edited by Sharae Deckard, Michael Niblett, and Stephen Shapiro, 1–23. New York: SUNY Press, 2024.
- Simion, Eugen. *The Return of the Author*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996.
- Szepanski, Achim. *Capitalism in the Age of Catastrophe: The Newest Developments of Financial Capital in Times of Polycrisis*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.
- Thomsen, Mads Rosendahl. *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures*. London: Continuum, 2008.
- Wandor, Michelene. *The Author Is Not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else: Creative Writing Reconceived*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- WRc. *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015.

# Corpul invalid în modernismul periferic: Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, între import și autohtonism

Irina GORGAN

Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Letters  
Corresponding author emails: irina.g2002@yahoo.com

---

## The Invalid Body in The Peripheric Modernism: Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, between Import and Autochtonism

**Abstract:** This article presents a socio-literary analysis of the “invalid body” as depicted in Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu’s novels *Disheveled Virgins* (*Fecioarele despletite*, 1926) and *Concert from Bach’s Music* (*Concert din muzică de Bach*, 1927), within the context of the rise of eugenicist ideologies in interwar Romania. By comparing these portrayals of disability with representations of illness in other contemporary European novels, I explore the anachronistic relationship between the peripheral literary space of Romania and the central literary cultures of England and France. The methodology combines disability studies with key theoretical frameworks, including dysmodernism (Davis, 2019) and the concepts of the dys-/disarticulated (Berger, 2014), which are instrumental in understanding the depiction of the disabled body in 20th century European literature. I argue that the scientific discourses serve as a key factor in the social marginalization of the invalid characters in Papadat-Bengescu’s novels, where illness is not portrayed as the result of personal or psychological trauma but rather as a direct consequence of genetic inheritance. Through this analysis, I aim to highlight the terminological and conceptual differences between the literary center and periphery, focusing on the cultural reception of Papadat-Bengescu’s work in Romania and its social and ideological implications within the broader European context.

**Keywords:** Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, modern novel, disability studies, eugenism, invalid body.

**Citation suggestion:** Gorgan, Irina. “Corpul invalid în modernismul periferic: Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, între import și autohtonism.” *Transilvania*, no. 9 (2024): 14-22.  
<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2024.09.02>.



## Argument

„Ciclul Hallipa” al Hortensiei Papadat-Bengescu este unul dintre rezultatele „laboratorului” de modernizare a literaturii române condus de Eugen Lovinescu în cadrul Cenaclului *Sburătorul*. Participarea la aceste întruniri a fost formatoare pentru autoare atât la nivel estetic, cât și ideologic. Procesul de „sincronizare” dirijat de Lovinescu produce o serie de mutații în special prin redirectionarea din punct de vedere tematic a literaturii naționale spre mediul urban. Așa cum afirmă Teodora Dumitru în articolul său din volumul *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, în acest context, „intelectualizarea” discursului literar își modifică criteriul de marginalizare: diferențele de rasă sunt înlocuite de cele de clasă<sup>1</sup>. În cazul romanelor *Fecioarele despletite* și *Concert din muzică de Bach*, aceste două concepte aproape coincid, copiii invalizii (Sia, Mika-Lé, gemenii Dorin și Codin) fiind rezultatele unor „aventuri

---

1. Teodora Dumitru, „Social Class Difference and the Evolution of Romanian Literature from Lovinescu’s Perspective (1924-1929)” în *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, ed. Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga, Maria Sass (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019), 208.



extra-naționale". Aceste personaje sunt „degenerate” atât la nivelul genei, cât și al clasei (de exemplu personajul Mika-Lé, care apare ca „rezultat” al relației Lenorei cu un „zugrav italian”). În această direcție, cercetătoarea îl încadrează pe Lovinescu<sup>2</sup> în contextul „experimentelor liberale” care, în acea perioadă, aveau efecte profund nedemocratice<sup>3</sup>. Consider că cele două romane ale Hortensiei Papadat-Bengescu pot fi considerate astfel de experimente, având în vedere deschiderea spre modernismul central din punct de vedere tehnic, respectiv reprezentarea personajelor „impure” ca factori disturbatori care trebuie eliminați din peisajul burghez.

Dacă în Europa de Vest, discursul literar intervine în problema discriminării persoanelor invalide încă din perioada victoriană<sup>4</sup>, în România, tensiunile interrasiale persistă în discursul public, cu scopul de a construi imaginea „românului curat” din punct de vedere genetic, aspect pe care îl voi detalia în acest studiu. Reluând definițiile lui Goethe, Marx și Eagles, care privesc literatura ca un sistem independent de granițe, Franco Moretti, în „Conjectures on world literature”, analizează romanul modern nu ca pe o dezvoltare autonomă, ci ca pe un *compromis* între influența occidentală și materialul local<sup>5</sup>. El observă lipsa de simetrie care apare între „literatura țintă” (*target literature*) și „literatura sursă” (*source literature*), atunci când o formă străină este importantă și adaptată la materialul brut, autohton. În urma analizei sale ample, atât din punct de vedere geografic, cât și cronologic (cercetătorul alege romane de pe patru continente scrise în decursul a două secole), Moretti ajunge la concluzia că romanul modern scris la periferie este, față de centru, un *compromis formal*. În continuarea lui Marko Juvan care, într-un articol<sup>6</sup> din 2019, analizează modernismul periferic („in-between peripherality”, în cazul Sloveniei), acest „compromis” pe care îl discută Moretti devine o formă a „modernităților alternative” („alternative modernities”)<sup>7</sup>. Conform lui Juvan, modernismului periferic îi este specifică o „dezvoltare neregulată sau accelerată”<sup>8</sup>, ceea ce, de altfel, promova Lovinescu în Cenaclul său.

Consider că o analiză de tipul *disability studies* este productivă în cazul acestor texte deoarece face vizibilă interferența unor elemente aparent incompatibile: tehnicile narative preluate din canonul modern vestic<sup>9</sup>, respectiv stigmatizarea socio-culturală predominantă în discursul interbelic românesc. Îmi propun, în continuarea studiului Mariei Chiorean, „Unde sunt *disability studies*”, analizare bolii din romanul bengescian în contextul socio-politic în care apare, bazându-mi demonstrația în special pe ideologia eugenistă care acaparează pătura intelectuală în perioada interbelică. Așa cum afirmă cercetătoarea, în acord cu tonul vocilor din întregul volum colectiv, conservatorismul criticii românești a limitat drastic capacitatea interpretativă a literaturii, metodologiile „străine” fiind considerate „o formă de cenzură și de compromis moral”<sup>10</sup>. Consider, în continuarea acestor studii, că este necesară o revizitare cu metodologii actualizate a textelor canonice ultrasaturate de clișeele critice care ofereau atenție personajelor cu

2. Viziunea deterministă a lui Eugen Lovinescu este vizibilă și în *Istoria civilizației române moderne*, vol. 1 (București: Minerva, 1992), 17.

„Pentru a evolua, pe lângă stabilitate, unui popor îi mai trebuie și maleabilitate. În trecutul nostru, nu considerăm ca patrimoniu decât elementul fix al rasei și al vieții naționale.”

3. Ibid. 207.

4. Vezi Julia Miele Rodas, „Tiny Tim, Blind Bertha, and the Resistance of Miss Mowcher: Charles Dickens and the Uses of Disability”, *Dickens Studies Annual* 34 (2004): 51–97, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44372091> (accesat în 19.12.2024).

5. Franco Moretti, „Conjectures on world literature”, *New Left Review*, nr. 1 (2000).

6. Marko Juvan, „Peripheral Modernism and the World-System: Slovenian Literature and Theory of the Nineteen-Sixties”, *Slavica tergestina*, nr. 23 (2019).

7. Vezi Doyle și Winkiel, 2005; Goldwyn și Silverman, 2016.

8. Juvan, „Peripheral Modernism”, 173.

9. Aurel Sasu, Mariana Vartic, *Romanul românesc în interviuri, o istorie autobiografică*, vol. I (București: Minerva, 1985), 478. „Să n-o uităm pe Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, care a încorporat în proza ei modernă, de o construcție solidă, experiențele romanului francez, proustian. (...) Pornind de la ambiția Hortensiei Papadat-Bengescu, și dumneavoastră încercați ca prin inovația stilistică, prin înnoirile în materie de tipologie, să vă exprimați crezul estetic și participarea patriotică la îmbogățirea creației naționale”.

10. Maria Chiorean, „Unde sunt *disability studies*”, în *Pentru o nouă cultură critică românească*, coord. Alex Goldiș, Christian Moraru, Andrei Terian (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2024), 292.

dizabilități doar ca agenți ai (dez)echilibrului structural<sup>11</sup>. Cele mai multe studii<sup>12</sup> analizează această „centralitate patologică”<sup>13</sup> a romanului bengescian fie sub cupola teoriilor despre corp pronunțate în text, fie prin patologia/cogniția „elitelor” sociale (Lenora și prințul Maxențiu), fără să abordeze o critică socială a dizabilității atribuite personajelor „compromise” din punct de vedere genetic, cum este cazul copiilor bastarzi: Sia (anomalie de dezvoltare a piciorului stâng<sup>14</sup>), gemenii siamezi Dorin și Codin (separați la naștere prin intervenției chirurgicale), respectiv Mika-Lé (cu un aspect fizic masculinizat).

### Metabolizarea ideologiei eugeniste în spațiul românesc

Pentru a identifica modul în care acest „compromis” se produce în cazul reprezentării corpului invalid în cele două romane ale Hortensiei Papadat-Bengescu, am folosit studiul lui Marius Turda, *În căutarea românului perfect*, o sinteză a fundalului sociologic care argumentează stigmatizarea socio-rasială din perioada interbelică. Așa cum observă Turda, România era dominată de obsesia creării unui *popor abstract*<sup>15</sup> pur românesc, care nu putea apărea decât prin construcții literare și filosofice, bazate pe conceptul de rasă<sup>16</sup>. Românul-model din punct de vedere genetic trebuia vindecat, educat, hrănit, deci scos din stare lui *primitivă*. Procesul de selecție a elitelor „statului biopolitic român” a avut la bază o serie de metafore rasiale și eugenice care au dominat propaganda ideologică încă de la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea. Eugenia<sup>17</sup> este una dintre ramificațiile științifice moderne adoptate și adaptate extrem de rapid în România în momentul importului din Occident<sup>18</sup>.

Tendința vizibilă în România este aceea a entuziasmului generat de prefabricatele occidentale, aspect relevant și pentru modul în care eugenia este receptată în țară. În Occident, mișcările produse de această nouă știință au generat tabere adverse, pe când, în spațiul românesc, a fost receptată ca adevăr incontestabil, fără să aibă o grupare științifică opozantă<sup>19</sup> și s-a imersat ușor în rândul maselor prin promovarea sa în reviste de mare calibrul precum *Buletinul Eugenic și Biopolitic* (1927-1947) și *Revista de Igienă Socială* (1930-1944), dar și în ziare de consum ca *Universul* și *Adevărul*. Una dintre lucrările reprezentative în acest sens este *Biopolitica* lui Iuliu Moldovan, publicată în 1926, care dezvoltă idei discriminatorii la adresa altor etnii<sup>20</sup>. În următorul an este publicat volumul *Fecioarele despletite*, în care este vizibilă o astfel de atitudine prin faptul că gemenii, în urma violului Siei și a morții acesteia în timpul avortului, nu sunt pedepsiți nici la nivel legislativ, nici naratorial, fiind un factor „benefic” din punct de vedere eugenic, prin eliminarea din peisajul burghez a unui personaj disfuncțional. Totodată, în

11. Ibid., 293-294.

12. Vezi Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2008), 615, Daniel Coman, „Reprezentări ale deviației psihologice în *Concert din muzică de Bach*, de Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu”, *Transilvania*, nr. 6 (2021): 35–39, Nicoleta Stan, *Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu. Formele patologiei în imaginarii narativ*, (Cluj: Limes, 2024), Elena Ion, *Mărci ale corporalității în opera Hortensiei Papadat-Bengescu*, (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de știință: 2017) etc.

13. Coman, „Reprezentări”.

14. Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Concert din muzică de Bach* (București: Institutului Cultural Român, 2004), 32. „Lica o regăsise cu mirare: crescută mult, dar urâta și stângace. Târa parcă un picior. O arătase unui doctor ce-i spusese că n-are nimic altceva decât că stângul e mai lenes”.

15. Dem. I. Dobrescu, „Societatea română de antropologie”, în *Adevărul* 51, nr. 16450 (1937): 3.

16. Marius Turda, *În căutarea romanului perfect. Specific național, degenerare rasială și selecție socială în România modernă* (Iași: Polirom, 2024), 12.

17. Conform *Oxford dictionary of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 302, s.v. “Eugenism”. Eugenia se referă la „studiul metodelor de îmbunătățire a calității populațiilor umane prin aplicarea principiilor genetice. Eugenia pozitivă urmărește să realizeze acest lucru prin programe de reproducere selectivă. Eugenia negativă urmărește să elimine genele dăunătoare (...)” În original: Eugenics – „The study of methods of improving the quality of human populations by the application of genetic principles. Positive eugenics would seek to do this by selective breeding programmes. Negative eugenics aims to eliminate harmful genes.”

18. Vezi Maria Bucur, *Eugenie și modernizare în România interbelică* (Iași: Polirom, 2005).

19. Ibid., 86.

20. Iuliu Moldovan, *Biopolitica* (Cluj-Napoca: Biblioteca Universității din Cluj, 1926), 12. „Cu toate că acei savanți, prevăzând dezastrul creat din cauza nerespectării legilor biologice, au atras de mult atenția asupra acestei consecințe, abia în ultimul timp și timid de tot începe biologia a-și lua locul pe care-l merită ca știință fundamentală și dominantă în orice problemă în legătură cu evoluția umană. Această evoluție este destul de bine studiată și precizată în legile cari o conduc și ne arată, că *indivizii sunt inagali din punct de vedere ereditar și deci inegali și în posibilitatea de a se manifesta în viață.*” (subl.m., I.G.)





anii '30 avortul a fost interzis, cu excepția cazurilor în care se dovedea „impuritatea” ereditară<sup>21</sup>, aspect preconizat de opțiunea auctorială a morții sângeroase a Siei care, dacă ar fi născut, ar fi prelungit genealogia „pătată” a sângelui burghez.

Așa cum am menționat anterior, eugenia a apărut ca urmare a teoriilor evoluționiste stabilite de Charles Darwin<sup>22</sup>. În ciuda asocierii termenului de „evoluționism” cu figura sa, cercetătorul își bazează demonstrațiile pe analize făcute de biologi încă din secolul al XVIII-lea<sup>23</sup>. Până la Darwin, teoriile pe care se va baza evoluționismul au fost ramificate în două direcții: pe de-o parte, Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck (1744-1829) afirmă că mediul poate schimba caracterele moștenite, pe când, conform legilor ereditare ale lui Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), moștenirea genetică s-ar manifesta indiferent de mediu. Chiar dacă indivizii invalizi sunt în aparență integrați în cadrul burghez, aceștia nu se adaptează niciodată, fiind într-o continuă tensiune antitetice de tipul Lenora – Mika-Lé. Prin urmare, copiii bastardizii se dau „șansa” de a demonstra teoria lamarckiană, dar sfârșesc prin a împlini premisele mendeliene. În termenii lui Davis J. Lennard, nu are loc construcția unei noi etici prin care invalizii să dobândească o nouă identitate care să îi integreze la nivel social, așa cum o va face modernismul canonic european<sup>24</sup>. El interpretează „fanteziile egocentrice dezlănțuite” în romanul modern ca un simptom al individualismului. Cercetătorul demonstrează că tocmai pe acest individualism al literaturii de secol XX se poate forma o conștiință a dizabilității la nivel social<sup>25</sup>: acest tip de scriitură va aduce în discuție problema identității, a raportului eu-societate, normal-anormal. Introducerea elementului anormal (invalid) va putea face posibilă această „nouă etică” (specifică *dismodernismului*<sup>26</sup>), o nouă formă de gândire prin care personajului (persoanei) cu dizabilități i se atribuie o nouă identitate, „independentă de familie, națiune, etnicitate și sex”<sup>27</sup>.

Deși raporturile sociale din romanele lui Papadat-Bengescu ar fi părut cauzate de lipsa unui substrat neuroștiințific, în timpul publicării „Ciclului Hallipa”, societatea românească era „sincronizată” cu Europa la nivelul dezvoltării medicinei neurologice. Neuroștiința este introdusă în România de către Gheorghe Marinescu (George Marinesco, 1863-1938), medic format în Franța, care înființează catedra acestei ramuri la Universitatea din București în 1897. Prin urmare, medicina română era la curent cu progresul din Occident, dar, pe fundalul obsesiei naționaliste, grupări literare precum cea a lui Lovinescu construiesc „canonul” literar român pe baza ideologiei eugeniste, mai degrabă decât pe neurologie.

Mai mult, în Constituția României elaborată în 1923 se menționează în mai multe rânduri obligația cetățenilor de a nu discrimina persoanele din jur. Astfel, în secțiunea de la Titlul II, articolul 5, se afirmă faptul că „românii, fără deosebire de origine etnică, de limbă sau de religie, se bucură de libertatea conștiinței, de libertatea învățămîntului, de libertatea presei, de libertatea întrunirilor, de libertatea de asociație și de toate libertățile și drepturile stabilite prin legi”<sup>28</sup>[s.m., I.G.]. În continuare, articolul 8: „Nu se admite în Stat nici o deosebire de naștere sau de clasă socială”<sup>29</sup>[s.m., I.G.]. Romanele selectate în cadrul cercetării mele sunt relevante pentru analiza coabitării acestor afirmații universaliste cu atitudinile sociale prezentate discriminatorii la adresa personajelor cu dizabilități. Prin urmare, în anii '20, corpul invalid era definit prin acest dezacord dintre teoria legislativă și practica (socio-)literară.

În ciuda rolului de ideologizare naționalistă pe care o consolidează eugenia în România, acest curent de gândire aduce, totuși, o serie de avantaje pe plan social. Așa cum observă Maria Bucur în studiul menționat anterior, în România, modernizarea are loc pe fundal eugenic. Aceiași indivizi care promovau puritatea rasei și controlul natalității produc mutații precum preluarea îngrijirii medicale de către stat, introducerea unor tehnici medicale moderne și înființarea facultăților de medicină din Transilvania<sup>30</sup>,

21. Bucur, *Eugenizare*, 25.

22. Oksana Yakushko, „Eugenics and its evolution in the history of western psychology: A critical archival review”, în *Psychother Politics*, Carpinteria: Pacifica Graduate Institute (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.1495> (accesat la data de 02.12.2024).

23. Vezi Yongsheng Liu, „Darwin and Mendel: The Historical Connection”, *Advances in Genetics* 102 (2018): 1–25, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0065266018300063> (accesat la data de 02.12.2024).

24. Lennard, 92.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 27. „What dismodernism signals is a new kind of universalism and cosmopolitanism that is reacting to the localization of identity. It reflects a global view of the world. To accomplish a dismodernist view of the body, we need to consider a new ethics of the body”.

27. Ibid., 86. „Disability is an identity divorced from family, nation, ethnicity, or gender.”

28. Gheorghe Sbărnă, *Constituțiile României. Studii*, (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012), 168 (s.m., I.G.).

29. Ibid.

30. Vezi prefața de Mihaela Miroiu în cartea semnată de Maria Bucur.

modificări care contribuie la sincronizarea civică la României cu Europa de Vest.

### Discursul științific, un factor al divergenței centru-periferie

După 1900, în Europa de Vest au loc două mișcări antagonice: pe de-o parte, discursul conștiinței prezent în romane de tipul celor lui Marcel Proust și cele ale Virginiei Woolf ia amploare odată cu neîncrederea în științele exacte<sup>31</sup>; estetica modernistă ar fi, conform Sarei Danius, un indice al crizei simțurilor mediată tehnologic, o metodă de revoltă a artei în fața modernizării și a mecanicizării sociale și are ca efect la nivel estetic tehnicile de sfidare a conștiinței prin care se accentuează latura umană, emoțională a individului. Pe de altă parte, discipolii lui Charles Darwin încep să pună bazele eugenismului, care urmărește redefinirea corpului uman ca un construct ideal, înzestrat cu trăsături excepționale. Așa cum observă Lennard J. Davis în *Dismodernism*, somatizarea caracterelor morale (sau teoria „trupului sufletesc” din romanul bengescian) este specifică literaturii canonice din secolul al XIX-lea, odată ce teoriile evoluționiste încep să codifice trăsăturile fizice, psihologice și etnice în șabloane<sup>32</sup>. Voi analiza modul în care textele canonice ale Hortensiei Papadat-Bengescu au la bază ideologia naționalistă a purității rasei, pe când canonul vestic (din care am ales texte de Marcel Proust și Virginia Woolf) optează pentru o viziune „științifică” mai degrabă universalistă, în care conștiința individului primează, în detrimentul rasei.

În Europa Occidentală, discursul științific modernist este adoptat diferit de literatură: odată cu dezvoltarea neuroștiinței, literatura prezintă patologia ca pe un determinant al memoriei și al emoției. Cu toate că, așa cum observă Marius Turda în lucrarea *Eugenism și modernitate*, toate țările din Europa folosesc discursul eugenist pentru regenerarea imaginarului colectiv național, științele neurologice sunt cele care formează „canonul modern occidental”<sup>33</sup>. În spațiul românesc, aspectul patologic este idealizat și psihologizat doar în cazul clasei burgheze<sup>34</sup>, indivizii invalizi „impuri” fiind limitați din acest punct de vedere la nivelul unei boli somatizate, a unei dizabilități monstruoase. Daniel Coman în „Devianță psihologică și stil cognitiv în *Enigma Otiliei* de G. Călinescu (1938)”, identifică o serie de scheme cognitive deviante care ajută la construcție personajelor călinesciene. Psihologia nu are aici rolul de a individualiza personajul, ci, dimpotrivă, de a-l tipologiza<sup>35</sup>. Boala psihologică rămâne și în acest caz, nu atât o critică socială, cât o forță narativă care intervine mai ales în efectul de comic<sup>36</sup>. Același cercetător, în articolul dedicat patologiei în *Concert din muzică de Bach*, analizează elementul psihopatologic prezent în roman și găsește o taxonomie a personajelor în funcție de aceasta: monstrul (Dorin și Codin), animalul (Mika-Lé), sălbaticul (Lică Trubadurul) și angelicul (prințul Maxențiu)<sup>37</sup>. Conform categoriilor lui Coman, patologia funcționează și în acest roman ca un generator de tipologii. Chiar dacă devianțele psihologice sunt prezente în proza interbelică românească, acțiunea acestora nu are o direcție centripetă, în sensul psihologismului individualist de tipul Doamnei Dalloway, ci generează, printr-o mișcare centrifugă, ciocniri sociale care pun în lumină diferențele de clasă.

Anacronismul care se produce între cele două spații este valabil până în 1936, când Max Blecher publică volumul *Întâmplări din irealitatea imediată*. Critica de întâmpinare observă că patologia apare în cazul lui Blecher sub forma „lucidității și a ascuțimii de spirit care, ca toate ascuțiturile, se

31. Vezi Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (London: Cornell University Press, 2002).

32. Davis Lennard, *Dismodernism. Disability and the missing body of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 97.

33. Marius Turda, *Eugenism și modernitate. Națiune, rasă și biopolitică în Europa (1870-1950)* (Iași: Polirom, 2014), 19.

34. Tuberculoza, în cazul prințului Maxențiu, care se pretează metaforizării, considerându-se că atacă zonele „înalte” ale sufletului. Vezi Susan Sontag, *Boala ca metaforă* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1995), 18.

35. Daniel Coman, „Devianță psihologică și stil cognitiv în *Enigma Otiliei* de G. Călinescu (1938)”, *Transilvania*, nr. 6-7 (2022): 74. „Deși, cum am spus, ele nu evoluează, aceste personaje sunt totuși mai complexe decât s-a sugerat prin tipicitatea lor (asocierea lor cu o singură caracteristică precum avariție, parvenitism, nebunie). De fapt, sugerez că toate aceste trei trăsături sunt doar niște efecte ale tulburărilor psihice care îi caracterizează. Rămânând niște personaje bazate pe o singură schemă cognitivă, ele pot fi recategorizate ca personaje cu un stil cognitiv deviant.”

36. Ibid., 79.

37. Daniel Coman, „Reprezentări ale devianței psihologice în *Concert din muzică de Bach*, de HPB”, *Transilvania 6* (2021): 37..



întoarce de multe ori împotriva lui [a autorului] însuși<sup>38</sup> sau ca pe o „fosforescență de descompuneri sufletești, (...) de o putere plastică vecină cu poezia vizionară”<sup>39</sup>. Chiar dacă apariția textului nu poate fi simptomatică pentru conștiința cu privire la dizabilitate în România din cauza formării autorului în spațiul francez, publicarea romanului de către Geo Bogza reprezintă un salt semnificativ prin accesul la trauma psihologică a individului invalid. Așa cum am exemplificat prin pasaje critice, boala începe să fie strâns legată de psihologia personajului, nu doar de clasa socială sau de tipologia pe care o ilustrează. În țările din vestul Europei, unde, spre deosebire de România, conceptul de „națiune” era întemeiat încă din secolul al XIX-lea, este posibilă estetizarea bolii prin psihologie, vizibilă în cazul artiștilor precum Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Egon Schiele, Frida Kahlo, Amedeo Modigliani, Paul Klee etc. – care abordează o astfel de perspectivă asupra patologiei în spațiul vestic ca reacție a sensibilului la „maladia capitalismului”<sup>40</sup> și la violența manifestată asupra corpului în timpul Primului Război Mondial. Este important de menționat și faptul că boala este prezentată din perspectiva subiectivă (sau discurs subiectiv, în cazul literaturii). Miza literaturii române pe discursul obiectiv<sup>41</sup> este un factor care întârzie definirea identității bolnavului din clasele non-burghez.

### **Corpul bolnav. Degenerare, patologie și extravaganță**

Pentru a articula diferența de percepție a corpului bolnav între cele două spații descrise anterior, voi miza pe o serie de exemple relevante din textele Virginiei Woolf și cele ale lui Marcel Proust. Prin comparația dintre *Orlando* (1928) și *Fecioarele despletite* (1926), urmăresc modul de reprezentare al personajelor hermafrodite, Orlando, respectiv Mika-Lé. Așa cum am menționat anterior, în cazul romanelor Hortensiei Papadat-Bengescu, corpul bolnav „estetizat” aparține exclusiv clasei burgheze, copiii bastarzi fiind, dimpotrivă, stigmatizați din cauza dizabilității lor. În cazul romanelor lui Papadat-Bengescu, boala este un rezultat al interiorității, dar nu atât al „sufletului”, așa cum reiese din filosofia romanului, cât al fundalului genetic al personajului. Conform conceptelor lui James Berger definite anterior, pentru ca boala să fie estetizată și corelată cu subiectivitatea pacientului, acesta trebuie să aibă dreptul la cuvânt prin discurs subiectiv. Conceptul *dys-/disarticulated* se referă la reprezentarea corpului invalid prin intermediul a două disfuncții: una fizică (*dis-*) și una verbală (*dys-*)<sup>42</sup>. Personajele degenerate din textele lui Papadat-Bengescu sunt prezentate din perspectivă obiectivă și, mai mult decât atât, sunt blocate într-un statut social inferior, ceea ce le privează dreptul la cuvânt în fața burghezilor. Romanul Virginiei Woolf ilustrează disfuncțiile fizice și psihice din perspectivă subiectivă, sub formă de catalizatori ai discursului interior. De exemplu, Doamna Dalloway este diagnosticată în „tablourile clinice” ale criticii literare ca suferind de „iluzie maniac depresivă”<sup>43</sup>. Această disfuncție îi favorizează rememorarea relației cu Septimius și desfășurarea existenței pe două planuri, cel real și cel imaginat.

La fel ca Doamna Dalloway, protagonistul romanelor lui Proust trăiește același tip de existență alterată de memorie, fiind mereu prins între existența interioară și cea exterioară<sup>44</sup>, atitudine definită de Gérard Genette ca o „contagiune metonimică”<sup>45</sup>. Mai mult, în *Sodoma și Gomora* publicată în anul 1921, autorul trece prin prisma subiectivă spațiul exterior folosind teoriile lui Darwin<sup>46</sup> referitoare la procesul

38. A. Tudor, Rubrica Literare-artistice, în *Zorile*, anul 2, nr. 274 (05 februarie 1936), 34.

39. Lucian Boz, Rubrica „Caleidoscopul vieții intelectuale”, în *Adevărul*, anul 50, nr. 16135, (august 1936), 194.

40. James Berger, *The Disarticulate: Language, Disability, and the Narratives of Modernity*. Vol. 8 (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 31.

41. Vezi Teodora Dumitru, „Conceptul Iovinescian de intelectualizare a literaturii față cu ipoteza postbelică a țărânului intelectualizat”, în *Transilvania*, nr. 2 (2021): 37–41.

42. Ibid., 2.

Conceptul *dysarticulated* este preluat de către Berger din logopedie și presupune dificultate în articulare prin care individul devine antisocial. *Disarticulated* este un termen din domeniul chirurgical și se referă la amputarea membrilor la nivelul articulațiilor. Dizabilitatea se referă atât la disfuncția articulației, cât și la articulației.

43. Vezi Sara Ghalandari, Leila Jamili Mental, „Illness and Manic-Depressive Illness in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway”, *Journal of novel applied science*, nr. 3 (2014): 482–489. În termeni medicali, tulburare afectiv bipolară.

44. Vezi R.S.G. Holdrinet, „Proust and Medicine”, *Marcel Proust Aujourd’hui*, nr. 5 (2007): 217–35.

45. Gérard Genette, „Métonymie chez Proust” în *Figures III*, apud Simon Porzak, „Inverts and invertebrates: Darwin, Proust, and nature’s queer heterosexuality”, *Diacritics* 41, nr. 4 (2013): 7.

46. În nota ediției se specifică lucrarea *Despre fecundarea orhideelor de către insecte și despre bunele rezultate ale încrucișării*, trad. fr. F. Pérolle, C. Reinwald (1870).

de fecundare al plantelor de către insecte<sup>47</sup>. În acest sens, este vizibil modul în care discursul științific a fost metabolizat de către scriitorul francez, care își construiește discursul subiectiv în această scenă prin suprapunerea științei cu esteticul: „Știam că această așteptare nu era mai pasivă decât cea a florii-bărbat, ale cărei stamine se întorseseră spontan, pentru ca insecta să o poată primi mai ușor (...)”<sup>48</sup>. Mai mult, pasajul ar reprezenta, conform criticii<sup>49</sup>, un tratat biologic care definește comportamentul homosexual. Prin acest tip de discurs se face vizibilă tendința secolului XX de a detabuiza subiectele „incomode” pentru publicul larg<sup>50</sup>. În schimb, romanele Hortensiei Papadat-Bengescu păstrează o anumită distanță față de conținuturile *tabu*. De exemplu, naratoarea este limitată atunci când vine vorba despre originile copiilor bastarzi. Actul ilegal al Lenorei din care a rezultat copilul Mika-Lé este doar menționat, pe când, în literatura occidentală, un astfel de comportament ar fi fost potențat din punctul de vedere al traumei psihologice, așa cum se întâmplă în cazul Doamnei Dalloway, al cărei discurs interior este stimulat de o „infidelitate” imaginată. Mai mult, autoarea *Fecioarelor despletite* lasă loc de interpretare atunci când vine vorba despre „posibilul” viol al Siei de către gemeni, scena respectivă nefiind prezentată explicit. Fapta gemenilor reiese din conversația care are loc între Rim și Lina, atunci când aceștia sunt menționați sub titlul de „amantul fetei”. De asemenea, vinovăția lor reiese și din scena înmormântării, când aceștia „stau doșiți (...) cu niște figuri înmărmurite, ca scobotâți în ultimul moment de pe scaunul electric de execuție și neputând crede în grațiere (...) și sfârșind ca criminalii prin a veni la locul crimei”<sup>51</sup>. Tot un subiect cenzurat este și moartea Siei în timpul avortului neasistat, subînțeles din replica lui Rim: „(...) trebuia dusă la spital și operată. Avea nevoie de un *mamoș* și de o *mamă*”<sup>52</sup>.

În ceea ce privește reprezentarea corpului intersexual, voi compara personajele Mika-Lé și Orlando. Atât fiica ilegală a Lenorei, cât și protagonistul Virginiei Woolf au origini exotice și caracteristici fiziologice specifice acestora. Deși în cazul amândurora distincția genului este incertă, codul etic al spațiilor în care textele sunt scrise face ca cele două personaje să fie receptate diferit: Mika-Lé este portretizată în categoria grotescului, pe când poetul rafinat Orlando are o existență idealizată. Astfel, apar diferențele de percepție ale celor două portrete: „lumina heraldică” a lui Orlando contravine cu aspectul lui Mika-Lé de „ciment gălbui”, umerii „bine clădiți” cu cei „pătrați, lemnoși” ai bastardei, „obrajii îmbujorați acoperiți cu puf ca de piersică” ai poetului cu „aspectul unei păpuși de lemn de la țară” al fiicei Lenorei. Totodată, protagonistul Virginiei Woolf este descris prin rama unei ferestre, aspect care îi atribuie valoarea armonioasă a unei piese de artă înrămate, pe când personajul din *Fecioarele despletite* este portretizat fragmentar și fugitiv, fiecare caracteristică fiind o piesă care alcătuiește un puzzle dizarmonic. Pe lângă aspectul fizic al personajelor, discrepanța reprezentării corpului hermafrodit este vizibilă și prin comparația abilităților celor doi: Orlando este modelul ideal de poet boem, extravagant, pentru care scrisul are valoare ritualică: „scoase un caiet cu o etichetă (...) și muie o pană veche și pătată de cerneală”<sup>53</sup>. În ceea ce privește ocupațiile lui Mika-Lé, în text se amintesc schițele sale cu „păsări, insecte, arabescuri, chipuri negre” și pereții pe care îi mânjește cu „draci, animale, flori și divinități informe ale Egiptului”<sup>54</sup>.

## Concluzii

Diferența majoră care apare între spațiul românesc și cel occidental în reprezentarea corpului invalid în perioada interbelică se referă la degenerare, așa cum apare în cazul copiilor bastarzi din romanele lui Papadat-Bengescu, respectiv la disfuncțiile la nivel psihologic, în cazul romanelor lui Woolf și Proust. Chiar dacă în arta europeană se întâlnește în continuare boala ca formă de infirmitate fizică, aceasta este prezentată din postura pacientului, prin discurs subiectiv. În literatura română modernă, personajele cu dizabilități nu au o identitate stabilă din cauza poziției naratoriale hegemonice care nu oferă degeneratului dreptul al cuvânt. În cadrul lucrării mele, am cercetat factorii sociali care

47. Marcel Proust, *În căutarea timpului pierdut. Sodoma și Gomora* (București: Art, 2011), 14-15.

48. Ibid., 15.

49. Porzak, 7.

50. Zezi și Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, Georges Vigarello, ed., *Istoria corpului III. Mutațiile privirii. Secolul XX* (București: Art, 2009), 107-110.

51. Ibid., 163.

52. Ibid., 151-152.

53. Virginia Woolf, *Spre far. Orlando* (București: Adevărul, 2009), 204.

54. Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Fecioarele despletite* (Iași: Cartea românească, 2019), 104.



determină această desincronizare față de vest, având ca miză principală entuziasmul prin care eugenia a fost preluată în România, ca mijloc de construcție a *românului perfect*. Totodată, am pus în lumină contrastul formă și fond prin afirmațiile constituționale din perioada interbelică, dar și ideologia prezentă în Cenaclul *Sburătorul* care a influențat textele autoarei. Prin acest studiu, am intenționat să contribuim la domeniul *disability studies* din România care, așa cum observă Chiorean, este abia la început de drum din cauza reticenței față de importul metodologic și a fricii de „contaminare” a literaturii cu alte domenii precum sociologia și elementul politic. De asemenea, mizând pe teoria lui Moretti despre „modernitățile alternative”, consider că nu se poate discuta despre alternativa *compromisului formal* românesc fără a lua în calcul această metodologie care chestionează inegalitățile și discriminările sociale.

### Bibliography

- Berger, James. *The Disarticulate: Language, Disability, and Narratives of Modernity*. New York: NYU Press, 2014.
- Boz, Lucian. “Caleidoscopul vieții intelectuale.” *Adevărul*, no. 16135 (August 1936). Digiteca Arcanum. <https://adt.arcanum.com/ro/discover/>.
- Bucur, Maria. *Eugenie și modernizare în România interbelică* [Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania] Iași: Polirom, 2005.
- Călinescu, Matei. *Cinci Fețe ale Modernității*. Bucharest: Polirom, 2017.
- Chiorean, Maria. “Unde sunt *disability studies*” [Where are Disabilities Studies?]. In *Pentru o nouă cultură critică românească*, edited by Alex Goldiș, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian. Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2024.
- Coman, Daniel. “Devianță psihologică și stil cognitiv în Enigma Otiliei de G. Călinescu (1938).” *Transilvania*, no. 6–7 (2022): 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2022.06-07.08>.
- Coman, Daniel. “Reprezentări ale deviației psihologice în Concert din muzică de Bach, de Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu.” *Transilvania*, no. 6 (2021): 35–39. <https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2021.06.04>.
- Corbin, Alain, Jean-Jacques Courtine, and Georges Vigarello, eds. *Istoria Corpului III. Mutațiile Privirii. Secolul XX*. Bucharest: Art, 2009.
- Danius, Sara. *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*. London: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Davis, Lennard. *Dismodernism: Disability and the Missing Body of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Dobrescu, Dem I. “Societatea Română de Antropologie” [The Romanian Anthropology Society]. *Adevărul*, vol. 51, no. 16450 (1937).
- Doyle, Laura, and Laura Winkiel, eds. “Introduction: The Global Horizons of Modernism.” In *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Dumitru, Teodora. “Conceptul lovinescian de intelectualizare a literaturii față cu ipoteza postbelică a țărânului intelectualizat” [Lovinescu’s Concept of Literature “Intellectualization” Against the Post-War Hypothesis of the “Intellectualized” Peasant]. *Transilvania*, no. 2 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2021.02.04>.
- Dumitru, Teodora. “Social Class Difference and the Evolution of Romanian Literature from Lovinescu’s Perspective (1924-1929).” In *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, edited by Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga, and Maria Sass. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019.
- Porzak, Simon. “Inverts and invertebrates: Darwin, Proust, and nature’s queer heterosexuality.” *Diacritics* 41, no. 4 (2013).
- Ghalandari, Sara, and Leila Jamili. “Mental Illness and Manic-Depressive Illness in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*.” *Journal of Novel Applied Sciences* 3, no. 5 (2014): 482–489.
- Goldiș, Alex, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian, eds. *Pentru o nouă cultură critică Românească* [Towards a New Romanian Critical Culture]. Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2024.
- Goldwyn, Adam J., and Renée M. Silverman, eds. *Mediterranean Modernism: Intercultural Exchange and Aesthetic Development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Hitchins, Keith. *România 1866-1947*. Bucharest: Polirom, 2013.
- Holdrinet, R.S.G. “Marcel Proust Aujourd’hui.” *Marcel Proust Aujourd’hui* 5 (2007). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44866290>.
- Juvan, Marko. “Peripheral Modernism and the World-System: Slovenian Literature and Theory of the Nineteen-Sixties.” *Slavica Tergestina* 23 (December 2019).

- Liu, Yongsheng. "Darwin and Mendel: The Historical Connection." In *Advances in Genetics* 102. Cardiff, UK: Cardiff University, 2018.
- Lovinescu, Eugen. *Istoria civilizației române moderne* [The History of Modern Romanian Civilization]. Vol. 1. Bucharest: Minerva, 1992.
- Manolescu, Nicolae. *Istoria critică a literaturii române* [The Critical History of Romanian Literature]. Pitești: Paralela 45, 2008.
- Miele Rodas, Julia. "Tiny Tim, Blind Bertha, and the Resistance of Miss Mowcher: Charles Dickens and the Uses of Disability." *Dickens Studies Annual* 34 (2004): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44372091>.
- Moldovan, Iuliu. *Biopolitica*. Cluj: Biblioteca Universității din Cluj, 1926.
- Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures on World Literature." *New Left Review* 1 (Jan/Feb 2000).
- Müller, Florin. *Socialism și fascism în România. Către o Istorie Intelectuală* [Socialism and Fascism in Romania: Towards an Intellectual History]. Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2020.
- Law, Jonathan, ed. *Oxford Dictionary of Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Papadat-Bengescu, Hortensia. *Concert din muzică de Bach* [Concert of Bach's Music]. Bucharest: Institutului Cultural Român, 2004.
- Papadat-Bengescu, Hortensia. *Fecioarele despletite* [Disheveled Virgins]. Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2019.
- Proust, Marcel. *În căutarea timpului pierdut. Sodoma și Gomora* [In Search of Lost Time: Sodom and Gomorrah]. Bucharest: Art, 2011.
- Sasu, Aurel, and Mariana Vartic. *Romanul românesc în interviuri. O istorie autobiografică* [The Romanian Novel in Interviews: An Autobiographical History], vol. I. Bucharest: Minerva, 1985.
- Sbârnă, Gheorghe. *Constituțiile României. Studii* [Romania's Constitution]. Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012.
- Sontag, Susan. *Boala ca metaforă* [Illness as Metaphor]. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1995.
- Tudor, A. "Rubrica literare artistice." *Zorile*, no. 274 (February 5, 1936). [https://adt.arcanum.com/ro/view/Zorile\\_1936\\_02/?query=max+blecher+&pg=33&layout=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/ro/view/Zorile_1936_02/?query=max+blecher+&pg=33&layout=s).
- Turda, Marius. *Eugenism și modernitate. Națiune, rasă și biopolitică în Europa (1870-1950)*. Iași: Polirom, 2014.
- Turda, Marius. *În căutarea romanului perfect. Specific național, degenerare rasială și selecție socială în România modernă*. Iași: Polirom, 2024.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Spre far. Orlando*. Bucharest: Adevărul, 2009.
- Yakushko, Oksana. "Eugenics and its Evolution in the History of Western Psychology: A Critical Archival Review." *Psychother Politics* (2019): <https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.1495>.



# Border Crossings: Towards a New Typology in Contemporary Immigrant Writing

Georgeta MATEI

George Emil Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Târgu Mureș  
Corresponding author emails: georgetamovila@umfst.ro

---

## Border Crossings: Towards a New Typology in Contemporary Immigrant Writing

**Abstract:** This paper reveals how contemporary immigrant authors challenge the conventions of autobiography as conceptualized by Philippe Lejeune in self-referential novels that blur the boundaries between fiction and reality, storytelling and truth-telling. We investigate the reality-fiction binary in the works of such authors as J.M. Coetzee, Salman Rushdie, W.G. Sebald, Aleksandar Hemon, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Junot Díaz, and Ocean Vuong, and show how their self-referential literary productions alter the way we perceive notions of truth and authenticity in contemporary literature. By combining a reader-oriented analysis with a poststructuralist inquiry on writing and reading, we aim at providing a more comprehensive understanding of life writing in transnational immigrant narratives.

**Keywords:** immigrant literature, life writing, autobiography, self-referential writing, truth, authenticity, storytelling.

**Citation suggestion:** Matei, Georgeta. "Border Crossings: Towards a New Typology in Contemporary Immigrant Writing." *Transilvania*, no. 9 (2024): 23-33.  
<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2024.09.03>



## Introduction

The blurring boundaries between fiction and reality, storytelling and truth-telling lie at the heart of a new typology in contemporary migrant (auto)fiction. Here, we want to point out that its seeds were already planted in the writing of migrant authors from previous generations, regardless of their nationalities, such as J.M. Coetzee, Salman Rushdie, and W. G. Sebald. Their works are in dialogue through their metafictional obsession with storytelling, its ethical implications, and the exploration of their subjects in global settings and traumatic historical contexts. In the following sections, we will mainly draw on the autobiographical and essayistic work of J. M. Coetzee, a South African Nobel-prize-winning author whose literature exemplifies how "life writing"<sup>1</sup> undermines the paradigms of authenticity and realism in immigrant literature. Partly autobiographical and partly fictional, his novel *Elisabeth Costello* (2003) canvases the problem of truth as strongly linked with the problem of the self and its corollary - the problem of self-expression and self-knowledge, thus the problem of identity. Therefore, Coetzee's writing is perceived as an *abstract model*<sup>2</sup> for this new typology in contemporary immigrant semi-biographical literature crossing the line between life and fiction.

## Crossing National & Aesthetic Borders in Contemporary Immigrant Literature

Fictionalizing one's autobiography is a common writing technique in postcolonial/ immigrant literature.

---

1. Life writing is defined by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson as a general term for any kind of writing that takes life as its subject. Such works can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or an explicit self-reference to the writer.

2. The term "abstract model" was coined and employed in *Graphs, Maps, and Trees – Abstract Models for a Literary History* by the Italian theorist Franco Morreti (London & New York: Verso, 2005), who sees the development of the novel as a genre that combines and recycles previous techniques.

Authors dealing with trauma and displacement often choose not to write about their personal experiences using the autobiographical "I." According to Benaouda Lebdaï, such is the case of Salman Rushdie's *Joseph Anton* (2012): "This writing strategy proves a deeper trauma than he would admit. From my point of view, the deliberate absence of 'I' works surely as a healing process. *Joseph Anton* becomes a necessary fiction for Salman Rushdie who can at last look back into that past, thanks to this mirror in which Joseph Anton, his double, plays his part."<sup>3</sup>

The Bosnian-born author Aleksandar Hemon also draws upon personal elements in constructing a series of alter-ego characters. His prose protagonists: Joseph Pronek from *Nowhere Man* (2002), Brik from *The Lazarus Project* (2008), and the narrator from *Love and Obstacles* (2009), are Sarajevan writers migrating to Chicago. They all enact the author's experience of migration and arrival to the US at different stages. Here, we will mainly focus on *The Lazarus Project* (2008), which is a fictional account of a Bosnian-born American writer, Vladimir Brik, who journeys to Eastern Europe in the company of his childhood friend Ahmed Rora Halilbašić, a Muslim Sarajevan war photographer, to research the story of the historical figure Lazarus Averbuch, a Jewish immigrant to Chicago killed by a police officer at the beginning of the 20th century. Both Brik and Hemon are natives of Sarajevo and share a Ukrainian ancestry. Both are writers stranded in America at the outbreak of the Bosnian war and work as English teachers for international students. Also, they both write a column in a newspaper and live in Chicago, married to American women. Besides, in the novel, Brik receives a grant to support his book writing, while in real life, *The Lazarus Project* (2008) is Hemon's result of receiving the MacArthur fellowship (dubbed the "genius" grant). Fact, fiction, photofiction, and metafiction blend as the narrative also parallels Hemon's journey to Europe to research and write the "true" story of Lazarus's death in the company of his best friend, the photographer Velibor Božović. The two collaborated in producing the novel, which combines Hemon's narrative and Božović's photographs. Therefore, reading the novel through the lens of the author's biography reveals that the narrator bears a striking resemblance to the author not only for their mixed ethnic background and history of migration but also for the fictional enactment of the writer's actual journey to Europe.

However, as mentioned in another study<sup>4</sup>, Hemon openly dismisses the traditional autobiographical label associated with his novel as he does not believe in the viability of this genre. The novel is purposefully written in an "antiautobiographical" manner to draw attention to the limitations of the genre due to its constructed nature<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, the author's deliberate rejection of autobiography is seen by Wendy Ward as a narrative strategy that deepens our understanding of the relation between arbitrary self-representation and the fictionalization of the self in writing about traumatic historical events<sup>6</sup>.

At the same time, Hemon's nonfictional books<sup>7</sup> go beyond the boundaries of memoir as a genre, blurring the line between life and narrative. In the last pages of his most recent memoir *My Parents: An Introduction/ This Does Not Belong to You* (2019), he writes: "Take this thing you're reading. I could've assembled a different version of it from an alternative set of fragments; I could've been born of different parts; I could've assembled someone else."<sup>8</sup> So, the author invents stories by constantly inventing himself. He creates avatars for his experiences and fantasies, which is something he has in common with the other immigrant authors we discuss in this paper. In the spaces they create between life and fiction, there is a constant interplay between autobiography and regional history, between the authors' voices and the literary personas they invent.

3. Benaouda Lebdaï, "Salman Rushdie / Joseph Anton: Deconstruction of the Fatwa Mirror," in *Autobiography as a Writing Strategy in Postcolonial Literature*, ed. B. Lebdaï (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 6.

4. Georgeta Movilă (Matei), "Centrality and Marginality in Contemporary American Immigrant Writing. Aleksandar Hemon: Reconfigurations of The Self in the Global Age," in *The Shades of Globalisation. Identity and Dialogue in an Intercultural World*, ed. Iulian Boldea (Târgu-Mureș: Arhipelag Press, 2021), 350–358.

5. Menachem Kaiser, "The Exchange: Aleksandar Hemon," *The New Yorker*, June 8th, 2009. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-exchange-aleksandar-hemon>.

6. Wendy Ward, "Does Autobiography Matter?: Fictions of the Self in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*," *Brno Studies in English*, no. 2 (2011): 187–199.

7. *The Book of My Lives* (New York: Picador USA, 2013/2014) and *My Parents: An Introduction/ This Does Not Belong to You* (London: Pan MacMillan, 2019) are Hemon's nonfictional books labeled as "memoirs."

8. Hemon, *My Parents*, 176.





The other selected authors' nonfictional works<sup>9</sup> also engage in what Smith and Watson specifically call "life narrative"<sup>10</sup>. The tension between fiction and reality demonstrates that neither genre can stand alone as an intact category, especially when dealing with trauma *life writing*. We will further employ this term instead of "autobiography" as we refer to various other types of self-referential writing, different from the authors' novels, including memoirs, personal essays (Hemon, Vuong, Díaz), and even TED talks (Adichie). Together with their literary texts, their nonfictional self-referential works create a comprehensive whole, providing readers with a better understanding of both their experience and aesthetics.

Junot Díaz's characters, for instance, often reflect aspects of his own life as a Dominican American author, navigating issues of identity, immigration, and cultural displacement. His Pulitzer Prize-awarded novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) includes characters and settings that parallel his own upbringing and the history of his native country. Its main narrator, Yunior, the author's assumed alter ego, is also the narrator of his two short story collections *Drawn* (1996) and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012). While not strictly autobiographical, Díaz's fiction resonates with authenticity due to its close connection to his cultural background and personal experience, both of which we learn from his personal essays and interviews. For instance, in 2018, Junot published an autobiographical essay titled "The Silence: The Legacy of Childhood Trauma,"<sup>11</sup> in which he writes about being sexually abused at the age of eight. This biographical detail sheds new light on how the author constructed his alter-ego character throughout his entire fiction based on this traumatic experience. In a conversation with Paula Moya<sup>12</sup>, the author suggested that Yunior failed his romantic relationships due to rape trauma. None of the events depicted in his fiction lead to such understanding, so his essay written 11 years after the publication of *Oscar Wao* (2007) shows how the author continues to engage his readership in different interpretative paths, crossing once again the line between life and fiction.

Unfolding the author's own experience as a queer Vietnamese American writer, Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019) also exemplifies how trauma life writing leads to the dissolution of the autobiographical genre as we know it, calling for alternative life writing practices. Written in epistolary form, the novel showcases a multitude of writing styles, from poetic to essayistic. At the same time, it unravels personal as well as collective traumas, thus introducing a collective subject. The novel is framed as a letter from a 28-year-old Vietnamese American writer named Little Dog to his illiterate mother, Rose. Through this letter, Little Dog delves into his family's history, including his grandmother's traumatic experiences during the Vietnam War, his mother's struggles as an immigrant in America, and his own experiences with identity, race, and sexuality. The novel intricately weaves themes of memory, trauma, and survival, offering a poignant exploration of the complexities of family bonds and the enduring effects of war and displacement on migrant communities.

In her novel *Americanah* (2013), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie also challenges authoritative notions of unitary identity, essentialism, integrity, truth, and the canonical institutions of bildungsroman and autobiography by blurring the line between fiction, life writing, and journalism through her fictionalized alter-ego Ifemelu. Mirroring the author's experience, Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman, becomes aware of being Black only after migrating to the United States, where she starts a blog<sup>13</sup> called "Raceteenth or

---

9. Díaz, Vuong, and Adichie have written essays for various publications such as *The New Yorker*, thematizing immigration, identity, and writing. While not strictly written nonfiction, they have also shared their views and experiences through interviews and public speaking engagements, providing insights into the similarities between their life and fiction. Some of them are further referenced in this paper.

10. As noted by Smith and Watson, life writing is complex as at least five dimensions constitute autobiographical subjectivity: memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency. More specifically, they define the concept of "life narrative" as "a historically situated practice of self-representation," rather than a genre. For further definitions and distinctions of the term check *Reading Autobiograph: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001 [2010]), 1–14.

11. Junot Díaz, "The Silence: The Legacy of Childhood Trauma," *The New Yorker*, April 9, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/04/16/the-silence-the-legacy-of-childhood-trauma>.

12. Paula Moya, "The Search for Decolonial Love: An Interview with Junot Díaz," *Boston Review*, June 26, 2012. <http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/paula-ml-moya-decolonial-love-interview-junot-d%C3%ADaz>.

13. Her blog entries are featured in the novel and can be read independently from the main narrative as they have a different tone, voice, and purpose.

Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America”.

As regards the problem of authenticity and autobiographical truth that we are going to explore further, Coetzee thinks that a writer should hope that his autobiographical project is not the story of himself, but a story about himself “a story that will not be the truth but will have some truth value, probably of a mixed kind - some historic truth, some poetic truth. A fiction of the truth in other words”<sup>14</sup>. The aim of this paper is not to discuss to what extent the novels of the selected authors are autobiographically true, but to what degree they are true to their readers, by tracing the limits of authenticity as being intimately connected to the limits of self-representation in postcolonial literature.

As Smith and Watson point out in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, postcolonial authors have reframed our understanding of autobiographical writing by providing alternatives to the individual self. Their life narratives introduce “collective, provisional, and mobile subjects”<sup>15</sup> that subvert the canon of autobiography. By questioning the Western/ colonizer’s norms of identity and experience, they often depersonalize the autobiographical genre.

New concepts of subjectivity arise as a result of acknowledging the hybridity of their lives in transcultural and transnational narratives that can no longer stand as “pure”—purely national or purely aesthetical. Besides this “intervention” in changing the contours of the autobiographical Western canon, Smith and Watson also put an emphasis on the poststructural and postmodern theorizing about the subject, underlying a paradigm shift from autobiographical *pacts* to autobiographical *acts*. *Autobiography* is seen as a performative act, as a “self-narration”<sup>16</sup> but also as an exchange of meaning between reader and writer. This pragmatic turn is aligned with a broader academic interest in the discursive and performative dimensions of language and experience that began in the late ‘70s. According to such views, the autobiographical truth no longer lies in a factual, referential truth but in the exchange between narrator and reader that negotiate and construct meaning as co-authors of the same act. Thus, in more recent theories on autobiographical writing proposed by Gasparini (2004), Smith and Watson (2010), Wagner Egelhaaf (2008), and Missine (2013), there is a strong emphasis on the role of the reader and “his/her expectations and prior knowledge as constitutive of the autobiographical genre.”<sup>17</sup>

Self-referential storytelling that draws on the retelling of historical events in a subjective form is typical of postmodernism. In the *Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon uses the term “historiographic metafiction”<sup>18</sup>. She emphasizes the inevitability of distortion in such narratives where historical representation is “projectively reprocessed in terms of our own narrowly ‘presentist’ interests.”<sup>19</sup> Regardless of the authors’ “interests,” such texts show us how identity is determined at the intersection of history and fiction. The implication of memory and archival materials such as photographs shifts the focus from the representation’s truth value and accuracy to that of secondary witnessing and retelling of events. Immigrant writers merge history and fiction to the point that the problem of veracity is rendered irrelevant. As a secondary witness, the reader is challenged to take an active role in the reproduction of events, inventing their own version of history.

In reconstructing history and the self through storytelling, immigrant authors also reconstitute categories of reality, truth, authenticity, and accuracy. Here, we assert W. G. Sebald’s influence and role as a precursor for Hemon’s use of photographs in his fiction. His novels, *The Emigrants* (1992), *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), and *Austerlitz* (2001) combine words with photographs and fact with fiction in the mode of memoir and travel writing. Sebald is mainly known for thematizing and documenting war and post-Holocaust trauma in photo-fiction “assemblages” that make his writing difficult to categorize. One of the positions he wrote from was that of immigration, which conferred him the status of a second-hand witness and storyteller of past atrocities and collective traumatic events. His circumspect approach to historical knowledge and memory highlights the interchange between the two in postmodern writing. Hemon also explores the mechanisms of visually representing historical

14. J.M. Coetzee, “A Fiction of the Truth,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 27, 1999.

15. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 135.

16. *Ibid*, 18.

17. Lut Missine, “2.3 Autobiographical Pact,” in *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, Volume I: Theory and Concepts, edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2019), 226.

18. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2002).

19. Hutcheon, 55.



trauma in texts that destabilize the truth value and narrative reliability of images. Their photo fiction complicates the problem of truth in postmodern autofiction at two levels. First, they incorporate both archival and personal photos into their texts in an arbitrary fashion, and by doing this, they sabotage the value of photographs as reliable historical evidence. Second, we are aware that the narrators are fictionalized versions of the authors, which casts doubt on the mediation of historical truth, and, at a larger scale, on historiography itself as a process of archivization and transmission of human knowledge.

In *The Lazarus Project* (2008), Hemon uses a series of photographs to delimitate each “history” of migration. The influence of W.G. Sebald is evident here and well-acknowledged by the Bosnian American author. In an interview with Deborah Baker<sup>20</sup>, the writer stated that he learned from Sebald to confront writing with photographs. The novel includes archival photos of Lazarus but also uncaptioned home interiors, urban landscapes, and other photographs taken along the journey to Eastern Europe by Velibor Božović. Photographs are also verbally evoked to meditate on the nature of telling stories and composing one’s identity through disparate but also arbitrarily selected fragments of lived experience, some of them which are captured on film<sup>21</sup>.

In a way, the use of visuals leads to the confrontation between fiction and reality. They create a reality effect together with the memoir mode of narrating the story. “The question then becomes whether the story in my book becomes authentic because of the presence of photos or the photos become inauthentic because of the presence of the story,” says Hemon.<sup>22</sup> The border between what is real and what is imagined is blurred and, from the viewpoint of our reading experience, rendered irrelevant. Hemon challenges his readers to question what is factually real in fiction by acknowledging the role of imagination in exploring different lives and experiences through the act of reading. He believes that literature can give us access to a kind of human knowledge that is otherwise impossible to explore. “What literature does is it employs imagination and language to allow us to extend ourselves into other human beings.”<sup>23</sup>

*The Lazarus Project* (2008) is especially relevant for our discussion as it exemplifies four common features these new immigrant authors share in crossing national and aesthetic boundaries in their literature. First, they reveal a transnational spatial awareness and sensibility marked by processes of dislocation, migration, and return movements that challenge binary thinking (local vs. global<sup>24</sup>, home country vs. host country), as well as the way we perceive the international literary space. They belong to a new generation of “minority” writers that reconsider the narrative of migration. Rather than striving to settle in the place of arrival, they tell the immigrant’s story beyond it, spanning multiple geographies and cross-cultural identity reconfigurations. They are concerned with the place of the minority person (the marginal, the immigrant, the racialized, the queer) in relation to the hegemonic culture and language. The construction of a homeland-like space in the place of arrival, beyond the narrowly circumscribed notions of nationalism (Hemon), race (Díaz, Adichie), or gender (Vuong), is one of the key features of their spatial aesthetics<sup>25</sup>.

---

20. Deborah Baker, “Aleksandar Hemon by Deborah Baker,” *Bomb Magazine*, August 20, 2008. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/aleksandar-hemon-1/>.

21. Hemon, *The Lazarus Project* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), 68: “When I look at my old pictures, all I can see is what I used to be but am no longer. I think: What I can see is what I am not,” says Brik in one of his conversations with his photographer friend.

22. Baker, “Aleksandar Hemon.”

23. Irina Reyn, “Exile on Any Street,” *Guernica*, February 1, 2010. [https://www.guernicamag.com/not\\_melted\\_into\\_the\\_pot/](https://www.guernicamag.com/not_melted_into_the_pot/).

24. In “Crossing Borders: From (Ex-)Yugoslavia to the Whole World,” published in *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 6, no. 1 (2020): 44–62, Snejana Ung analyses the internal geography of some of Hemon’s works and shows how his imagination transcends the duality between home culture and host culture. Hemon’s latest novel, *The World and All That It Holds* (2023), continues to incite his readers with a new transnational narrative that defies categorization, moving across genres and borders. The story crosses great distances, from Sarajevo to Shanghai, and alternates multiple timeframes. As far as the author’s spatial awareness goes, he introduces the world as a governing notion from the very beginning. Consequently, the characters are constructed beyond a particular nation-state’s cultural and linguistic space. Multiple spaces and languages overlap in a complex, multilayered narrative.

25. The complex relation between nation, narrative, and identity in new immigrant writing is extensively treated in “Nation and Narration”: Writing Alternative Histories In Contemporary Immigrant Literature, in *Means And Meanings Of Communication. Contexts And Interdisciplinarity* (Târgu-Mureș, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2022, 171-181, where I show how these writers challenge the boundaries of the American nation, selfhood, and literature through a transcultural, postnationalist perspective on self-formation and narration.

Second, the novels analysed here reveal the dynamic of reality and illusion as they mix genres, traditions, cultures, and languages. Such crossings are most vividly depicted in Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), who draws on speculative genres to address the suppressed stories of marginalized individuals, the theme of forbidden knowledge, and the role of imagination in constructing alternative narratives. Hemon's novel exhibits a hybrid structure as narratives, timeframes, and mediums overlap. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2014) is also a hybrid as it takes the shape of bildungsroman, romance, and ethnic migrant novel while constituting a political commentary on issues of colonial history, migration, and racism. Ultimately, Ocean Vuong draws on Japanese narratology in his novel to subvert the literary tradition of Asian-American immigrant writing, moving beyond US-centric representations of conflict and trauma.

Third, they approach migration not just in terms of themes and actual stories that might or might not be historically true, but also through linguistic alterity. The writers we focus on construct their identities through language. As Sonia Weiner (2018) argues, they "discursively create the self"<sup>26</sup>. They rethink cultural hybridity and redefine the diasporic imagination by using the English language in innovative ways (their texts are infused with cultural and linguistic references to their homeland which contributes to a sense of authenticity). As they draw on their experience as immigrants, their writing "translates" a constant movement between languages and cultural backgrounds, resulting in self-translation with fundamental implications in cross-cultural identity reconfiguration, on the one hand, and intercultural dialogue on the other. The use of multiple languages impacts the reading experience and leaves room for further negotiation between author and reader.

The fourth feature common to the immigrant writers' aesthetics discussed in this paper is their metafictional preoccupation with storytelling, which will be dealt with in the following section of this paper.

### **Breaking the Autobiographical Pact: Life Writing & the Limits of Authenticity in Migrant Literature**

According to the French academic Philippe Lejeune, "we call autobiography the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality"<sup>27</sup>. In his renowned essay "Le Pacte Autobiographique," he defines the relationship between author and reader as a pact/ contract. Thus, the reader supposes that there is an identity of name between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist of the story. The concept of the "pact" has faded away in recent theories because of the hybridity and complexity of autobiographical and autofictional texts. Contemporary immigrant life writing par excellence challenges Philippe Lejeune's understanding of autobiography from the point of view of both its form and reception. Coetzee, for instance, believes that pacts can be renegotiated, which is also true in terms of meaning:

"An autobiographer is not only a man who once upon a time lived a life in which he loved, fought, suffered, strove, was misunderstood, and of which he tells the story; he is also a man engaged in writing a story. That story is written within the limits of a pact, the pact of autobiography, one of the many pacts negotiated over the years between writers and readers (and always open to renegotiation) for each of the genres and sub-genres, pacts which cover, among other things, what demands may be made of each genre and what may not, what questions may be asked and what may not, what one may see and what one must be blind to."<sup>28</sup>

As regards the novels of the immigrant writers we focus on, many of the scholars referenced in this paper broke "the autobiographical pact" (as defined by Lejeune) for the sake of interpretation and highlighted the similarities between their lives and their fiction in the absence of the mandatory identification between author, narrator, and protagonist. However, both formally and functionally, their writing implies the enactment of a transaction between the text and the reader that does not exclude truth-telling. According to Smith and Watson, "If we approach self-referential writing as an intersubjective process that occurs within the writer/reader pact, rather than as a true-or-false story, the emphasis of reading shifts from assessing and verifying knowledge to observing processes of communicative exchange and understanding."<sup>29</sup> Autobiographical narration is thus intersubjective and can be redefined beyond the truth-falsehood binary.

26. Sonia Weiner, *American Migrant Fictions: Space, Narrative, Identity* (Leiden: Brill & Rodopi, 2018), 200.

27. Philippe Lejeune, cited in Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 1.

28. J.M. Coetzee, *Truth in Autobiography* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1984), 5.

29. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 13.



By crossing this aesthetical boundary, they first subvert the conventions of autobiography as a narrative centred on a confessional “I.” The first impression in the act of reading is not that of dealing with autobiographical writing, and in some cases, not even with a novel (Vuong). In *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), the author blends the bildungsroman, historical, autobiographical, and epistolary styles in a poetic prose that crosses multiple aesthetic borders to construct a complex, imaginative, and experimental life narrative. The novel begins as a letter, but essayistic passages and poetry lines interrupt the epistolary style. Sharp informational fragments problematize the opioid crisis in post-9/11 America. Trevor, the American white boy Little Dog falls in love with, dies of an overdose of heroin combined with fentanyl. Like many other young people in the US, he became an addict due to a prescribed drug meant to alleviate bodily pain called OxyContin.

The narrator also employs an evocative, essayistic style to write about monarch butterflies, buffalos, and other animals. Repeatedly mentioned in the novel, monarch butterflies symbolize memory, migration, and transgenerational legacy. Like the monarchs, Little Dog has his family’s traumas inscribed into his genes and behaviour. From this perspective, self-harm impulses, depression, and addiction issues are perceived as effects of distressing childhood experiences. In one of his interviews, Vuong mentioned that he wanted to write a novel that would faithfully enact his generation’s disintegration. As a result, failure and epigenetic trauma are significant themes in his prose, which at times “breaks into poetry”<sup>30</sup>.

As already mentioned, writing disguised autobiographies as novels or other forms of literary writing is a pattern already identified in postcolonial literature in the work of authors such as Rushdie and Coetzee. In *Elisabeth Costello*, for example, Coetzee attributed part of his actual lectures to a fictional Australian author that stands as his female alter-ego. However, despite the reader’s knowledge of their fictionalized autobiographical writing, the second impression that emerges through reading is that of authenticity as the authors choose narrative techniques that create the illusion of direct communication between author and reader, a relation mediated by the author-figures that are extraordinary storytellers. As Weiner noted in *American Migrant Fictions* (2018)<sup>31</sup>, Junot Díaz and Aleksandar Hemon share a common obsession with the process of writing and creating narrators that double as storytellers. Their narrators grapple with the challenges of expressing themselves in a foreign culture, and their narratives become inclusive of different linguistic and cultural elements. Hemon’s narrator in *The Lazarus Project* (2008) is preoccupied with becoming an acclaimed American writer to prove his value to his beloved wife and her American family but he ends up in his native country, questioning his choices and true identity. For Díaz’s Oscar Wao (whose Spanish inflicted-nickname is a direct reference to Oscar Wilde), writing was a coping mechanism and self-discovery instrument that could have made him a Latino “Tolkien” if his life would not have ended abruptly and tragically upon his last return to Dominican Republic. Vuong’s alter-ego narrator writes a letter to his mother in English, a language she does not comprehend, and fulfils his destiny as a writer by acknowledging his Asian cultural inheritance. Adichie’s protagonist in *Americanah* (2013) becomes a successful blogger and public speaker exploring what it means for a displaced subject to live and write in a “borrowed tongue”<sup>32</sup>.

As regards telling the truth, J. M. Coetzee shows how questionable this category is in contemporary writing. Phenomenologically, truth is umbilically connected to notions of authenticity and belief, aspects that the above-mentioned authors also self-referentially exploit throughout their fiction. As Jane Poynter puts it, “That Coetzee is concerned with ‘how to tell the truth in autobiography’ therefore does not mean he is concerned with truth per se, but with its telling. In other words, Coetzee is less interested in the truth value of narrative than in the mechanism truth always a category to be questioned in Coetzee—is brought to light”<sup>33</sup>.

In “Truth in Autobiography,” his inaugural lecture given as a Professor at the University of Cape Town in 1984, the author discusses the confessional rhetoric in Rousseau’s autobiography and raises an essential issue: if we replace all questions of truthfulness with questions of sincerity, how can we tell the author was sincere? “There are truths - he says - that it may cost too much to tell. It is not insincere,

---

30. The words belong to Vuong. In a conversation with Toby Ashraf (2020: min. 19:30), he explains that his novel is like a carefully orchestrated explosion, an elongation of his poetry.

31. Sonia Weiner, *American Migrant Fictions*, 27.

32. In *Borrowed Tongues: Life Writing, Migration, and Translation* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), Eva C. Karpinski coined the term “borrowed tongue” in reference to writing in a second language or one perceived as not one’s own.

33. Jane Poynter, *J.M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 168.

or not merely insincere, to fail to come out with these truths.<sup>34</sup> The question of truth in terms of sincerity is also pursued by Coetzee in his fiction, the second chapter of *Elizabeth Costello* being emblematic of the elusiveness of this matter and the impossibility of discerning between what things are and what they seem to be. In analyzing Costello's and Egudu's lectures, Stephan Mulhall explores the dialectics of appearance and reality, exploiting the relation between truth, sincerity, and belief:

"It is not that either of them is insincere, as if offering what they know to be false as true: it is both, in their different ways, operating in a domain where the distinction between rhetoric and substance, appearance and reality, no longer has a grip. It is the very idea of truth as independent of our beliefs that creates the logical space for a phenomenon of belief that is entirely independent of truth—a domain in which belief is no longer inherently truth-oriented but is ultimately reducible to a matter of energy or mere utility."<sup>35</sup>

The same questions can be raised in terms of perception with respect to Coetzee's narrative itself. Can we believe what we are told? If so, what is the basis of the reader's trust? Like Costello, we know that "things can be true even if one does not believe in them, and conversely. Belief may be no more, in the end, than a source of energy, like a battery which one clips into an idea to make it run."<sup>36</sup> As Smith and Watson suggest in *Reading Autobiography*, we need to adjust our expectations of the truth in life narratives as the autobiographical truth is an "intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of a life."<sup>37</sup>

Next, I will take a closer look at what Coetzee does in *Elizabeth Costello* as an abstract model/ pattern that we can identify in other postcolonial/ migrant self-referential writing. Constructed as a collection of "lectures", the writer achieves a much more complex narrative than what we might understand by "lesson"—"the proper form of a lecture is something direct and nonfictional—instructional, expository, or essayistic using fictions to illustrate a point, perhaps, but in a wider framework of straight-talking"<sup>38</sup>. He creates what we can call *textistence*<sup>39</sup>, a construct in which reality and fiction, text and existence collide and become one.

A more comprehensive reading would illustrate another aspect that can be argued in terms of form and function—the fact that both the text and self-identity are created as performance. Most of the lessons are told from the perspective of Costello herself, while others are told from the point of view of her son, John. There are, though, other author-figures, indeed, not taking the role of the narrator, that contribute to the idea of this novel as a performative discourse, such as the "exotic" character Emmanuel Egudu. Costello's first impression of this character as a "poseur" is meaningful with respect to the double nature of the textual lectures and of the metatextual narrative (the reality-fiction binary). Both the author and his alter-egos are susceptible of imposture because of the auto-plagiaristic dimension of their discourses. As Coetzee retells his lectures by inventing Costello, who herself is an author-figure known for rewriting fundamental narratives, Egudu's lectures are nothing but repetitions as he makes a living out of a lecture circuit on cruise ships. "But a poseur, she now wonders: what is that? Someone who seems to be what he is not? Which of us is what he seems to be, she seems to be?"<sup>40</sup>

What derives from everything stated so far is that the issue of authenticity can be perceived as independent from truth and sincerity. While at a textual level, the reader can be persuaded to believe in the created realm and genuinely empathise with the truths of the characters, metatextually, authenticity is subverted by the reader's awareness of the discrepancy between what these life narratives are (the authors' actual experience) and what they are made to be (fiction). Moreover, authenticity is both epistemologically and anthropologically undermined by the reader's awareness of a deconstructive playful force behind the narrative, typical to the cultural and aesthetic framework the text belongs to responsible for the relativization of all truths. "This open acknowledgment of the fictionality of all

34. Coetzee, "Truth in Autobiography," 5.

35. Stephen Mulhall, *The Wounded Animal: J.M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

36. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 39.

37. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 13.

38. James Meffan, J.M. Coetzee "Elizabeth Costello (2003)," in *A Companion to the Works of J. M. Coetzee*, edited by Tim Mehigan (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2011), 175.

39. The lecture Coetzee held in when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, is also suggestive of perceiving his existence as *textistence* because of the inadequacy to call his lectures nonfictional as they are stories in nature.

40. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 36.



'knowledge', says Pat Morris, the insistence that reality amounts to cultural stories and interpretations that we impose upon existence to create meaning for ourselves and of ourselves is the most typical characteristic of postmodern writing"<sup>41</sup>. So, the postmodern cultural matrix, among others, represents one of the limits of authenticity in contemporary migrant and postcolonial literature. For this reason, we believe that the truth behind the narrative is, in fact, a multiplicity of truths belonging to the reader, each reader activating or acknowledging his or her own truth. From a reader-oriented point of view, the text-reader dynamic interrelationship is far more complex as there are many variables implied.

This relation, implying not only the limits of authenticity already discussed but also limits of representation of the real, is skilfully examined by Wolfgang Iser in his essay "The Play of the Text"<sup>42</sup>, arguing that "authors play games, and the text is the playground,"<sup>43</sup> and so "whatever is repeated in the text is not meant to denote the world, but merely a world enacted. This may well repeat—he continues—an identifiable reality, but it contains one all-important inherent in the real world referred to"<sup>44</sup>. The critic also claims that there are various levels of difference between the fictional world and its possibly 'realist' referent, differences that occur simultaneously within the text. If we interrogate the first extratextual relation pointed out by Iser - "between author and the world in which he or she intervenes"<sup>45</sup> -, with regard to *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee's writing represents, from an Aristotelian perspective on literary representation, a copy of a copy, a copy of an already fictionalized reality as Costello's lectures have a ground in Coetzee's actual lectures or academic papers. For instance, an earlier version of Lesson 1, *Realism*, appeared under the title "What is Realism?" in 1997, and an earlier version of Lesson 2 appeared as "The Novel in Africa," Occasional Paper no. 17 of the Townsend Center for the Humanities, at the University of California at Berkely, in 1999. "The Novel in Africa" is even more illustrative of how reality abides in the realm of fiction, as Coetzee inserts actual references. By naming and quoting actual writers (Cheik Hamidou Kane and Paul Zumthor), he crosses, once again and even more disturbingly, the boundaries between the real and the fictional. From perceiving the text as a playground to perceiving it as a playground of differences, in a Derridean sense, is only a small step because by disclosing the truth of the fictionality, as well as the fictionality of the truth, Coetzee is one of the authors that contribute to the undoing of realism in contemporary writing. Thus, *Elizabeth Costello* is representative of the disintegration of the paradigm that dominated the novel as a genre for more than a century. Due to this new paradigm of paradoxes and relativism that emerged in arts and literature in the second half of the 20th century, the reader can perceive a correspondence and a difference between fact and fictional truth in self-referential novels.

### Conclusions

By offering new perspectives on selfhood and self-referential writing, immigrant authors such as Aleksandar Hemon, Junot Díaz, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Ocean Vuong cross both national and aesthetic borders, contributing to the emergence of what we call a transnational immigrant life writing typology. The protagonists of their fiction reach maturity in different cultural, linguistic, racial, and ethnic contexts, yet their works have much in common in themes, techniques, language use, and narrative structures.

A common feature of the texts referenced in this study resides in the authors' metatextual preoccupation with self-referential storytelling. By creating narrators that double as writers often reflecting on their own writing process, they establish parallels between their lives and those of their narrators, presenting different stages in the process of their identity formation and re-formation across borders. Their works complicate the discussion around the tension between truth and fiction in semi-biographical writing as they break both the "autobiographical contract" (Lejeune, 1989) and "fictive dream" (Gardner, 1991).

Moreover, they continue their narratives outside the borders of their fiction. Hemon has created websites

---

41. Pat Morris, "The Poststructural Critique of Realism," in *Realism* (London, & New York: Routledge, 2003), 30.

42. Originally published in S. Budick and W. Iser, eds., *Languages of the Unsayable* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 325–39, the essay was reprinted in Lilian R. Furst, ed., *Realism* (London: Longman, 1992), 206–217.

43. Wolfgang Iser, "The Play of the Text," in *Realism*, ed. by Lilian R Furst (New York: Routledge, 2003), 207.

44. *Ibid.*, 208.

45. *Ibid.*

for his novels<sup>46</sup>. Adichie's official website hosts a section entitled Ifemelu's Blog<sup>47</sup>, and Díaz has annotated his narrator's footnotes from his novel on an open access platform dedicated to rap lyrics<sup>48</sup>. More recently, Vuong gives readers and followers new insights into his fiction through a photographic project for Cultured Magazine<sup>49</sup> showing pictures with his mother and her salon, both fictionalized in his semi-biographical novel. The article reminds us of Velibor Božović's own "Lazarus project" posted on his website.<sup>50</sup>

By self-reflecting on the process of interpretation, we want to highlight that, as readers and global citizens, we are all interconnected in and outside academia and national literatures, fighting the "increasingly fortified world"<sup>51</sup> we live in. While we are not co-authors of these writers' life narratives, we are co-authors of their truth as we are invited to participate into a collective contestation of grand narratives, including the grand myth of fiction.

Ultimately, what matters most is the outcome of the intersubjective and dynamic interplay between authors' and readers' intentions that we call reading. Concerning the authors' self-referential writing, be it fictional or real, autobiographical or essayistic, the actual result of interpretation as a process transforming the reader is the Otherness we make sense of. The most important thing about fiction is not so much making sense of other lives but making sense of ourselves through them. Once again, life writing is not so much about factual truth but about potential truths we make sense of through criticism.

### Bibliography

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. 2013. London: 4th Estate, 2017.
- Baker, Deborah. "Aleksandar Hemon by Deborah Baker." *Bomb Magazine*, August 20, 2008. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/aleksandar-hemon-1/>.
- Božović, Velibor. "The Lazarus Project." <https://veliborbozovic.com/the-lazarus-project/>. Accessed July 7, 2024.
- Coetzee, John Maxwell. *Elizabeth Costello*. London: Vintage, 2004.
- Coetzee, John Maxwell. "A Fiction of the Truth." *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 27, 1999.
- Coetzee, John Maxwell. "Truth in Autobiography." Inaugural Lecture at the University of Cape Town, 1984.
- Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2008.
- Díaz, Junot. *Drown*. London: FABER & FABER, 2008.
- Díaz, Junot. "The Silence: The Legacy of Childhood Trauma." *The New Yorker*, April 9, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/04/16/the-silence-the-legacy-of-childhood-trauma>.
- Ferreira-Meyers, Karen, Giulia Grillo Mikrut, Dipti R. Pattanaik, and Kerstin W. Shands, eds. *Writing the Self: Essays on Autobiography and Autofiction*. English Studies 5. Sweden: Elanders, 2015.
- Forest, Philippe. "Je & Moi: Avant-propos." *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, September 29, 2011.
- Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers*. 1983. New York: Vintage, 1991.
- Genius.com. <https://genius.com/artists/Junot-diaz>. Accessed July 7, 2024.
- Hemon, Aleksandar. *Nowhere Man*. 2002. London: Picador, 2009.
- Hemon, Aleksandar. *The Lazarus Project*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2009.
- Hemon, Aleksandar. *Love and Obstacles*. 2009. London: Picador, 2010.
- Hemon, Aleksandar. *The Book of My Lives*. New York: Picador USA, 2014.
- Hemon, Aleksandar. *My Parents: An Introduction/ This Does Not Belong to You*. London: Pan McMillan, 2019.

46. These are no longer accessible on the author's website but you can check the webpage for Hemon's first collection of short stories in English, *The Question of Bruno* (2000) - <http://aleksandarahemon.com/bruno/bruno/index2.html>.

47. Ifemelu's blog entries on Adichie's website differ from the ones in the novel in terms of style and purpose. They postdate the action in the book and offer a glimpse into the life of the main characters as returnees to their native country. Also, they have little literary value. See <https://www.chimamanda.com/ifemelus-blog/>, accessed July 7, 2024.

48. Díaz's profile and annotations can be seen by accessing <https://genius.com/artists/Junot-Díaz>, accessed July 7, 2024.

49. See Ocean Vuong, "Writer Ocean Vuong's Debut Photography Series Memorializes the Nail Salons and Family Trips of His Youth," June 27, 2024, <https://www.culturedmag.com/article/2024/06/27/writer-ocean-vuong-debut-photography>

50. Fragments from Hemon's novel accompany each image on Božović's online project, recontextualizing the narrator's words outside the borders of its pages. See Velibor Božović, "The Lazarus Project," <https://veliborbozovic.com/the-lazarus-project/>, accessed July 7, 2024.

51. The words belong to Jacqueline Rose, from *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).





- Hemon, Aleksandar. *The World and All That It Holds*. London: Pan Macmillan, 2023.
- Hemon, Aleksandar. "The Question of Bruno." <http://aleksandarahemon.com/bruno/bruno/index2.html>.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2002.
- "Ifemelu's Blog." <https://www.chimamanda.com/ifemelus-blog/>. Accessed July 7, 2024.
- Iser, Wolfgang. "The Play of the Text." In *Realism*, edited by Lilian R. Furst. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Kaiser, Menachem. "The Exchange: Aleksandar Hemon." *The New Yorker*, June 8, 2009. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-exchange-aleksandar-hemon>.
- Karpinski, Eva C. *Borrowed Tongues: Life Writing, Migration, and Translation*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012.
- Lebdai, Benaouda, ed. *Writing Strategy in Postcolonial Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. Edited and with a foreword by Paul John Eakin. Translated by Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Meffan, James. "Elizabeth Costello (2003)." In *A Companion to the Works of J.M. Coetzee*, edited by Tim Mehigan and Timothy J. Mehigan, 221–234. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011.
- Missine, Lut. "2.3 Autobiographical Pact." In *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction, Volume I: Theory and Concepts*, edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 222–228. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2019.
- Moya, Paula. "The Search for Decolonial Love: An Interview with Junot Díaz." *Boston Review*, June 26, 2012. <http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/paula-ml-moya-decolonial-love-interview-junot-d%C3%ADaz>.
- Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. London and New York: Verso, 2005.
- Morris, Pat. "The Poststructural Critique of Realism." In *Realism*, edited by Lilian R. Furst, 191–206. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Movilă (Matei), Georgeta. "Centrality and Marginality in Contemporary American Immigrant Writing. Aleksandar Hemon: Reconfigurations of The Self in the Global Age." In *The Shades of Globalisation: Identity and Dialogue in an Intercultural World*, edited by Iulian Boldea, 350–358. Târgu-Mureș: Arhipelag Press, 2021.
- Movilă (Matei), Georgeta. "'Nation and Narration': Writing Alternative Histories in Contemporary Immigrant Literature." In *Means and Meanings of Communication: Contexts and Interdisciplinarity*, edited by Iulian Boldea, Cornel Sigmirean, and Dumitru-Mircea Buda, 171–181. Târgu-Mureș: Arhipelag XXI Press, 2022.
- Matei, Georgeta. "Speaking the Language of Vulnerability: Alternative Languages in Literary Discourse." In *Alternative Approaches to Discourses*, edited by Rus D. and Han B., 200–214. București: Editura ProUniversitaria, 2023.
- Mulhall, Stephen. *The Wounded Animal: J.M. Coetzee and the Difficulty of Reality in Literature and Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Nguyen, Viet Thanh. "Failing Better: A Conversation with Ocean Vuong." *LARB*, June 24, 2019.
- Poyner, Jane. *J.M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009.
- Reyn, Irina. "Exile on Any Street." *Guernica*, February 1, 2010. [https://www.guernicamag.com/not\\_melted\\_into\\_the\\_pot/](https://www.guernicamag.com/not_melted_into_the_pot/).
- Rose, Jacqueline. *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Ung, Stejana. "Crossing Borders: From (Ex-)Yugoslavia to the Whole World." *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 6, no. 1 (2020): 44–62.
- Vuong, Ocean. "Writer Ocean Vuong's Debut Photography Series Memorializes the Nail Salons and Family Trips of His Youth." *Cultured Magazine*, June 27, 2024. <https://www.culturedmag.com/article/2024/06/27/writer-ocean-vuong-debut-photography>.
- Wagner-Egelhaaf, Martina, ed. *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction, Volume I: Theory and Concepts*. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2019.
- Ward, Wendy. "Does Autobiography Matter?: Fictions of the Self in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*." *Brno Studies in English* 37, no. 2 (2011): 187–199.
- Weiner, Sonia. *American Migrant Fictions: Space, Narrative, Identity*. Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2018.

# Emigrarea ca miracol: Banatul ca loc miraculos al primelor treceri de frontieră

Ferenc VINCZE

University of Vienna, Das Institut für Europäische und Vergleichende Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft  
Corresponding author emails: ferenc.vincze@univie.ac.at

---

## Emigration as a Miracle: Banat as the Miraculous Place of the First Border Crossings

**Abstract:** This paper focuses on a recurring scene in fiction about emigration, the crossing of physical and geographical borders. The practice of crossing borders is an act of separation from the home, the familiar, and can be understood as a trigger for the later consequences of emigration, since this act creates the situation in which the emigrant experiences himself as a stranger, as a different person in the destination. In the literature on Eastern Europe, there have been many texts that thematize the act of crossing borders, but this thesis will focus on how the first—and to this extent most prominent—border crossing leading to emigration can be linked to the phenomenon of the miracle and, at the same time, to the region of Banat.

**Keywords:** emigration, miracle, transcultural phenomena, cultural transfer, Iris Wolff, Cătălin Dorian Florescu

**Citation suggestion:** Vincze, Ferenc. "Emigrarea ca miracol: Banatul ca loc miraculos al primelor treceri de frontieră." *Transilvania*, no. 9 (2024): 34–42.  
<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2024.09.04>.



Una dintre scenele recurente<sup>1</sup> în ficțiunea despre emigrație este trecerea granițelor fizice și geografice. Practica trecerii frontierelor este un act de separare de casă, de familiar și se poate presupune că este cauza consecințelor ulterioare ale emigrării, deoarece acest act creează situația în care emigrantul se experimentează pe sine ca străin, ca o persoană diferită în locul de destinație. În studiul meu va fi vorba mai ales despre refugiați și emigranți politici, adică despre persoane care au trecut granița din cauze politice în timpul perioadei comuniste, și nu economice, care a fost recent subiectul mai multor romane românești contemporane și a fost analizată de mai mulți autori.<sup>2</sup> Având în vedere acest aspect, se poate susține că trecerea frontierei joacă un rol semnificativ în schimbarea identității de sine, deși experiența efectivă a străinătății nu se produce în primul rând în timpul actului fizic de trecere a frontierei.

În mod obișnuit, așa-numitele studii privind exilul s-au axat pe figura migrantului care își schimbă mediul cultural, social și politic, adică migrantul care pleacă și migrează în interior și, nu întâmplător, pe diverse aspecte ale integrării. După cum au subliniat istoricii literari maghiari Eszter Pabis<sup>3</sup> și Beáta Thomka,<sup>4</sup> studiile literare și culturale au fost în prima linie a acestei cercetări, de exemplu, în utilizarea teoretică a experienței emigrației dintre cele două războaie mondiale și a întoarcerii după 1945 pentru a

---

1. În contextul emigrației și al trecerii frontierei, de exemplu, *Adio, adio, patria mea, cu î din i, cu â din a și Noapte bună, copii!* de Radu Pavel Gheo, *Der Fuchs war damals der Jäger* de Herta Müller, *Die Tür zur hinteren Küche* de Johann Lippet sau *Habseligkeiten* de Richard Wagner.

2. De exemplu, Adriana Stan, care scrie în studiul său despre aspectele ideologice ale reprezentărilor postcomuniste ale emigrației. Adriana Stan, „On Your Own in a One-and-Unequal World: Forms and Worldviews in Contemporary Romanian Narratives of Emigration.” *Revista Transilvania* nr. 4. (2024): 1–7.

3. Pabis Eszter, „Határátlépések. Magyar származású kortárs íróknak német nyelvű műveiről a transznacionális emlékezet-kutatás kontextusában”, *Werkstatt*, nr. 11. (2016): 190–191.

4. Thomka Beáta, *Regénytapasztalat. Korélmény, hovatartozás, nyelvváltás* (Budapest: Kijárat, 2018), 29–30.



studia imigrația și reprezentările acesteia în perioadele ulterioare. În esență, curente de interpretare nu mai sunt axate pe practica trecerii frontierelor fizice sau geografice, ci mai degrabă pe faptul că natura tranzitorie a trecerii în sine a devenit o metaforă pentru noile contexte sociale și culturale emergente, care pot fi înțelese în termenii logicii hibridității.<sup>5</sup> Acest proces stabilește practic cadrul în care este înțeleasă tranziția sau trecerea frontierelor atunci când se analizează literaturile europene:

„Prin urmare, atunci când Europa este regândită în condițiile pluriculturalismului și multilingvismului, este vorba despre trecerea frontierelor în sensul triplu al cuvântului: despre facilitarea contactelor și tranzacțiilor dincolo de bariere și filtre, despre reflectarea critică a regimurilor de frontieră, a tehnologiilor și ideologiilor de securitate a frontierelor și despre tranziția de la artă, care reflectă și transfigurează realul, la construcția socială a realității.”<sup>6</sup>

Abordarea triplă ilustrată în citat deschide o serie de posibilități prin care frontiera și practica trecerii frontierei, care este strâns legată de aceasta, pot fi înțelese ca un sistem larg de relații și, prin urmare, pot fi percepute în termeni de dinamică a formării și a schimbării. După cum subliniază Eszter Pabis, „primul aspect al ambivalenței fundamentale inerente conceptului de frontieră poate fi sesizat în relația dintre frontieră și trecerea frontierei. Frontierele iau ființă și există în măsura în care pot fi traversate, transgresibilitatea lor are o semnificație constitutivă”.<sup>7</sup> În această semnificație constitutivă poate fi dezvăluită esența schimbării și formării în curs, care, în opinia mea, poate fi găsită în întruchipările actului de trecere a frontierelor. Dacă luăm în considerare procesele de emigrare, putem concluziona că părăsirea familiarului, a cunoscutului (chiar dacă este vorba de un mediu social și politic opresiv, structurat dictatorial) poate fi definit ca fiind primul act care produce și face posibil nevăzutul, necunoscutul ulterior și străinul. Cu toate acestea, multe dintre trecerile de frontieră care au loc în cadrul semantic al emigrației poartă, în momentul actului, un anumit sens al ireversibilității sau finalității, întrucât, în cele mai multe cazuri, motivațiile care duc la emigrare includ o schimbare a cunoscutului într-o asemenea măsură, încât condițiile de existență ale subiectului care trece frontiera devin intolerabile.

În cele ce urmează, voi discuta despre trecerile de graniță din *Wunderzeit* (*Vremea minunilor*) de Cătălin Dorian Florescu<sup>8</sup> și *Die Unschärfe der Welt* de Iris Wolff în contextul emigrării, pentru a prezenta, ca studiu de caz, soluțiile lor de structurare a textului de-a lungul diferitelor prezentări. Cele două romane menționate mai sus au fost alese pentru acest eseu deoarece fiecare dintre ele prezintă prima – și nu întâmplător miraculoasă – trecere a frontierei spre emigrare. În ceea ce privește reprezentările emigrației academice în literatura română, Ioana Macrea-Toma afirmă: „Literatura română (și nu numai ea) a abordat fenomenul migrației prin tipologizarea (sau transfigurarea) unor experiențe reale într-un discurs al eșecului. Fără să își asume descrieri din interiorul unor vieți exilate (cu excepția, probabil a lui Mălin Mălaicu-Hondrari), romanele despre această temă par să își fi însușit mai degrabă un anume discurs despre migrație, care să reazeze trăiri personale (sau nu) sub semnul marginalității damnate.”<sup>9</sup> Cele două romane selectate reprezintă în esență emigrarea din România, creând un discurs nu al eșecului, ci mai degrabă al succesului miraculos. Ipoteza mea este că noțiunea de miracol este strâns legată de scenele de trecere a frontierei și, prin urmare, de emigrare, deoarece închiderea fizică și mentală a regiunii a fost spartă aproape numai printr-un miracol. Așa cum Cosmin Borza și Claudiu Turcuș au subliniat în studiul lor, reprezentarea trecerii frontierei în perioada postcomunistă este mai puțin descrisă ca „miraculoasă”, ci mai degrabă ca „tragicomică” sau „burlescă”: „Tocmai de aceea, pentru România primei decade și jumătate postcomuniste, tipic rămâne travaliul (imaginar) de a trece „dincolo”, mai degrabă decât experiența (propriu-zisă, materială, a) lumii „de dincolo”. Respectivul travaliu imaginar se exprimă frecvent în forma farsei tragicomice sau a travestiului burlesc, ai căror bieți

5. „Für die Border Studies hat sich damit ein weites Feld aufgetan, in dem es nicht nur um die Untersuchung geografischer und territorialer, juristischer und politischer, sondern auch um die Aufarbeitung kognitiver und kultureller, metaphorischer und imaginärer Grenzziehungen geht.” Matthias Bauer, Martin Nies, Ivo Theele, „Grenz-Übergänge: Zur ästhetischen Darstellung von Flucht und Exil”, în *Grenz-Übergänge. Zur ästhetischen Darstellung von Flucht und Exil in Literatur und Film*, ed. Matthias Bauer, Martin Nies, Ivo Theele. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019), 7.

6. Ibid., 9.

7. Pabis, *Határátlépések*, 192.

8. Cătălin Dorian Florescu, *Wunderzeit* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001); Traducere în limba română de Adriana Rotaru: Cătălin Dorian Florescu, *Vremea minunilor* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2022)

9. Ioana Macrea-Toma, „Excepția sincerității: romanul migrației academice”, *Observatorul Cultural*, nr. 966, 2019. <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/excepția-sincerității-romanul-migrației-academice/>.

actanți rămân ferm convinși că noua lume liberă și democratică le garantează trecerea granițelor și că întregul demers nu depinde decât de propria lor voință.<sup>10</sup> Mai mult, Banatul, care poate fi identificat ca o regiune frontalieră, situată fizic la granița dintre România, fosta Iugoslavia și Ungaria, devenind astfel un teritoriu al trecerilor miraculoase de frontieră, este conceptualizat ca un spațiu în care se dă posibilitatea miracolelor și ca un spațiu central. Rodica Ilie în studiul său despre literatura exilului, afirmă că „literatura exilului rupe legătura cu cititorul din propria cultură, scriitorul disident, renunțând la centru, caută alt cadru de exprimare, uneori pierde patria cuvântului său și devine un rătăcitor în alte patrii. Să fii scriitor altundeva, în altă limbă decât materna, înseamnă să îți reinventezi un centru.”<sup>11</sup> Așadar, conform ipotezei mele, Banatul nu este doar o regiune a miracolelor, ci și o regiune centrală care a făcut posibilă emigrarea.

### Trecerea frontierelor ca un cadru și un miracol

Tematica primului roman al scriitorului și emigrantului român de limbă germană Cătălin Dorian Florescu, publicat în 2001, este axată pe actul de trecere fizică și geografică a frontierelor. *Wunderzeit* este, în esență, o poveste de emigrare spusă din perspectiva unui copil, având ca scenă principală prima trecere a frontierei care duce la emigrare, dar nu și prima trecere a frontierei din viața copilului. Structura romanului plasează în mod clar acest actul în centru, deoarece împărțirea romanului în titluri de capitole este întreruptă doar de prima și ultima unitate de text care descriu trecerea frontierei, și care nu au un titlu propriu. Astfel cele două secțiuni de text organizează narațiunea într-un cadru, cu trecerea frontierei însăși ca început și sfârșit al poveștii.

Narațiunea este spusă din punctul de vedere al lui Alin, un copil care, în prezentul pasajelor de încadrare, așteaptă împreună cu părinții săi la granița (între România și Iugoslavia) permisiunea de a pleca. De la momentul proeminent al trecerii frontierei începe desfășurarea evenimentelor care o precedă, care povestesc parțial călătoriile anterioare în străinătate, una în Italia și cealaltă în Statele Unite. Fiecare dintre cele două călătorii este posibilă în parte datorită bolii de creștere a copilului.<sup>12</sup> Și, așa cum scena de încadrare a trecerii frontierei este punctul de plecare pentru, printre altele, narațiunea celor două călătorii și apoi a întoarcerii, aceste călătorii sunt și ele un prilej de a povesti România anilor 1970, adică copilăria al lui Alin. Pe lângă aceasta, narațiunea călătoriei americane oferă și ocazia, așa cum subliniază studiul lui Ștefan Baghiu și Oviu Olariu, de a arăta dezavantajele emigrației economice.<sup>13</sup>

În timp ce aceste călătorii anterioare ar fi făcut posibilă includerea unor scene de trecere a frontierei, nu este cazul în aceste capitole, actul trecerii frontierei este din nou omis, ca și cum nu ar fi fost important. Capitolul În călătorie cu tata, care se concentrează asupra călătoriei lor în Italia și a șederii lor acolo, începe cu sosirea lor la Belgrad: „Trenul făcea întruna *tadam-tadam*. Eu aș fi putut să-l învâț și alte cuvinte în loc de *tadam-tadam*, însă nu aveam timp, oprirea la Belgrad era prea scurtă pentru așa ceva. Deci m-am hotărât să stau cu ochii pe geamantanele noastre, câtă vreme tata umbla să caute trenul pentru Italia.”<sup>14</sup> Reprezentarea trecerii frontierei a fost omisă în timpul călătoriei prin Iugoslavia spre Italia și nu a fost descrisă în mod explicit în timpul călătoriei spre SUA, unde zborul și evenimentele de la începutul anilor 1950 povestite de tată (parțial ca o distragere a atenției de la teama de zbor) au trecut în prim-plan. Cu toate acestea, semnificația sosirii și posibilitatea de a interpreta aeroportul american ca pe un punct de tranzit sunt evidențiate pe scurt de momentul ieșirii:

„Jos ne aștepta o sală umbrită și răcoroasă, pe care trebuia s-o străbatem. Dincolo de ea era foarte multă lumină. Sanowsky tocmai ieșea dincolo, era ca la cinema când unul se ridică în picioare și îi vezi umbra jucând

10. Cosmin Borza, Claudiu Turcuș. „Tragicomedia Occidentului: emigrația economică în romanele și filmele românești din anii '90”, *Transilvania* nr. 5 (2024): 90.

11. Rodica Ilie, „Exil și marginalitate. O posibilă regândire a exilului românesc”, *Transilvania*, nr. 11-12 (2017): 19.

12. „Tot ce făcea, boala mea făcea într-un fel ascuns. Mușchii își pierdeau puterea, trebuia să port pantofi grei și tari, iar noaptea îmi puneau, din când în când, o șină de metal. Boala mea avea un nume de om: Charcot-Marie [...] La Veneția exista numai o bănuială în privința bolii. Asta era altă bănuială, nu ca aceea când erai bănuț că ești disident. Atunci fețele deveneau serioase și ușile se închideau în spatele tău. Te întorceai acasă abia peste câțiva ani. Și la cealaltă bănuială, a bolii, fețele au devenit serioase. Dar apoi comandantul Miliției m-a mângâiat pe obraji, iar eu și tata am primit împreună un pașaport, ca să plecăm în Italia.” Cătălin Dorian Florescu, *Vremea minunilor* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2022): 46.

13. Ștefan Baghiu, Oviu Olariu, „Capitalist Heterotopia & Lost Social Utopia: Documenting Class, Work, and Migration in Postcommunist East-Central European Fiction”, *Central Europe* 22, no. 1 (2024): 8.

14. Florescu, *Vremea minunilor*, 43.



pe ecran. Atunci publicul fluieră și îl huiduie, însă aici umbra lui Sanowsky era tot.ee aveam. Când ușile s-au deschis, lăsându-1 să treacă, am auzit zgomotul străzii: claxoane americane și voci spaniole. Pe urmă ușa s-a închis în spatele lui și înăuntru s-a făcut din nou liniște. Sanowsky a pus geamantanul jos și ne-a căutat cu privirea. Tata m-a luat de mână și amândoi ne-am grăbit spre ieșire. Când ne-am aflat aproape de ele, ușile s-au despărțit și s-au tras în lături, ca și cum ar fi știut ce aveam noi de gând. Asta se cheamă tehnică și așa ceva se găsește din belșug în America.// Am pășit dincolo, în lumină.”<sup>15</sup>

Momentul ieșirii din zona de tranzit a aeroportului, datorită construcției textului și utilizării semnificațiilor, este actul de trecere a frontierei, deoarece nu zborul, nu aterizarea, ci ieșirea din aeroport constituie intrarea în America. Ușa nevăzută a fotocelulei simbolizează o graniță asemănătoare unei linii, pe care textul o creează prin accentuarea perechilor de contrarii și a tipului de mișcare prezentat: holul prin care trebuie să treci este rece și umbrit, în timp ce lumea de dincolo de ușă este luminoasă (și asociată cu un sentiment de căldură). În plus, textul creează o opoziție între aici și dincolo, care sunt separate de ușa care reprezintă trecerea. Ținând cont de toate acestea, putem vedea un fel de trecere a frontierei, dar este important să atragem atenția asupra funcționării ușii cu fotocelulă ca frontieră, care, prin automatismul său – „inventând” ideea de trecători, de trecători de frontieră –, elimină în cele din urmă frontiera însăși, așa cum este evidențiată și de simpla ieșire a omului care îi primește, Sanowsky, mai devreme. Privirea lui Sanowsky în căutarea lor este o manifestare a propriei sale practici de incomprehensiune, devenită de acum rutinieră, care nu consideră deloc ușa sălii drept prag sau graniță de intrare, și astfel scena indică și ea interpretabilitatea subiectivă a frontierei.

Scenele (parțial absente) ale liniei de frontieră și ale trecerii frontierei spre Italia, care nu sunt arătate, și spre America, care sunt construite în primul rând într-un mod extrem de subiectiv, indică accentul pe care îl pune actul de trecere a frontierei narat în cele două secțiuni ale structurii de încadrare. În cele două capitole fără titlu, care constituie cadrul romanului, trecerea frontierei este în esență pusă în scenă, iar creșterea continuă a tensiunii create aici subliniază în mod esențial semnificația și un fel de finalitate a trecerii frontierei. În capitolul de deschidere, doar două pagini fac loc anxietății, speranței și incertitudinii familiei (tată, mamă, fiu) care așteaptă la graniță. În debutul povestirii, tatăl a intrat deja într-una dintre cabinetele polițiștilor de frontieră, în timp ce mama și fiul așteaptă împreună în mașină întoarcerea tatălui. Narațiunea din punctul de vedere al copilului, cu o descriere precisă a timpului, accentuează tensiunea așteptării și indică incertitudinea rezultatului trecerii frontierei.

„Zece august, ora nouă dimineața.// Au trecut exact două minute și treizeci de secunde de când tata a deschis portiera și a ieșit. Acum exact un minut, a dispărut în căsuța aceea. Precis că n-au avut cum să-l tortureze într-un singur minut. într-un minut nu termină nici măcar de făcut pipi băieții noștri. Odată am cronometrat timpul: desfa șlițul la pantaloni, fa pipi, scutură cocoselul, încheie-te la șliț. S-a și dus un minut. N-ai când să iei pe cineva la bătaie.”<sup>16</sup>

În pasajul citat, există atât o descriere a timpului care a trecut, imaginația și memoria rătăcitoare ale copilului, care lucrează cu logica asociativă pentru a ușura tensiunea așteptării, cât și teama de posibila tortură a tatălui. În același timp, cele două pagini ale scenei coincid în ceea ce privește timpul narațiunii și timpul povestit, iar în această scurtă perioadă de așteptare se concentrează amintirile și reflecțiile care apar și, nu în ultimul rând, marcajul geografic și semnificația metaforică a trecerii frontierei:

„Am ajuns la capătul patriei noastre. Ca toate celelalte lucruri, are și ea un capăt. Poți să-i pui capăt mai devreme sau mai târziu. [...]// Aici, unde tocmai ne aflăm, se întâmplă câteodată minuni, iar alteori nu, și dacă totuși se întâmplă, adulții au un nume pentru tot ce urmează după ele — îi zic libertate. Nu mă dumiresc eu pe de-a-ntregul, însă trebuie să fie o chestie strașnică oricum. Așa ca mândria. Libertatea începe la doi pași de noi, îndată ce treci bariera, de la tăblia galbenă cu un scris pe care nu-1 pot citi: Iugoslavia.// E timpul să se petreacă minunea a cincea.// Tată, de ce întârzi?”<sup>17</sup>

Pe de o parte, desemnarea sfârșitului patriei marchează locul fizic al trecerii frontierei dintre România și Iugoslavia în Banat, iar pe de altă parte, identifică cealaltă parte a frontierei cu libertatea și plasează

15. Ibid., 121–122.

16. Ibid., 8.

17. Ibid.

trecerea în sine în categoria miracolului. Evidențierea acestei treceri de graniță și asocierea ei cu miracolul este întărită de esența structurii de încadrare, deoarece în acest punct se suspendă narațiunea trecerii frontierei și capitolele romanului, care poartă titlul, relatează procesul care a dus la acest act, decizia de a părăsi patria și evenimentele care au avut loc. Tocmai datorită acestei soluții structurale și poetice, călătoriile anterioare (în Italia, în Statele Unite) nu au nicio importanță din punctul de vedere al trecerii frontierei, întrucât nu sunt definitive și nu li se acordă nicio prioritate în narațiune și în prezentare. Indicarea timpului scurs este din nou un element recurent în scena de așteptare, mai întâi cele două minute și jumătate anterioare sunt extinse la câteva minute („Noi transpirăm, mama și cu mine, iar tata a plecat de câteva minute.”<sup>18</sup>), pentru ca apoi să devină din nou mai concretă după pregătirile pentru plecare și rememorarea unei experiențe de frontieră anterioare: „Acum ne-am împotmolit la graniță. Tata a dispărut de zece minute.”<sup>19</sup> Timpul precis marcat al așteptării tatălui (și nu întâmplător al miracolului) este întrerupt de scurte amintiri, scurtimea acestor fragmente de memorie marcând în parte timpul care a trecut și care este povestit, și în parte - ca mai înainte, în primul capitol - dând narațiunii un sens al timpului. În narațiunea descriptivă, care se bazează pe amintiri, întoarcerea tatălui aduce o schimbare, care indică faptul că polițistul de frontieră plătit în avans a fost arestat, astfel încât transferul peste graniță al obiectelor de valoare ascunse în podeaua dublă a rulotei devine foarte discutabil. Reapariția tatălui înseamnă nu numai că succesul plănuț al trecerii frontierei este pus sub semnul întrebării, dar și că textul descriptiv continuă de atunci încolo aproape exclusiv cu dialoguri între membrii familiei și, mai târziu, între aceștia și polițistul de frontieră care îi verifică. Datorită dialogurilor accentul se mută pe prezent, iar amintirile care apar în timp ce familia așteaptă sunt scoase din narațiune până când mașina și familia trec granița. Prezența polițiștilor de frontieră și percheziția mașinii lor îl determină pe tată să îi ceară fiului său, care suferă de o afecțiune musculo-scheletică, să coboare din mașină, ilustrând scopul călătoriei, importanța îngrijirii medicale în străinătate și, în același timp, faptul că se vor întoarce după teste. În timp ce boala a fost motivul principal al vizitei polițiștilor de frontieră, vacanța de o lună a fost scopul călătoriei în amintirile legate de despărțirea de cunoscuți, evocate mai devreme în ultimul capitol, care încadrează călătoria. Ambele apar în esență ca o poveste pentru a ascunde finalitatea emigrării și, prin urmare, a trecerii frontierei și, în timp ce prima este realizată fără rezerve de către membrii familiei, în cazul celei de-a doua, povestea care ascunde scopul real al călătoriei face imposibilă însăși despărțirea. Această imposibilitate este reflectată în dialogul dintre mamă și tată, care se apropie acum de trecerea frontierei:

„În casa scârilor ne-am întâlnit cu niște vecini, care ne-au urat concediu plăcut. Pe stradă, eu și Dorin ne-am dat mâna. El a spus:// — Prin urmare, ne vedem într-o lună.// — Clar. într-o lună. Cu bine.// În mașină, vocea mamei a tremurat:// — E groaznic să-ți iei rămas-bun în felul ăsta.// — Ce altceva putem face? Sau preferi să primească un telefon anonim cei din vamă, cum că vrem să fugim din țară? i-a răspuns tata.”<sup>20</sup>

Structura de încadrare a romanului lui Cătălin Dorian Florescu se concentrează pe scena de graniță a plecării definitive din țara natală, soluțiile poetice ale capitolelor de început și de sfârșit întărend tensiunea așteptării la granița Banatului. Aluziile temporale accentuează și ele acest lucru, în timp ce această scenă de trecere a frontierei, prin practica suspensivă a restului romanului, adică a întregului text cu excepția acestor capitole, accentuează și ea disconfortul și, nu în ultimul rând, incertitudinea așteptării trecerii graniței. În timp ce raporturile temporale ale capitolelor de încadrare sunt de așa natură încât timpul povestit și timpul narațiunii coincid spectaculos, corpul romanului, prins în cadru, este cel care suspendă concretețea experienței timpului și, astfel, timpul de așteptare, care este abia un sfert de oră, se prelungește la infinit. Tocmai încetarea acestei experiențe infinite justifică identificarea miracolului care dă și ea titlul romanului cu trecerea frontierei, întrucât textul se încheie cu sintagma „Wunderzeit”, care dă și ea titlul romanului. Deși granița și trecerea frontierei reprezentate în acest text nu reprezintă prima trecere a frontierei din viața familiei personajului principal, ea poate fi interpretată atât din punct de vedere al poveștii, cât și al structurii, ca fiind primul act de emigrare, ceea ce deschide o serie de interpretări posibile.

18. Ibid., 249.

19. Ibid., 252.

20. Ibid., 249.



### Trecerea frontierei (verzi) și minunea ei

În timp ce scena de trecere a frontierei din *Wunderzeit* se referă în esență la trecerea frontierei referențiale cu un pașaport turistic, *Die Unschärfe der Welt* al lui Iris Wolff reprezintă un alt mod de a trece frontiera. În capitolul de deschidere (*Zăpadă*), facem cunoștință cu cele două familii ale căror perspective se repetă de-a lungul romanului: Hannes, un pastor luteran într-un mic sat din regiunea Banat, soția sa Florentina și fiul lor Samuel sunt o familie, în timp ce Paul, Nika și cei trei copii ai lor (Oswald, Thea, Mirko) sunt cealaltă familie. Copiii acestor două familii, Samuel și Oswald, sunt personajele cheie în scena trecerii frontierei din capitolul *Macromolecular*. Capitolele, care acoperă un interval de timp semnificativ, sunt valabile și în această parte, cu o densificare narativă ce precedă scena trecerii frontierei, care este desfășurată și prezentată în detaliu. În ea aflăm povestea lui Oswald, sau mai exact a lui Oz, care încearcă să păcălească regimul opresiv și să părăsească țara prin diverse metode, dar nu reușește. Într-o scenă de viață militară ca o închisoare, care poate fi interpretată ca un preludiu și parțial ca o motivație pentru emigrare, Oz experimentează – în timpul unei nopți în turnul de veghe după moartea unui prizonier – pentru prima dată prezența unei creaturi fictive din basme, un dragon, care devine de fapt o metaforă pentru frică.

„Als Erstes war der Geruch dagewesen. Modrige Kühle, wie an einem Waldsee. Dann ein silbriges Geräusch, begleitet von Flimmern, das ihn blendete wie eine spiegelnde Fensterscheibe. Er verlor das Gleichgewicht, fiel hin, hielt sich an Vorsprüngen fest, dann am Boden selbst, als könnte ihn auch der Boden abschütteln wie ein lästiges Tier.// Ein Reptilienauge füllte die Schießscharte. Eine geschlitzte Pupille, die Farbe von Feuer. Vor der anderen Schießscharte lag ein grüner Schuppenpanzer. Eine Ahnung setzte sich aus diesen Ausschnitten zusammen, dann löste sich der Wachturm auf, als wäre er das Unwahrscheinliche, nicht das, was dahinter lag. Oz sah das ganze Bild, die Flügel, die Krallen, die gespaltene Zunge, hörte das Scharren des Schuppenpanzers am Holz. Alles war so überdeutlich da, dass er, trotz Angst und Schwindel, wusste, dies war kein Traum.“<sup>21</sup>[Primul lucru pe care l-am observat a fost mirosul. Răcoare de mușegai, ca un lac de pădure. Apoi, un sunet argintiu, însoțit de pâlpâiri, care îl orbea ca un geam reflectorizant. Și-a pierdut echilibrul, a căzut, s-a agățat de cornișe, apoi de solul însuși, ca și cum pământul însuși l-ar putea scutura ca pe un animal enervant. Un ochi de reptilă a umplut antreul. O pupilă tăiată, de culoarea focului. O armură de solzi verzi zăcea în fața celeilalte embresuri. Un sentiment de presimțire s-a compus din aceste decupaje, apoi turnul de veghe s-a dizolvat, ca și cum ar fi fost improbabil, nu ceea ce se afla dincolo. Oz a văzut întreaga imagine, aripile, ghearele, limba bifurcată, a auzit zgârieturile armurii de solzi pe lemn. Totul era acolo atât de clar încât știa, în ciuda fricii și a amețelii, că nu era un vis.]

În fragmentul de mai sus sentimentul fricii al personajului Oz apare pentru prima dată, și este reprezentat de către un dragon de basm, și această frică va apărea și în alte momente ale narațiunii, întrupchipată tot de acest dragon. Acest fenomen, care poate fi identificat și ca un simbol al traumei, apare în visele lui Oz și uneori în realitate, simbolizând nu doar frica, ci și puterea invincibilă și de neevitat. Cu toate acestea, tocmai dragonul este cel care, într-o scenă ulterioară, îi dă lui Samuel ideea despre cum să realizeze trecerea frontierei: „Der Drache fliegt durch die Luft«, wiederholte Samuel. Oz nickte. Und somit war es beschlossene Sache.“<sup>22</sup> [Dragonul zboară prin aer, repetă Samuel. Oz a dat din cap. Și așa s-a stabilit.] Neclaritatea frazelor<sup>23</sup> de început ale capitolului devine evidentă în acest moment, când Oz și Samuel se apucă să construiască un „avion” din piesele pe care le au la dispoziție, care le va permite să treacă ilegal granița și să părăsească țara.

Descrierea detaliată a construcției aparatului de zbor este urmată de scena concretă a trecerii frontierei, adică decolarea cu aparatul și zborul deasupra zonei de frontieră selectate. Dintre circumstanțele plecării, se remarcă, ca și în cazul romanului *Wunderzeit*, neputința de a-și lua rămas bun și, dacă în textul lui Florescu reflecția mamei indică caracterul problematic al acestei situații, aici dificultatea acesteia este menționată ca parte a narațiunii: „Schwerer war es zu gehen, ohne Abschied nehmen zu können.“<sup>24</sup> [Era mai greu să pleci fără să poți să-ți iei rămas bun.] În această măsură, putem observa că actul de a-și lua rămas bun este o parte recurent tematizată a pregătirii pentru plecare, adică

21. Iris Wolff, *Die Unschärfe der Welt* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2020), 126.

22. Ibid., 134.

23. „Es war nicht seine Idee gewesen. In der Luft. Mit einer Propellermaschine. Aber es funktionierte.” [Nu fusese ideea lui. În aer. Cu un avion cu elice. Dar a funcționat.] Ibidem, 121.

24. Ibid., 134.

a pregătirii pentru emigrare, eșecul de a face acest lucru – și, prin urmare, încălcarea normelor sociale ale ritualului – fiind conturat ca o experiență traumatizantă sau ca parte a acesteia. Deși, în opinia lui Oz, durerea de a-și lua rămas bun nu este diminuată dacă toată lumea știe despre ea, omiterea ei, în opinia mea, creează o experiență de incompletitudine tocmai prin absența ei. Mai mult, intenția nedezevăluită de a pleca se identifică, într-un fel, cu trădarea rudelor apropiate prin acte de tănuire, ascundere și, astfel, stima de sine a celui care pleacă în secret este afectată.

La fel cum capitolele de încadrare fără titlu din *Wunderzeit* creează tensiune în scena trecerii frontierei datorită faptului că trecerea întârzie, și astfel sunt nevoiți să-l aștepte pe tatăl. În aceste momente de așteptare se ivește chiar și posibilitatea unei trădări care ar duce la eșecul trecerii frontierei. O situație asemănătoare apare și în romanul lui Iris Wolff, în care trecerea frontierei este tot așa de tensionată, cauzată de apariția constantă și aproape precodificată a trădării. În descrierea detaliată a imaginației și a trecerii frontierei liniare, pe lângă temerile reale, imaginația dragonului, menționată mai devreme, este împletită în umbră, urmărind actul fizic al trecerii frontierei ca o prezență opresivă a puterii și, în același timp, făcând ca actul fizic al trecerii frontierei să fie el însuși fabulos.

„Sie hatten eine Gegend gewählt, die kaum besiedelt war, in einiger Entfernung von bewachten Grenzübergängen. Und doch erwartete Oz in jedem Moment das Geräusch von Maschinengewehren, das Bersten des Flugzeugs, ihr Fallen. Sollte das hier nicht gelingen, gäbe es keine Alternative. Er wandte sich zurück. Am Horizont die Vorahnung des Morgens. Ein lautes, klingendes Blau. Vielleicht dachte er das, weil sich alles nur noch in Geräuschen abspielte. Weil es neben dem Dröhnen des Propellers nichts anderes mehr gab. Die Dämmerung wurde lauter. Seine Hoffnung wurde lauter. Und als ihm bewusst wurde, wie lange sie schon unbehelligt dahinfliegen, dass da unten ungarische Felder waren, ungarische Straßen, bemerkte er, dass der Drache, der sie die ganze Zeit begleitet hatte, Mühe hatte mitzuhaltten. Er fiel zurück. Erst nur ein Stück, dann so weit, dass Oz ihn kaum noch sehen konnte.”<sup>25</sup> [Au ales o zonă slab populată, la o anumită distanță de punctele de trecere a frontierei păzite. Și totuși, în orice moment, Oz se aștepta la sunetul mitralierelor, la explozia avionului, la căderea lor. Dacă nu reușeau aici, nu ar fi avut altă alternativă. S-a întors cu spatele. La orizont, premoniția dimineții. Un albastru puternic, răsunător. Poate că așa credea el, pentru că totul se întâmpla numai în sunet. Pentru că nu mai era nimic altceva în afară de vuietul elicei. Crepusculul se făcea tot mai puternic. Speranța lui creștea mai tare. Și când și-a dat seama de cât timp zburaseră nestingheriți, că acolo jos erau câmpuri ungurești, drumuri ungurești, a observat că dragonul care îi însoțise tot timpul se străduia să țină pasul. A căzut înapoi. Doar puțin la început, apoi atât de mult încât Oz abia dacă îl putea vedea.]

Nu este o coincidență faptul că scena trecerii frontierei – în citatele de mai sus – este definită de elemente de creație sonoră acustică, deoarece efectele sonore produse de mașină sunt cele care ar fi putut crea posibilitatea de a fi prins și eșecul trecerii. Atmosfera acustică și tensionată a trecerii este întărită de acumularea de cuvinte și expresii care denotă diferite sunete (*Geräusche*, *Bersten*, *klingelnd*) și formațiuni sonore (*scheppern*, *Dröhnen*), de pocnetul recurent al anumitor consoane (de exemplu, *g*) pe tot parcursul textului, în timp ce dragonul, care evocă prezența invizibilă a puterii, în contrast cu pocnetul mașinii, urmărește în tăcere experimentul. Succesul traversării (aproape imperceptibil pentru ei) este marcat de apariția peisajului acum maghiar și de frică, adică de rămânerea în urmă („*Der Drache blieb fort.*”<sup>26</sup>), după care se întrerupe și corpul textului: după inserarea unei pauze de linie, apare un spațiu gol, astfel că formația tipografică a textului marchează și ea trecerea frontierei. Semnificația acestui fapt este demonstrată și de încetarea descrierilor detaliate, după care etapele ulterioare ale emigrării sunt povestite în mod asemănător unei liste, cu titlu și știre, precedând pasajele care relatează integrarea ulterioară în Germania:

„Was dann folgte, ließ sich an zwei Händen abzählen. Abschied von der Propellermaschine.// Warten auf die Papiere in Österreich.// Ihre Fluchtgeschichte in der Zeitung.// Einbruch des Winters.// Weiterreise nach Deutschland.// Durchgangsstelle für Aussiedler in Nürnberg.// Sprachtest in der Landesaufnahmestelle für Flüchtlinge und Aussiedler in Rastatt, mit dem Ergebnis: Sprechen fließend Deutsch, Sprachtest erübrigt.// Übergangswohnheim.// Frühling.” [Ceea ce a urmat putea fi numărat pe două mâini. Adio avion cu elice.// Așteptarea actelor în Austria.// Povestea evadării ei în ziar.// Începutul iernii.// Plecarea spre Germania.//

25. Ibid., 137.

26. Ibid.





Centrul de tranzit pentru repatriați din Nürnberg.// Test de limbă la centrul de primire de stat pentru refugiați și repatriați din Rastatt, cu rezultatul: vorbește fluent germana, testul de limbă nu este necesar.// Casă de tranziție.// Primăvara.]

În romanul lui Florescu, textul se încheie imediat după trecerea frontierei, câștigarea libertății fiind menționată de mai multe ori, în timp ce în textul lui Wolff, ținând cont de procedeele de construcție a textului menționate anterior, putem concluziona că actul provoacă o ruptură textuală și, în același timp, o schimbare stilistică, poetică, dar putem spune și că procesul și survenirea actului devin marcate de formularea poetică. În fragmentul analizat din *Die Unschärfe der Welt*, descrierea trecerii frontierei este situată spre mijlocul capitolului respectiv, iar ruptura marcată tipografic și poetic împarte capitolul în două părți, astfel că frontiera și practica trecerii frontierei nu sunt doar reprezentate tematic, ci și înscrise în construcția textului. În această măsură, se poate afirma că trecerea frontierei, care poate fi legată de emigrație, adică de plecarea definitivă de acasă, apare în aceste cazuri ca un fel de ruptură a cărei reprezentare la nivelul textului nu poate fi ignorată.

### **Legăturile dintre trecerea frontierei și emigrație**

Temporalitatea referențială a emigrației determină în mod fundamental scenele de frontieră și de trecere a frontierei în romanele care descriu regiunile est-europene. Atât în *Wunderzeit* de Florescu, cât și în *Die Unschärfe der Welt* de Wolff, imaginile de frontieră și experiențele de trecere a frontierei sunt prezentate ca experiențe, care anticipează Revoluția din 1989 și schimbarea de regim din România, iar în aceste cazuri frontiera este prezentată ca un obstacol care trebuie depășit, iar trecerea frontierei ca un act de depășire. Cu toate acestea, o lectură comparativă a celor două romane relevă, de asemenea, că ambele texte în proză sunt modelate tipografic și poetic de reprezentarea frontierei și a actului de trecere a acesteia. Trăsătura comună este aceea că soluțiile poetice și structurale sunt parțial menite să arate tensiunea trecerii frontierei, și totuși, în ambele romane, în moduri diferite, dar și la suprafața textului, o ruptură perceptibilă marchează apariția trecerii frontierei. Pe lângă aceste similitudini în ceea ce privește forma poetică, există și un sentiment de mirare sau de miracol în ambele romane. Ambele treceri de frontieră, adică apariția și permiterea actului, sunt identificate cu un fel de miracol: în romanul lui Florescu, expresia din titlu, „*Wunderzeit*” [timpul miracolului], este cea care devine un marker al succesului trecerii frontierei, în timp ce în romanul lui Wolff, trecerea frontierei cu mașina zburătoare construită acasă este considerată miraculoasă, iar calitatea sa de basm este completată și amplificată de prezența și dispariția dragonului, care poate fi interpretată și ca o metaforă a puterii. Identificarea cu miraculosul, punerea în prim-plan a basmului nu sunt doar o parte și un element tematic al reprezentărilor frontierei și trecerii frontierei, ci sunt esențiale din punct de vedere al funcției lor, deoarece tocmai natura lor face ca actul trecerii frontierei să fie evidențiat și subliniat. În plus, se poate observa că apariția sau producerea „miracolului” aduce și o schimbare substanțială în text: romanul lui Florescu se încheie după acest moment, iar capitolul lui Wolff aduce o schimbare stilistică vizibilă. Prin urmare, se poate afirma că primul act al emigrării, care sugerează finalitatea deciziei, este trecerea frontierei, care reprezintă un punct de plecare bine definit spațial, dar și temporal, din patria natală, de acasă.

Aceste două întruchipări ale frontierei și ale trecerii frontierei în roman relevă o caracteristică esențială a reprezentărilor est-europene ale emigrației, care poartă experiența schimbătoare a categoriilor de separare, finalitate și tranzitivitate. Reprezentările frontierei și ale trecerii ei evidențiază, de asemenea, natura sau chiar schimbarea lumii referențiale reprezentate. De asemenea, ele subliniază faptul că, în discursul studiilor despre emigrație, textele despre emigrație reprezintă un spațiu posibil de prelucrare a trecutului – așa cum a observat și Sabina Becker în legătură cu cercetările despre exil<sup>27</sup> – și că aceste procese sunt fundamental transculturale în multe privințe, deoarece, în acest caz, întruchipările miraculoase ale frontierei și trecerii frontierei în Banat pot fi văzute ca un fenomen de transfer.

27. „Exil, Exilerfahrung und Exilliteratur sind aber wohl zu jedem Zeitpunkt eingebunden in die Phänomene und Prozesse der Vergangenheitsbewältigung, der Verarbeitung oder Verdrängung des Verlusts von Heimat. Die im Exil, aber vor allem die im Zuge der Akkulturation entstandene Literatur ist Teil einer Erinnerungskultur, eines kollektiven und kulturellen Gedächtnisses, sei es im Hinblick auf die frühere Heimat, sei es hinsichtlich der Integration in eine fremde Gesellschaft.” Sabina Becker, „*Transnational, interkulturell und inter-disziplinär: Das Akkulturationsparadigma der Exilforschung*”, în *Exil und Literatur. Neue Perspektiven*, edited by Doerte Bischoff, Susanne Komfort-Hein (Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 59.

## Bibliography

- Baghiu, Stefan and Ovio Olaru. "Capitalist Heterotopia & Lost Social Utopia: Documenting Class, Work, and Migration in Postcommunist East-Central European Fiction," *Central Europe* 22, no. 1 (2024): 2–17.
- Bauer, Matthias, Nies, Martin, and Theele, Ivo. "Grenz-Übergänge: Zur ästhetischen Darstellung von Flucht und Exil" [Border crossings: On the aesthetic representation of flight and exile]. In *Grenz-Übergänge. Zur ästhetischen Darstellung von Flucht und Exil in Literatur und Film* [Border crossings. On the aesthetic representation of flight and exile in literature and film], edited by Matthias Bauer, Martin Nies, Ivo Theele, 7–16. Bielefeld: transcript, 2019.
- Becker, Sabina. "Transnational, interkulturell und inter-disziplinär: Das Akkulturationsparadigma der Exilforschung" [Transnational, intercultural and interdisciplinary: The acculturation paradigm of exile research]. In *Exil und Literatur. Neue Perspektiven*, edited by Doerte Bischoff, Susanne Komfort-Hein, 49–70. Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2013.
- Borza, Cosmin and Claudiu Turcuș. "Tragicomedia Occidentului: emigrația economică în romanele și filmele românești din anii '90" [The Tragicomedy of the Occident: Depictions of Economic Migration in the Romanian Novel and Film of the 1990s]. *Transilvania*, no. 5 (2024): 87–96.
- Florescu, Cătălin Dorian. *Vremea minunilor* [Miracle time]. Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2022. Trad. de Adriana Rotaru.
- Florescu, Cătălin Dorian. *Wunderzeit* [Miracle time]. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001.
- Ilie, Rodica. "Exil și marginalitate. O posibilă regândire a exilului românesc" [Exile and Marginality: A Possible Re-Thinking of Romanian Exiles]. *Transilvania*, no. 11-12 (2017): 18–21.
- Macrea-Toma, Ioana. "Excepția sincerității: romanul migrației academice" [The honesty exception: the novel of academic migration]. *Observatorul cultural*, no. 966 (2019). <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/exceptia-sinceritatii-romanul-migratiei-academice/>
- Pabis, Eszter. "Határátlépések. Magyar származású kortárs írók német nyelvű műveiről a transznacionális emlékezet-kutatás kontextusában" [Boundary crossings. On the German-language works of contemporary writers of Hungarian origin in the context of transnational memory research]. *Werkstatt* no. 11 (2016): 184–197.
- Stan, Adriana. "On Your Own in a One-and-Unequal World: Forms and Worldviews in Contemporary Romanian Narratives of Emigration." *Transilvania*, no. 4. (2024): 1–7.
- Thomka, Beáta. *Regénytapasztalat. Korélmény, hovatartozás, nyelvváltás* [A novel experience. Age experience, belonging, code-switching]. Budapest: Kijárat, 2018.
- Wolff, Iris. *Die Unschärfe der Welt* [The blurring of the world]. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2020.



# National Minorities in the Contemporary Romanian Cinema: From Cheap Exotism to Self-Representation

Daniel IFTENE

Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj Napoca, Department of Cinema and Media  
Corresponding author emails: daniel.iftene@ubbcluj.ro

---

## National Minorities in the Contemporary Romanian Cinema: From Cheap Exotism to Self-Representation

**Abstract:** This study aims to map the representation of national minorities in Romanian fiction films from 1990 to 2021 and to highlight the main mechanisms employed by local filmmakers to portray the local multicultural landscape. Starting with the films of the transition period and the approaches of directors like Lucian Pintilie and Mircea Daneliuc in reflecting on the minority-majority relationship, the study offers a comparison with three fiction films where authors from ethnic minorities themselves take control of narratives about their own communities. By doing so, these filmmakers—Radu Gabrea, Toma Enache and Alina Şerban—shape the discourse generated about their communities. Thus, the study seeks to shed light on both the transition toward self-representation of ethnic minorities in contemporary fiction films and the differences between these moments of self-representation and former cinematic depictions of local ethnic minorities.

**Keywords:** minority, ethnicity, transition, Lucian Pintilie, Mircea Daneliuc, Radu Gabrea, Alina Şerban, self-representation

**Citation suggestion:** Iftene, Daniel. "National Minorities in the Contemporary Romanian Cinema: From Cheap Exotism to Self-Representation." *Transilvania*, no. 9 (2024): 43-53.  
<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2024.09.05>.



The study at hand endeavors to uncover the dynamics behind the presence and representation of ethnic minorities in contemporary Romanian cinema, specifically post-1990, tracing the significant journey from the harmful discourse of communist-era films towards the emerging trends of self-representation in recent local cinema. The transition process from the exoticized gaze on national minorities in contemporary cinema is extremely complex, strongly influenced by deeply rooted cultural stereotypes in the Romanian space, the access of members from various ethnic communities to cultural production means and gaining control over their self-representation, and, finally, by the dominant authorial and cultural policies in recent years. To uncover some of the tectonic shifts that have brought about changes in recent Romanian cinema, this study is limited to fictional films released in Romania between 1990 and 2021, that are Romanian productions and address, either as a primary or secondary theme, the relationship between minority and majority in contemporary Romania, and that develop a discourse on local multiculturalism. Naturally, an extraordinary area for further investigation would involve exploring documentary or experimental films that tackle the same themes and their potential influence on the refined themes and discourses found in fictional films.

In the past 10 years, the shift from external to internal representation of minority communities has become increasingly prominent, often influenced by Romanian directors' interest in reforming outdated methods of exploiting ethnic differences on screen. One such example can be found in the connection between the short films *Written/Unwritten* (dir. Adrian Silişteanu, 2016) and *Letter of Forgiveness*

(dir. Alina Șerban, 2020). Both films prominently feature Roma protagonists and involve the actress and director Alina Șerban. Silișteanu's film, which garnered numerous international awards, isolates a credible situation affecting a Roma family compelled to confront the bureaucratic dimensions of the world around them, particularly when one of their nieces becomes a teenage mother and has to be discharged from the hospital. The director swiftly addresses highly debated public issues about the Roma community at the time of production (the lack of education, sexism, patriarchalism, the importance of tradition, administrative unpreparedness, etc.). Importantly, he manages to avoid reinforcing stereotypical images and even undermines them through the extensive use of the Romani language and by casting actors whose ethnic identity overlaps with that of the characters they portray, thereby avoiding the questionable acting stereotypes prevalent in the local stage and film. After 2016, Alina Șerban's trajectory increasingly focuses on cultural programs aimed at highlighting Roma culture in Romania, culminating in her recognition in 2024 as 'the first Roma director in Romanian theater'<sup>1</sup>, after her 2020 film *Letter of Forgiveness* was presented by her director as 'the first film about Roma slavery from a Roma perspective.' This time, the most readily apparent dialogue was with the most renowned film on Roma slavery in the Romanian Principalities, *Aferim!* (2015) directed by Radu Jude, which is still the most well-known Romanian feature on this subject<sup>2</sup> due to its revisionist perspective on local history and attempt to counter the mythmaking machine of pre-1989 historical film.<sup>3</sup> After portraying the role of a mother who, due to family pressure, abandons her children in *Written/Unwritten*, Șerban is cast in Marta Bergman's Belgian film, *Alone at My Wedding*, and she receives numerous awards for her portrayal of a young Roma woman married online to a Belgian man, and thus exploring the cultural differences between the worlds they come from. Shortly thereafter, the actress accepts the role of a single mother immigrating from Romania to Germany, who turns to boxing to care for her children in *Gypsy Queen* (dir. Hüsseyin Tabak, 2019). Very shortly after, her directorial debut, *Letter of Forgiveness* confronts head-on the issue of Roma slavery by looking at a mother's sacrifice for her son while serving a boyar family in Moldova. The fore-mentioned article in Scena9 states triumphantly: 'Everything Alina has ever done, she has done on her own,' trying to establish a landmark for the visibility of Roma artists in the national landscape.

In essence, this study critically examines the evolving portrayal and societal engagement with ethnic minorities in Romanian cinema, highlighting a feeble but significant shift towards more authentic and inclusive representations.

### Looking for the Other

One of the starting questions of this research has dealt with the visibility or invisibility of different national minorities in the analyzed feature films as compared to place particular communities hold in the demographic structure. Based on the analysis of Romanian fiction films released after 1990, it becomes evident that there are clear distinctions between the demographic presence of ethnic communities in recent years and the frequency with which stories involving characters from these communities appear in local cinema. According to official census, the largest ethnic minority in Romania is that of the Hungarians, followed by Roma, Ukrainians, and Germans. Jews, whose presence in Romanian film is greater than that of other communities, are positioned, in recent census, below Lipovan Russians, Turks, Tatars, Serbs, Slovaks, Bulgarians, Croats, and Greeks. Therefore, as stated before, to claim that there is a direct proportionality between the size of an ethnic group and its representation in local cinema is completely invalid, as there are communities that rarely appear in fiction films, while others are completely absent (such as Lipovan Russians, Ukrainians, Turks, Tatars, Armenians, Chinese, etc.). The tension between a mostly represented community and the concealment of other, results in 'significant resonances and secondary effects that shape affective intensities in

1. Ioana Pelehtăi, "Alina Șerban: Vreau o revoluție culturală!," *Scena9*, March 13, 2024. <https://www.scena9.ro/article/alina-serban-actrita-roma-teatru-film>.

2. *Aferim!* received more than 20 awards in international film festivals, including Berlin International Film Festival's Silver Bear for best director. The film gathered a record number of viewers during its premiere week in Romania, surpassing any Romanian film released until then.

3. Andrei Gorzo, Veronica Lazăr, *Beyond the New Romanian Cinema: Romanian Culture, History and the Films of Radu Jude* (Sibiu: Editura ULBS, 2023).



relation to ethnicity and race.<sup>4</sup> And this comes from counting a much stronger presence of Roma (especially in contemporary-themed films) compared to other ethnic communities. The other working hypothesis considered was related to the geographical dispersion of ethnic communities in Romania, that could have provided the explanation for the much more frequent presence of Roma, as a defining part of the contemporary local sphere, as well as that of Hungarians or Germans in conjunction with the intra-Carpathian space. In fact, it is very interesting that apart from Roma, local film directors and screenwriters have primarily focused attention on the Jew and German communities, both seen as dispersed populations<sup>5</sup> and on the Hungarians, regarded as a localized ethnic group.

All these observations must also be considered within the context of Romanian auteur cinema post-1990, a trend that has been and will remain defining for a long time. This is because it is here that the most relevant mechanisms in the game of representation and self-representation come into play. The director or the director-screenwriter seem to be vital in the dynamics of reflecting the multiethnic landscape of contemporary Romania, as their own identities (as it happened for Alina Șerban, Toma Enache or, more famously, Radu Gabrea), or their own points of intersection with various ethnic communities become crucial to the decision-making process in giving voice to different minority groups.

Another interesting phenomenon that comes to attention deals with giving voice to the Jewish characters and stories in local cinema, as nor the numbers or the space distribution of this national minority function as an argument. Due to the small number of Jews in Romania (merely over 2.000 persons in the latest census) their absence from film fictions that deal with the present is quite explainable. Nevertheless, this absence is addressed through the process of remembrance and of destroying the myth of the Romanians' ethnic tolerance. And this is a point in some of Radu Gabrea's or Radu Jude's revisionist work, that the Jewish community has been reduced to the memory of its own existence due to the extreme and under-acknowledged antisemitism which have marked Romania in recent centuries. Very recently, Andrei Cohn presents a new exploration of 19th and 20th-century Romanian antisemitism in *Holy Week* (2024). This adaptation of Ion Luca Caragiale's novella *O făclie de Paște* [*An Easter Torch*] (1889) aims to dismantle the illusion of ethnic tolerance and harmonious coexistence.

In the complex equation regarding the likelihood of certain ethnic minorities receiving visibility from Romanian filmmakers, the general attitude of the majority group towards specific communities, or a so-called "hierarchy of xenophobia,"<sup>6</sup> undoubtedly plays a significant role. This hierarchy operates bidirectionally concerning the most persecuted local ethnic communities. Consequently, their image is more likely to be subjected to cultural and artistic production mechanisms, reaching a wider audience. The ambivalence of this endeavor lies in the potential for visibility to both provide a platform for the perpetuation and cementing of stereotypes and provoke their deconstruction and interrogation. In either of these positions, like any other type of cinema, Romanian cinema actively positions itself as "that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects,"<sup>7</sup> considering the fluid nature of cultural identity. The issue at hand is what type of subjects contemporary Romanian cinema proposes in relation to the nowadays cultural and ethnic mosaic, and the ways in which it distances itself from past practices and embraces highly contemporary perspectives.

### Mapping the transition

The analysis of ethnic identity representation in Romanian cinema today must consider the lingering effects of past ideological practices and the ongoing efforts to redefine and broaden the scope of national identity through film. This examination reveals the dynamic interplay between cultural production and political influence, highlighting the evolving nature of identity construction in cinema. The representation of ethnic identity in contemporary Romanian cinema is deeply intertwined with the public and cultural policies prior to 1990, during which the national-communist ideology was propagated through film. This period saw the creation of a homogeneous and nearly monolithic depiction of the

---

4. Ipek A. Celik, *Permanent Crisis: Ethnicity in Contemporary Cinema and Media* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 17–18.

5. Panikos Panayi, *Outsiders: A History of European Minorities* (New York: Bloomsbury, Hambledon Continuum, 1998), 3–5.

6. Felix B. Chang, Sunnie T. Rucker-Chang, eds., *Chinese Migrants in Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), 210.

7. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," *Framework. The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36 (1989): 81.

ethnic composition of the Romanian population. Grand national epics and a plethora of historical and adventure films aimed to promote and reinforce a set of identity markers favored by the political regime, as they effectively established a direct and unyielding connection between grand historical figures and the Romanian identity. In these narratives, ethnic minorities were consistently excluded or, more detrimentally, symbolically assimilated into ethnic groups with whom the protagonists were in conflict. The portrayal of Romania as a multicultural space was seldom employed, and when it was, it served primarily as a pretext to highlight and support the fundamental qualities attributed to the Romanian ethnicity: tolerance, hospitality, and pacifism.

This ideological framework was instrumental in shaping public perception and contributed to the creation of a national identity narrative that marginalized ethnic minorities. The historical films of this era, such as *Tudor* (dir. Lucian Bratu, 1963), *Michael the Brave* (dir. Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1971) or *Stephen the Great—Vaslui 1475* (dir. Mircea Drăgan, 1975), provided a platform for the state's ideological agenda, presenting an idealized vision of a unified national identity that overshadowed the diverse ethnic realities of the country. Consequently, the cinematic exclusion or negative portrayal of minorities reinforced societal biases and perpetuated a narrow understanding of what it meant to be Romanian. The attitude towards national minorities depicted in the films of this period reflects the broader Romanian public policies post-1945. The trajectory of the Hungarian ethnic group during this time is particularly illustrative: from the freedoms enjoyed until the mid-1950s and the creation of the Hungarian Autonomous Region, to the closure of Hungarian-language schools and the division of the region into three distinct counties during the Ceaușescu regime, as part of broader assimilation measures.

As Bogdan Jitea notes in his study on historical films from the communist era, Romanian filmmakers employ a series of markers associated with distinct ethnic groups. Examples from films like *Michael the Brave* and *Frații Jderi* (dir. Mircea Drăgan, 1974) illustrate the aggressive potential attributed to the Other, while also depicting strategies for his acceptance within the Romanian community. These strategies often involve characters renouncing their own community and denouncing its practices.<sup>8</sup>

The transition after 1990 has significantly influenced the policies of ethnic minority representation in Romanian cinema, navigating between retaliatory and demystifying attitudes towards the cultural constructs of the communist past, and the European direction questioned by many directors who either continue their careers or make their debut during this period. Some of the films directed by key figures of the transitional period such as Lucian Pintilie and Mircea Daneliuc (especially *An Unforgettable Summer* and *The Snails' Senator*) directly problematize the coexistence of multiple ethnic groups within the same space and articulate the image of a failed community project at various stages of its construction. The high number of interethnic conflicts that emerged right after the beginning of 1990, starting with the Romanian-Hungarian clashes in Târgu Mureș, that were followed by attacks against Roma in Hădăreni in 1993, become direct or implicit reference points in the endeavors of these two directors.<sup>9</sup> This attempt to rewrite, through film, the history of inter-ethnic relations in the Romanian space, which includes both dismantling the false impression of cultural homogeneity and questioning the stereotypical portrayal promoted by nationalist propaganda in defining Romanian identity, has been also further pursued recently by Radu Jude in his films addressing Romanian antisemitism (*I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians*, *The Dead Nation*, *Scarred Hearts*), as well as the issue of Roma slavery and implicit local racism (*Aferim!*).

A distinct but not very numerous category is that of directors and screenwriters who make their endeavor one of self-representation, building part of their career around the mission of bringing their own ethnic community to the forefront. This serves as a corrective gesture aimed at reducing the imbalance created between majority and minority through ethnic representation policies. The efforts of filmmakers such as Radu Mihaileanu, Radu Gabrea, Alina Șerban, and Toma Enache not only hold significance in the artistic world but also constitute a political act aimed at restoring a "parity of esteem" that in the long term can contribute to "diminishing intergroup tensions" and creating "more inclusive identities and narratives."<sup>10</sup> In the following pages, we will discuss external perspectives on

8. Bogdan Jitea, *Cinema în RSR. Conformism și disidență în industria ceaușistă de filme* (Iași: Polirom, 2021), 241–242.

9. For a more detailed view on Romanian ethnic conflicts in the 1990's, see Ben Fawkes, *Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict in the Post-communist World* (London & New York: Palgrave, 2002).

10. Mark Howard Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 327.



national minorities, focusing on three components that emerge as relevant in the analyzed cinematic fictions—space, body, and voice—since it is here that we can observe how these points reiterate, question, or dismantle commonplaces in Romanian artistic representations.

### **The Other's Eccentricity**

The initial step in this analysis involves examining the physical spaces occupied by characters described as belonging to various ethnic minorities, as well as their relationship with the places they get in contact with. A notable pattern in the geographies of fictional worlds within Romanian cinema is the frequent positioning of these characters on the periphery, at a significant distance from what is defined or understood as the center. For instance, in the seminal project *An Unforgettable Summer* (1994), director Lucian Pintilie, drawing from the second volume of Petru Dumitriu's novel, *Family Chronicle*, reconstructs a borderland near Bulgaria, far from Bucharest, the Romanian capital after the First World War and the end of the unification process. This is a place where authority manifests in the absence of rules, where everything is possible, permissible, and justified by immediate interests. The space is barren and empty, amplifying the sense of vulnerability felt by the main character, Marie-Thérèse Von Debretsy. The only object she brings from the salons she previously frequented is a Venetian mirror, which stands in stark contrast to the mudbrick dwellings, much like Captain Petre Dumitriu's family contrasts with the Dobrogea's landscape.

Unlike the newcomers, the residents along the Danube are depicted as a natural extension of the frontier space, always caught between worlds and never truly integrated into any of the major communities with which they interact. Thus, by these spatial dynamics, Pintilie highlights broader themes of marginalization and the ambiguous status of ethnic minorities. By situating these characters on the periphery, the filmmaker not only underscores their physical and social isolation but also critiques the power structures that maintain these divisions that lead to the precarious position of ethnic minorities and emphasize their struggles for visibility and acceptance within the dominant cultural narrative. In addition to being caught between Romanians who mistake them for komitadjis threatening the borders of the new Romania and the Bulgarian resistance movement, Bulgarian and Turkish peasants fall victim to violence from all sides. Their status as a minority within the new ethnic architecture of interwar Romania, on a fluid border, resonates only with that of the film's protagonist, who is also isolated due to her ethnic identity. Marie tries to offer them respect and humanity in a context where anyone different is treated as an enemy, but she fails in the face of Romanian military authority. Pintilie's perspective on this failure is not necessarily forgiving, as his main character is attacked by the wives of the men she helped ease towards the tragic fate she was aware of. Thus, in the final scene, it is not the aggressor who is condemned, but rather the one who did not heroically resist ethnic aggression. The eccentricity of minority characters or communities is an image Pintilie revisits in his films after 1990, where protagonists leaving the urban area often encounter Roma people, thus marking their exit from the bourgeois world they typically inhabit and entry into the real world. For Pintilie, however, this portrayal is not tied to the transition period, but rather a depiction of reality that he also employed in his communist-era films, such as *Sunday at Six* (1966) or *Carnival Scenes* (1981).

Mircea Daneliuc employs a similar spatial logic in constructing the multicultural village, which shares characteristics with Hădăreni, in *The Snails' Senator* (1995). Senator Vârtosu, himself originating "from the center," occupies the former villa of Nicolae Ceaușescu, now state property allocated to members of post-communist institutions. For Daneliuc, the villa serves as the outpost of the new political authority, given its considerable distance from the village where interethnic conflicts are set to occur, and its surrounding fences, that make it inaccessible to those not welcomed into the senator's select circle. In the village and on the hills where the community collects snails for Vârtosu and the French journalists he aims to impress, Daneliuc delineates distinct spaces for Roma, Romanians, and Hungarians, with the latter two groups allied against the former. Moreover, he creates a direct relationship between the house and barn where the Roma are attacked and the one where the grieving mother mourns her son, who was killed during the altercation with the Roma. By paralleling these two places, which ultimately merge into a single unified space through images captured through windows and doors during the extremely violent attack, the director effectively portrays interethnic relations steeped in racism, hatred, and the erosion of norms and authority. This spatial analysis highlights how Daneliuc's film critically engages with themes of marginalization and interethnic conflict, using the physical distance and separation of spaces to underscore social and racial divides. The villa's inaccessibility symbolizes the exclusionary practices of the new political elite, while the distinct and segregated village spaces

reflect broader societal fractures.

The discourse on the relationship between the center and the periphery in transitional films that address the issue of multiculturalism can also be viewed as a response to the discourse on the primitivism of Eastern Europe, tested by the mechanisms of Europeanization. This phenomenon has often been discussed as a strategy employed by filmmakers from the Balkans and Eastern Europe to capture Western audiences' attention by presenting them with the comfortable image, they hold about this part of Europe,<sup>11</sup> and by highlighting "poverty and profound social problems" as part of the self-colonizing attempt.<sup>12</sup> Even when not situated in a geographically defined periphery, characters associated with ethnic minorities are frequently placed in economically or socially marginalized spaces. Lucian Pintilie illustrates this in a brief scene from *Terminus Paradis* (1998), where the protagonists purchase their engagement rings from a Roma vendor at an amusement park. Similarly, actor-director Horațiu Mălăele creates an almost fantastical setting in Bucharest for the fortune teller's caravan, which foreshadows the death of the protagonist and his friends in *Funeralii fericite* (2013). The setting includes an open-air fire, a secluded area arranged around a caravan, where men play cards and guitars, and women tell fortunes. Mălăele creates a space that exists outside the world, which ceases to exist the following day, depicting a form of contemporary nomadism that is almost entirely absent from Romanian fictional cinema. All the above examples rightly prove Dina Iordanova's observation that "exploring the Roma serves as a means of self-representation,"<sup>13</sup> a metaphor for—in this case—Romania's marginality in the European context it faces post-1989.

### The Other's Body and Voice

If many films from before the Romanian New Wave adhered to stereotypical and exoticized portrayals of ethnic minority communities, the discourse has significantly evolved in recent years. This shift is attributed to the increasing presence of these communities in the local cultural and political arenas, as well as the popularization of corrective measures or attitudes concerning the representational strategies employed by Romanian directors. The most readily identifiable are the sexualized perspectives on the bodies of Roma men and women, frequently depicted as involved in seductive games. This tendency not only follows the direction of Eastern European and Balkan cinema but also aligns with Western European trends, significantly contributing to the bohemian image associated with the Roma community. As Ian Hancock notes, the exoticization of non-white women's bodies was a sustained cultural practice within colonial empires, particularly through the production and public or private distribution of nudes (whether in paintings, photographs, or, later, films).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, as Radu Jude hints in *Aferim!*, this practice, given the strongly patriarchal structure of the societies that created it, underscores the differential (including legal) treatment of non-punishable relationships between a white man and a non-white woman versus the criminalized ones between a non-white man and a white woman.

Like in many other European cultures, Romanian artist frequently eroticize the bodies of ethnically or racially different individuals. For example, in the local painting of the 19th and early 20th centuries, there are numerous instances where portraits of Roma women are depicted in ways that amplify the sensuality of the models. Notable examples include *Țiganca din Ghergani* and *Ursăreasa din Bolduri* by Nicolae Grigorescu, as well as *Țigăncușa cu basma roșie* by Octav Băncilă. Grigorescu combines the inviting attitude of the young Roma woman through her almost frontal body position and gaze that meets that of the viewer, with an open shirt that accentuates her breasts—an approach he does not use when portraying Romanian women, regardless of their social status or professional background. In contrast to Grigorescu, the artistic career and political activity of Băncilă do not confirm a tendency to exploit this type of imagery.

Romanian cinema, both before and after 1990, is not devoid of highly sexualized images of Roma

11. See Dina Iordanova, "Balkan Film Representations since 1989: the quest for admissibility," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 2 (1998): 262–280.

12. Florin Poenaru, 'Noul val din perspectivă colonială' în Andrei Gorzo, Andrei State, *Politicile filmului. Contribuții la interpretarea cinemaului românesc contemporan*, (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Tact, 2014), 166.

13. Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 215.

14. Ian Hancock, "The 'Gypsy' Stereotype and the Sexualization of Romani Women," in *Gypsies in European Literature and Culture*, eds. Valentina Glajar, Domnica Rădulescu (London & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 184–186.





women, who are thus associated with a form of sexual freedom that contrasts with the conservatism of the majority. Possibly the most eroticized portrayal of a Romani woman in post-communist Romanian cinema belongs to director Mircea Mureșan. In the mid-1960s, Mureșan had already provided Romanian audiences with one of the most sensationalist scenes in communist cinema up to that point (the infamous rape scene in *Răscoală*, 1965). He returned in 1990 to exploit nudity and popular comedy, genres he had initially embraced with films like *Miss Litoral* (1991) followed by the over-orientalized *Sexy Harem la Ada Kaleh* (2001). In his last film, *Vrăjitoarea Azucena – Îngerul de abanos*, Mureșan constructs the premise of an erotic thriller in which a border guard enters a destructive relationship with a young Romani woman. He imbues her with an almost mystical presence in a world where the Romani are otherwise depicted solely through the lenses of poverty and criminality.

To systematize the theories that explain the fascination with alterity, Stuart Hall gathers under the title *The Spectacle of the Other* four distinct approaches. The first two are drawn from linguistics and revolve around the essential connection between difference and meaning (“without difference meaning could not exist”) and the dialogic relationship between the two (“we can only construct meaning through the dialogue with the Other”). The latter two are drawn from anthropology (“the marking of ‘difference’ is thus the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture”) and psychoanalysis (“the Other is fundamental to the constitution of the self, to us as subjects, and to sexual identity”).<sup>15</sup>

All the directions described by Hall revolve around the attraction to the Other, coupled with the inherent fear of the danger it poses to our own efforts to position ourselves in the world, to define ourselves, and to dominate. This can be seen, for example, in the altercation that opens Lucian Pintilie’s *An Unforgettable Summer*, which takes place in the brothel across from the elegant house of the Voroveanu family, precisely on the night of a sumptuous reception. The attempt to close the establishment is defiantly resisted by the young Erzsi, whose sense of moral ownership of the space is argued through its connection to the girls’ occupation. Her words, half in Romanian, half in Hungarian, dominate—through the chosen staging—the extension of Romanian authority. While attempts are made to temporarily close the brothel, the frantic cries of the women instigated by Erzsi (“We won’t leave from here!”) are heard, aiming to be hidden from the judgmental eyes of the local Romanian aristocracy. Initially, the woman’s protest is treated with superiority by the soldiers, who rebuke her with one of the most severe ethnic slurs [‘boanghina dracului’]. However, from the moment the women use their bodies to undermine the self-image of the men at the top of the power structures, the attack on them becomes brutal, launching the film’s main themes. [“That’s Erzsi’s ass. Get it down,” commands the general, interrupting the officers’ lustful gazes.] In Pintilie’s construction, the attack in response to the uninhibited superiority of the young Hungarian woman becomes an act of interethnic violence, manifested both physically and verbally. “Well, Béla Cur, eh? Can you believe it? Why aren’t you...? So, if we have a nice ass, we defy the Romanian army? Isn’t that why we made Greater Romania? So, you could mock it?” Moreover, as Andrei Gorzo also notes, what happens to Erzsi is linked to the attitude towards the film’s protagonist, Marie-Thérèse, and to the Romanian-Hungarian military confrontations of the early 20th century.<sup>16</sup>

The ethnic body is also a political body in Mircea Daneliuc’s *The Snails’ Senator* though not in the sense of sexual exploitation (the director constructs this aspect more along class lines than ethnic ones). Instead, it is through the defiance of the symbolic order maintained by the Romanian majority. This is exemplified by Cireșica, who is frequently chastised for her relationship with a Romani man and her flirtatious attitude with other men. During the snail gathering, a young Romani man tries to flirt with her, and her response is playful rather than rejecting [“What’s wrong with you, have you gone crazy? The children are watching”]. Furthermore, in the next scene, Cireșica is attacked by her own brother due to the thefts committed by “her Gypsies.” The earlier playful interaction takes a grave turn when two Romani men attempt to rape her, an incident that exacerbates interethnic tensions. Thus, in Daneliuc’s film, the violent attack on the only local character open to relationships with the Romani community becomes the climax of the territorial and economic conflict of the post-1990 era. Notably, the discussion about the rape between the senator and his secretary does not focus on the victim but on the alleged indifference of the Romani people towards the land during the reappropriation process. [Vărtosu: How do they rape right in front of you? / Secretary: They do whatever they want, senator.

15. see Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the Other,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), 223–290.

16. Andrei Gorzo, *O vară de neuitat. Un studiu critic* (Bucharest: LiterNet, 2017), 8.

They're the masters here. Look at the state of their houses... look at the land. They scream for land, take it from the Romanians, and leave it fallow. You say something, they pull a knife.]

The body is the site of violence and abuse in *Aferim!*, the film with which Radu Jude significantly shaped the discourse on the historical roots of Romanian racism and xenophobia. Guilty of the most serious violation of the symbolic boundaries between the boyar authority and their slaves, the Roma character Carfin is publicly emasculated by boyar Căndescu for engaging in sexual relations with his wife. The boyar's violent act,<sup>17</sup> visually intensified by the extended shot of the naked body writhing in pain and the tandem cries of both the slave and his wife, serves as the ultimate demonstration of the infamous property rights over the lives of Roma people in the Romanian Principalities, which both the aristocracy and the clergy exploited. At least two earlier scenes highlight the connection between the bodies of Roma slaves and local authorities: the sale of the child slave Țintiric at the market and the encounter with Zambila, a woman whom the innkeeper offers to customers for sexual services. In the first scene, Jude traces the entire process of the sale of slaves, from the fear of ending up with a violent master, to the shame of being scrutinized and treated like objects, to being weighed, physically inspected, and bargained over. A similar objectification occurs with Zambila, whose body is also subject to transaction and assessment in plain view. Just as with Carfin, her body feeds the sexual fantasies of the Romanian men, yet none have the freedom to refuse the purchase. Even the fugitive slave admits to the *zapciu* that, even if he had wanted to, he could not have refused his mistress' sexual advances. One of the most visible transformations in the portrayal of national minorities in contemporary Romanian cinema is the freedom to use the language of each community, not as a marker of insurmountable boundaries between communities, but to highlight the multilingual dimension of the Romanian multicultural landscape.

In Romanian cinema of the 1990s, lines spoken in Romani, Hungarian, German, or Yiddish were very rare. The simplest explanation for this is that characters belonging to national minority communities almost never appeared in scenes without at least one Romanian with whom they interacted, and who, explicitly or implicitly, through their belonging to the majority community, imposed the use of the Romanian language<sup>18</sup>. The most significant proposal in this regard from the early 2000s came from Radu Gabrea, whose films reflecting the history of the German community in Transylvania extensively used the German language. More recently, important contributions have come from directors such as Florin Șerban and Ana Lungu, who gave space to the Hungarian language in *Box* (2015) and *A Prince and Half* (2018), respectively, as well as from Adrian Silișteanu and Alina Șerban in *Written/Unwritten* and *Letter of Forgiveness*.

### Moments of self-representation

A new direction in the representation of ethnic minorities in contemporary Romanian cinema is marked by films focused on self-representation, where the narratives are controlled by members of the communities being portrayed. Although the number of such films remains limited, particularly in the realm of fiction, three notable examples open new perspectives on the politics of minority representation in Romania. The first significant figure in this regard, post-1990, is Radu Gabrea. After the fall of communism, Gabrea dedicated much of his work to addressing the fragile and violently oppressed ethnic minorities in Romania over the past century. Alongside his films and documentaries about the Jewish community in Romania (*Goldfaden's Legacy*—2004, *Itzik Manger*—2005, *Gruber's Journey*—2008, *Jews for Sale*—2012), an important portion of his work is focused on the Transylvanian Saxons and Germans (*The Beheaded Rooster*—2007, *Red Gloves*—2010, *A Love Story, Lindenfeld*—2014), with two of these films being adaptations of the autobiographical novels by the Saxon writer Eginald Schlattner. Returning to Romania after his self-imposed exile in Germany, Gabrea lamented the failure of the multicultural project in post-Revolution Romania, attributing this failure to the majority's fear of losing its own identity. As he explained: "This belief led me to focus on wounded

17. For an in-depth analysis of the systemic violence in *Aferim!* see Andrei Gorzo and Veronica Lazăr, "Aferim!—ceva nou în cinema românească" in *Politicile filmului. Contribuții la interpretarea cinemaului românesc contemporan*, eds. Andrei Gorzo and Andrei State (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Tact, 2014), 301–311.

18. For very interesting research on how the words used in *Aferim!* to reflect the socio-linguistic identity of Roma people disclose the purpose and the targeted audience of the film, see Crina Neacșu, "Celălalt în Aferim! al lui Radu Jude: dimensiunea lingvistică a rasismului", *Transilvania*, no. 7 (2023): 10–16.



identities in my films, whether they are communal or individual."<sup>19</sup>

In *The Beheaded Rooster*, director Radu Gabrea portrays the fall from grace of a multicultural community, where the Saxons are torn apart by their varying attitudes—sympathy, antipathy, or indifference—towards Nazi policies. The coming-of-age of an entire generation is forced through the anti-Semitic policies of World War II, particularly symbolized by the traditional *exitus* being corrupted by political pressures. However, in *The Red Gloves*, Gabrea offers a more complex narrative on identity and the destruction of the Saxon community during the early years of communism. The protagonist, Felix Goldschmidt, undergoes a transformation, as repeated physical and psychological abuses in the communist prisons of the 1950s strip him of his ethnic identity, replacing it with a political one. In one striking moment, at the end of his hellish journey, when a prison guard asks, "Wait a minute, what are you? Saxon or Jew?"; Felix responds, "I am a communist!" Set in the late 1950s, the film highlights the deportation of Transylvanian Saxons to Soviet labor camps, the protests and resistance movements among Saxon youth against the Soviet communists, their subsequent imprisonment, and the forced betrayals of their peers. Some of the most intense moments in the film are the repeated encounters between Felix and Major Blau, the man responsible for severing Felix's ties to his community and erasing his ethnic identity. Blau is the only character in the prison with whom Felix converses in German, discussing literature, politics, and catharsis. Here, language becomes a tool of closeness as German is the language of Felix's family, his Saxon community, and his personal artistic creation. However, even his artistic output succumbs to the tragic fate of the young writer, reduced to a love poem for the Communist Party, forcefully translated into Romanian in front of his torturers.

Gabrea emphasizes the linguistic dimension in the construction of Felix's character. German is the language of his most intimate relationships, his familial ties, and his creative endeavors. Gabrea incorporates elements of Felix's "Germanness" throughout the film—he dreams of Leonore, a gothic ballad by Gottfried August Bürger, and hums Lili Marlene. Yet, each time Felix tries to assert his linguistic identity, it is suppressed by the prison interrogators and guards. At one point, an interrogator demands, "Speak in Romanian! We are in the Romanian People's Republic!" Romanian thus becomes the language of authority, and even Major Blau switches to Romanian when trying to interrupt one of Felix's crises, triggered by the slow realization of the "death by installments" suffered by the Saxon community in Romania. This use of language not only symbolizes the erasure of ethnic identity but also reflects the broader political and cultural suppression experienced by minority groups under the early communist regime. Gabrea's depiction of Felix's identity shift from ethnic to political highlights the profound impact of historical forces on individual and communal identities, marking *Red Gloves* as a powerful exploration of the destruction of the Saxon community and the coercive power of the state.

In *I'm Not Famous, But I'm Aromanian*, director Toma Enache brings to light a community largely absent from Romanian cinematic fiction—the Aromanians. Enache's approach is more expository than restorative or polemical, situating the narrative in the present time while introducing a fantastical element tied to the ethnogenesis of the Aromanian people. The protagonist, Toni Caramuşat, embarks on a journey aimed at uncovering the great mystery of this dispersed community, represented by the character Armânamea. The name of the female protagonist, whose allure is timeless, symbolizes the entire Aromanian community, spread across the world, from the Balkans to Hollywood. Armânamea carries the symbol of this scattered group—a map of the territories inhabited by Aromanians—emphasizing their dispersed existence. Language plays a crucial role here, serving as a fundamental marker of unity for this globally dispersed group, one with a distinct position within Romania's cultural mosaic. No matter where Toni travels, he encounters Aromanians ready to assist him in his quest to become "famous and wealthy." To underscore the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Aromanian community, the director incorporates brief ethnographic scenes. However, these scenes tend to exoticize the community rather than deepen an understanding of its complexities. In contrast to Gabrea, Enache seems to be more anchored in an extension of the "red boots multiculturalism," (term coined by Audrey Kobayashi),<sup>20</sup> through the celebratory tone he imparts to his film and the commercial form he employs. Enache's film, by focusing on language and community symbols, emphasizes the persistence of Aromanian identity across different geographies, while subtly contributing to discussions about the representation of minority groups in Romanian cinema.

19. Călin Stănculescu, *Radu Gabrea: biografia unei opere* (Bucharest: NOI Media Print, 2012), 136.

20. For a larger debate on this concept, see Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic and Religious Identities* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 121–134.

The efforts of artists who create narratives about their own ethnic communities and, moreover, contribute to the multilingual and polyphonic landscape using language are essential in the recognition of different communities. Coming back to the opening of this article, the release of the short film *Letter of Forgiveness*, directed by Alina Șerban, marks an important moment for the representation of minorities in Romanian cinema. This is the first fictional film directed by a Roma woman in Romania and presents, in a simple yet powerful way, a complex and difficult story drawn from the reality of Roma slavery in the Romanian Principalities in the mid-19th century. The film follows Maria, a servant in the Cantacuzino-Pășcanu household, as she attempts to secure her son Dincă's freedom by offering her own "letter of forgiveness" in exchange. Although the setting of the aristocratic house initially appears much less grim than that depicted by Radu Jude in *Aferim!*, with the action unfolding almost entirely inside the house during a festive moment, Șerban establishes the condition of the main characters in the opening scenes. The first scene connects the Roma with labor, as the kitchen—where we first see Maria—and other spaces like the laundry and stables are almost exclusively populated by Roma servants. The second one shows the relationship between the servants and authority, when Grigore Al. Ghica, the ruler of Moldavia, arrives. The servants line the hallway leading to the entrance, heads bowed, avoiding eye contact with the man as he enters and moves through the rooms.

Touching the masters, even with a glance, seems to be part of the series of forbidden transgressions for the subjugated minority. This scene is further developed by Maria's attempts to speak with the ruler of Moldavia, carefully orchestrated by the director, who also plays the lead role. In her first attempt, the woman's words fade quickly, while her final intervention is marked by repeated utterances of "please" and "forgiveness," betraying the fear that accompanies her transgression. More than the sacrificial figure of the Roma mother, attention is drawn to the liminal status of her son, Dincă, a result of another boundary-crossing act—he is the illegitimate son of the high-ranking official Dumitrache Cantacuzino. Like the real-life story that inspired the film, the young man is a prisoner of Profira, Dumitrache's wife, whose attitude toward him reflects the ambiguities of the period leading up to the emancipation of the Roma, doubled by her own paradoxical behavior. Though at one point, Profira raises the boy almost as an aristocrat's child (he travels with her to France, where he studies French and political science, and learns to read and write), she ultimately denies him the freedom to control his own destiny. His emancipation is abruptly halted when the woman decides that he cannot be more than a mere cook. The dialogue between Ghica and Profira reveals Profira's authoritarian reflexes, closely tied to her access to resources and her position in managing them. ["Ghica: This slave has sucked from the milk of civilization! / Profira: That milk you're talking about, I gave it to him"]. Both lines frame the possibility of emancipation and the attainment of equal rights for isolated or exploited minorities as something managed exclusively from the outside, by leaders representing the majority.

This exchange underscores the notion that the fate and progress of marginalized groups, like the enslaved Roma in this context, are portrayed as being controlled and dictated by the dominant class. Profira's response reflects a possessiveness over the "civilizing" process, as if the opportunity for education and cultural exposure is something she grants at her discretion, rather than a fundamental right. Similarly, Ghica's comment suggests that any advancement made by the enslaved is not inherent but rather a result of external intervention, reinforcing the power imbalance between the majority and the minority. In this light, the dialogue emphasizes a paternalistic view of emancipation—one in which the ruling class retains control over both the resources and the narrative of progress, leaving little room for the agency of the oppressed. The struggle for equality is thus framed not as an inherent right but as something that can only be bestowed by those in power.

### Conclusions

The three examples mentioned above offer a different perspective on the stakes and outcomes of representing national minorities in contemporary Romanian cinema. All three are the result of processes in which members of the represented communities played a major role (as authors) in the production process. These moments complete the picture of multiculturalism portrayed in post-1989 Romanian cinema, which was initially marked by indifference toward ethnic communities or, worse, by the exoticization or denigration of their members. After 2010, this picture has been enriched by critical and revisionist perspectives. An element not explored in-depth in this study, but whose importance cannot be denied, is the contribution of Hungarian, Roma, and German actors, among others, who have been involved in recent film productions and have thus added depth to the characters they portrayed.

Although unequal in their aims and complexity, the three films discussed in the second part of this



article serve as models for the paths toward self-representation that members of national minorities can take to gain control over shaping their own place in Romania's multicultural landscape. Two of the examples (films by Radu Gabrea and Alina Șerban) approach ethnic communities without exoticizing them, instead highlighting the markers necessary for understanding their position within the historical contexts depicted. Toma Enache's film, while following a more commercial formula to spotlight the Aromanian community, takes advantage of their marked absence from the Romanian cinematic landscape. At the conclusion of their 2014 study on *Aferim!*, Gorzo and Lazăr questioned whether Romanian audiences and cinema would be ready for "a fantasy of racial revenge," akin to *Django Unchained* for American audiences. What is clear, however, is that this has not yet materialized—neither through the work of Romanian directors nor through the voices of ethnic and racial minorities that have been victims of racism and xenophobia throughout local history.

**Acknowledgement:** Research for this article was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-PCE-2021-0141, within PNCDI III.

### Bibliography

- Baumann, Gerd. *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic and Religious Identities*, London & New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Celik, Ipek A. *Permanent Crisis: Ethnicity in Contemporary Cinema and Media*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2015.
- Chang, Felix B., and Sunnie T. Rucker-Chang, eds. *Chinese Migrants in Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe*. London & New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Fawkes, Ben. *Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict in the Post-communist World*. London: Palgrave, 2002.
- Gorzo, Andrei. *O vară de neuitat. Un studiu critic* [An Unforgettable Summer. A Critical Essay]. Bucharest: LiterNet, 2017.
- Gorzo, Andrei, and Veronica Lazăr. *Beyond the New Romanian Cinema: Romanian Culture, History and the Films of Radu Jude*. Sibiu: Editura ULBS, 2023.
- Gorzo, Andrei, and Andrei State, eds. *Politicile filmului. Contribuții la interpretarea cinemaului românesc contemporan* [Film Politics: Contributions to the Interpretations of Contemporary Romanian Cinema]. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Tact, 2014.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation." *Framework. The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36 (1989): 68–81.
- Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Sage, 1997.
- Hancock, Ian. "The 'Gypsy' Stereotype and the Sexualization of Romani Women." In *„Gypsies” in European Literature and Culture*, edited by Valentina Glajar and Domnica Rădulescu. London & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.
- Iordanova, Dina. "Balkan Film Representations since 1989: the quest for admissibility." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 2 (1998): 263–280.
- Iordanova, Dina. *Cinema of the Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media*. New York & London: Bloomsbury, 2019.
- Jitea, Bogdan. *Cinema în RSR. Conformism și disidență în industria ceaușistă de filme* [Cinema in the Socialist Republic of Romania: Conformism and Dissent in the Ceaușescu-Era Film Industry]. Iași: Polirom, 2021.
- Neacșu, Crina. "Celălalt în *Aferim!* al lui Radu Jude: dimensiunea lingvistică a rasismului" [The Other in *Aferim!* by Radu Jude: The Linguistic Dimension of Racism]. *Transilvania*, no. 7 (2023): 10–16.
- Panayi, Panikos. *Outsiders. A History of European Minorities*. London: Hambledon Press, 1999.
- Ross, Mark Howard. *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Stănculescu, Călin. *Radu Gabrea: biografia unei opere* [Radu Gabrea: The Biography of His Work]. Bucharest: NOI Media Print, 2012.

# Die fotografische Erzählung der Deutsche Migration und die Konsolidierung des chilenischen Nationalstaates

Daniela SENN

Catholic University of Temuco, Department of Anthropology  
Corresponding author emails: dsenn@uct.cl

---

## The Photographic Narrative of the German Migration and the Consolidation of the Chilean Nation

**Abstract:** This article presents an iconological analysis of heritage photographs, that were taken during the migration process of the 19th and early 20th centuries from Germany to Chile and still impact in the present. The photos are conserved in collections in several archives in Chile and were published in different illustrated books, that were financed by the Chilean state in the context of the bicentenary of the Republic (2010). From the visual and critical heritage studies approach, photographs will be contrasted against period literature and contemporary assessments to discern the discursive and aesthetic devices, that are used to elaborate a visual narrative of southern Chile. In this way, images are understood as "readable" elements that, on the one hand, present synchronously and, on the other hand, tell a diachronic story. Heritage photography is selected to represent southern Chile in a specific time period. Cultural heritage is therefore analyzed as an institutional process in which different social agents define historical and aesthetic content as valuable and essential in a certain structure.

**Keywords:** Historic narrative, cultural heritage, photography, southern Chile.

**Citation suggestion:** Senn, Daniela. "Die fotografische Erzählung der Deutsche Migration und die Konsolidierung des chilenischen Nationalstaates" *Transilvania*, no. 9 (2024): 54-64.  
<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2024.09.06>.



„Hübsch genug, obwohl sie ganz aus Holz gebaut ist  
wie die Städte von Chiloé und Valdivia“<sup>1</sup>

## EINLEITUNG

Jenseits von Symbolen, Gegenständen, Bräuchen und Erinnerungen wird auch das Kulturerbe als ein gesellschaftliches Phänomen verstanden. Dieser Prozess, „gleich einem Kapital nimmt es stetig zu, verändert sich, interagiert und wird von unterschiedlichen Sektoren übernommen“<sup>2</sup>. Einerseits impliziert es, dass im Laufe der Zeit etwas als grundlegend oder entscheidend für die Identität einer Region festgelegt werden kann, andererseits wird diese symbolische Gesamtheit von bestimmten Machtgruppen verwaltet, studiert und befindet sich in Besitz derer. In diesem Zusammenhang schlägt Laurajane Smith, Direktorin des Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies an der Australian National University, das Konzept des „authorized heritage discourse“<sup>3</sup> vor. Dabei handelt es sich um die Festlegung politischer und kultureller Bedeutungen der Vergangenheit und derer aktuellen Rollen<sup>4</sup>.

---

1. Kurt Bauer, *Helden der Arbeit*, 31.

2. Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas Híbridadas*, 87 (Eigene Übersetzung).

3. Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 7.

4. Laurajane Smith, "El Espejo Patrimonial. ¿Ilusión narcisista o reflexiones múltiples?," *Antropol. Arqueol*, no. 12 (2011): 46.



Betrachtet man nun diese Repräsentation als eine rhetorische Entstehung der Ideen und Bräuche einer Gemeinschaft, so kann diese durch die Verwurzelung der Bevölkerung in den jeweiligen Ländern aufrechterhalten werden. Sie besteht folglich im Charakterisierungsprozess eines Volkes oder einer Alterität. Diese Praxis impliziert Bemühungen für die Dokumentation, Beschreibung und Ausstellung von Aspekten einer bestimmten Kultur<sup>5</sup>. Zu Beginn steht demnach die Überlegung, dass die Art und Weise wie ein Gebiet dargestellt wird, kein Zufall ist. Die Geschichte eines Landes oder eines Territoriums besteht aus sorgfältig gezeichneten Konstellationen, deren Inhalte ausgewählt werden. Die Arbeit zur Bewahrung des kulturellen Erbes (bzw. Patrimonialisierung)<sup>6</sup> kann als ein Versuch der Festlegung von grundlegenden, ursprünglichen und traditionellen Elementen eines Landes begriffen werden<sup>7</sup>. Dieses Bemühen spiegelt sowohl den Gestaltungswillen internationaler, auf das Thema spezialisierter Institutionen als auch lokaler Akteure wider.

Im Jahre 2010 feierte Chile den 200. Jahrestag der Unabhängigkeit von der spanischen Kolonialmacht. Die damalige Regierung beabsichtigte, dieses Ereignis für eine Stärkung des Nationalstaates zu nutzen. Sie beauftragte jede Region des Landes eine Darstellung des Territoriums, der Geschichte, der Bevölkerung und der kulturellen Praktiken vorzubereiten. Dafür verfügt das Land über eine bestimmte Struktur für die Verwaltung des kulturellen Erbes. Sie folgte dabei den Vorgaben der Welterbekonvention der UNESCO von 1972.

Ab 1978, als das Nationale Fotografische Archiv gegründet wurde, bis ungefähr zur Zweihundertjahrfeier der Republik hat der chilenische Staat unterschiedliche Initiativen gefördert, die Fotosammlungen als kulturelles Erbe darstellten. Das betraf insbesondere die Sammlungen, die durch die Migrationsbewegung von Deutschland nach Südchile (von der Regierung als „Frontera“ oder „Araucanía“ bezeichnet) im 19. Jahrhundert entstanden. Als *fotografía patrimonial* (patrimonialisierte Fotografie) wurden sie in unterschiedlichen staatlichen Projekten verwendet. Staatliche Stellen gründeten Institutionen für die Verwaltung des kulturellen Erbes, unterstützten verschiedene Fotoarchive und finanzierten Bildbände, wie zum Beispiel die Sammlung „Relatos del Ojo y la Cámara“ (Erzählungen des Auges und der Kamera). Ziel war es, die patrimonialisierten Fotografien kategorisieren.

Ziele dieses Artikels ist es, die diskursiven und ästhetischen Verfahren zu analysieren, die bei dieser visuellen Erzählung Südchiles verwendet worden. Die Patrimonialisierung verschiedener, aus der Konsolidierung des Nationalstaates und aus dem Migrationsprozess von Europa nach Südchile stammender Fotosammlungen dient infolgedessen als Bemessungsgrundlage für die Festlegung historischer, kultureller und ästhetischer Werte der Republik.

## METHODOLOGISCHER ANSATZ

Aus dem Ansatz der visuellen und der kritischen Studien zum Kulturerbe bietet dieser Artikel eine ikonologische Analyse von Bildern, die vor etwa 100 Jahre aufgenommen wurden und sich in der Gegenwart noch auswirken. Primärquelle der Analyse sind Fotos und einleitende Texte der Bildbände „Erzählungen des Auges und der Kamera“, die den südlichen Teil des Landes zeigen. Hinzu kommen verschiedene Dokumente wie Chroniken, Berichte, Gesetze oder Zeitschriften, die die Einordnung in die Epoche ermöglichen. Durch zeitgenössische Bewertungen der einleitenden Texte der Bildbände, und Maßnahmen der öffentlichen Politik zum kulturellen Erbe wird eine mögliche Kontinuität der Darstellungen gesucht. Am Anfang steht die ikonologische Analyse von 6 Fotografien, die Betrachtung ihrer Bildsprache und die kritische Einordnung der Ergebnisse in den Kontext ihrer Entstehung. So ist es möglich, die vor etwa 100 Jahre gemachten Aufnahmen in eine Beziehung mit der Gegenwart zu bringen. Im Wesentlichen geht es dabei darum, die Bilder nicht zu Texten zu reduzieren, sondern als kulturelle Produkte zu verstehen. Gemäß dem Kunsthistoriker W.J.T Mitchell könnten Bilder durch eine

5. Gabriela Vargas-Cetina, *Anthropology and politics of representation*, 9.

6. Maximiliano Von Thüngen, *Ruinias Jesuíticas, paisajes de la memoria. El Patrimonio cultural de los antiguos pueblos de guaraníes*, 20. Prats, Llorenç. „Concepto y gestión del patrimonio local“, *Cuadernos de Antropología Social*, no. 21 (2005): 17–35.

7. Olaf Kaltmeier und Mario Rufer, *Entangles Heritages. The Uses of heritage and postcolonial condition in Latin America*, 3; Mario Rufer, „La memoria como profanación y como pérdida: comunidad, patrimonio y museos en contextos poscoloniales“, *A Contra Corriente*, no. 15 (2018): 156. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6303754>; Daniela Senn, „Patrimonialización e ingreso a la modernidad: El caso de las Iglesias de Chiloé“, *Revista Isla Flotante*, no. 7 (2017): 13. <https://bibliotecadigital.academia.cl/xmlui/handle/123456789/4266>.

textuelle Analyse „zwar ein Werkzeug für das wissenschaftliche Treiben“<sup>8</sup> verstanden werden, „aber sie sind bestenfalls ein nebensächlicher, dekorativer oder funktioneller, keinesfalls ein wesentlicher Teil der Wissenschaft, geschweige denn ihr Zielobjekt“<sup>9</sup>.

Wichtig ist nicht nur was Bilder zeigen, sondern auch was man mit diesen Bildern in unterschiedlichen Kontexten macht. Der Kunsthistoriker Hans Belting suggeriert uns, dass „wir mit den eigenen Augen sehen, was doch nur in Bildern sehen können“<sup>10</sup>. Insofern sind „Bilder immer spezifisch darin, dass sie eine Kultur ebenso prägen, wie sie von ihr geprägt werden“ (ebd.). Das bedeutet, dass wir laut unseren Sehkonventionen und unserer kulturellen Gliederung<sup>11</sup>. Bilder, beziehungsweise Fotografien erkennen, wahrnehmen und nutzen. Fotografien werden nicht nur nach einem bestimmten Genre kategorisiert. Am Ende entscheiden „die kontextuelle Einbindung und die Zuschreibungen viel stärker über diese Zugehörigkeiten als tatsächliche Aufnahmeintention und formale Kriterien“<sup>12</sup>. In unserem Fall wurden die Fotos als patrimonialisierte und lesbare Elemente in Büchern, beziehungsweise Bildbänden angeboten. Genauso wie Walter Benjamin vorschlägt, bedeutet Lesbarkeit hier nicht nur „zu sehen, sondern zu wissen“<sup>13</sup> und dazu „das Prinzip der Montage in der Geschichte zu übernehmen“<sup>14</sup>.

## ERGEBNISSE

### Das Gesicht eines Landes

In der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts förderte der chilenische Staat die Zuwanderung, die damals als Kolonisierung verstanden wurde. Zahlreiche europäische Familien, besonders aus Deutschland, wurden eingeladen, um die damals noch weitgehend unerschlossenen Provinzen im Süden des Landes (beziehungsweise in der Frontera) zu besiedeln und den Einfluss des Staates auf diese Regionen zu erhöhen. Ziel dieser Politik war es, die Vereinigung des Landes zu erreichen, um die staatliche Kontrolle über das gesamte Land auszubauen. Die Eliten in Santiago wollten die südlichen Provinzen nicht nur für Industrie und Handel erschließen, sondern auch deren nationale Identität nach ihren Vorstellungen entwickeln<sup>15</sup>.

Für die chilenischen Regierungen der 1850er bis 1890er Jahre waren die Deutschen die passenden Migranten, um aus den Landesflächen höheren wirtschaftlichen Profit zu schlagen<sup>16</sup>. Dafür verfügte der Staat über Vertreter, die den Migrationsprozess rechtfertigten, ermöglichten und für ihn warben. Franz Kindermann (1842-1921), Mitbesitzer von Ländereien, die Bernhard Eunom Philippi (1811-1852) „für den Konsul Flindt in der Provinz Valdivia am Rio Bueno gekauft hatte und nun verwaltete“<sup>17</sup>, beschrieb den Süden Chiles als ein Territorium, dass für die Einwanderung deutscher Siedler „besonders geeignet“<sup>18</sup> sei. Einige Jahrzehnte später warb José Benjamin Dávila-Larraín (1854-1899) in Europa um neue Einwanderer. Zum Beispiel verfasste er im Jahre 1886 den Flyer „Chili“ (Bild 1) und verwaltete das Museum Chilenischer Produkte. Potenzielle Migranten aus unterschiedlichen Ländern konnten sich so über die Vorteile des „neuen“ Landes informieren. Vor diesem Hintergrund erschienen die ersten Fotografien, die die Bevölkerung, die Landschaft und die Entwicklung des Südens darstellten.

8. W.J.T. Mitchell, „Bildwissenschaft“, in *Ikonologie der Gegenwart*, Hg. Gottfried Boehm und Horst Bredekamp (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2009), 99–113.

9. Ibid.

10. Hans Belting, „Zu einer Ikonologie der Kulturen. Die Perspektive als Bildfrage“, in *Ikonologie der Gegenwart*, Hg. Gottfried Boehm und Horst Bredekamp (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2009), 9–20.

11. Lenzi, Teresa, „La fotografía contemporánea como dispositivo discursivo y/o narrativo“, *Digital 2*, no. 3 (2009): 5. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/3370/337027035005.pdf>.

12. Jens Jäger, *Fotografie und Geschichte*, 171.

13. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Remontagen der erlittenen Zeit*, 18.

14. Ibid.

15. Jorge Pinto, *La formación del Estado y la Nación, y el pueblo Mapuche. De la Inclusión a la exclusión*, 186.

16. Andrea Stegmaier del Prado und Jochen Bender, „„Wer nicht arbeiten will, soll nur draußen bleiben“ Chile-Auswanderung aus Nelligen und Ruit in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts“, in *Aus der Geschichte Ostfilderns*, Hg. Stadt Ostfildern (Ostfildern: Stadt Ostfildern, 2006): 176–215.

17. Gottfried Frittbogen, „Von Philippi bis Anwandter. Die Entwicklung des Gedankens der deutschen Einwanderung in Südchile“, *Ibero-amerikanisches Archiv* 10, no. 3 (1936-1937): 271–286. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43134838>.

18. Franz Kindermann, *Chile: mit Berücksichtigung der Provinz Valdivia, als zur Auswanderung für Deutsche besonders geeignet*, 6. [https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11248686\\_00003.html](https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11248686_00003.html).





**Bild 1:** Flyer „Chili“, Dávila Larraín  
(Quelle: Harvard University -  
Collection Development Department,  
Widener Library, HCL, 1886).



**Bild 2:** „Indianer aus dem Araucanerland“,  
Cristián Valck (Quelle: Dirección Museológica,  
Universidad Austral de Chile, ca. 1865).

Zur gleichen Zeit begann der chilenische Staat, die Mapuche zu enteignen. Im Jahr 1852, als die „Arauco“-Provinz offiziell gegründet wurde<sup>19</sup>, kam Cristian Valck (1826-1899) in Valdivia an<sup>20</sup>. In seinem Atelier, welches das erste im Süden Chiles war, nahm er sowohl Familienporträts als auch die ersten Fotografien von „Ureinwohnern“ auf. Die Fotos sind in dem Bildband „Los Pioneros Valck. Un siglo de Fotografía en el sur de Chile“ (2005) mit einleitenden Texten von Carolina Odone, Margarita Alvarado und Anderen publiziert wurden. Den Unterschied zwischen Porträts von Elitefamilien und Fotografien der von ihm als „unbekannte Menschen“ und „Indianer aus dem Araucanerland (Araucanía)“ (Bild 2) bezeichneten Stammesmitglieder der Mapuche machte Valck nicht nur durch die Bildbeschriftung deutlich. Er verwendete auch visuelle Verfahren, mit denen er eine Grenzlinie markierte und die Bevölkerung nach ihrer Herkunft sortierte.

Diese Verfahren entstammen laut der chilenische Ästhetin Margarita Alvarado der Pose und der Inszenierung<sup>21</sup>. Dabei werden besondere Merkmale der Bevölkerung betont. Während Valck die Aufnahmen von Elitefamilien in seinem Atelier in ein für damalige Verhältnisse luxuriös ausgestattetes Bühnenbild einbettete (Bild 3), versuchte er bei den Bildern der Indigenen, eine Naturumgebung nachzuahmen. Er stellte sie genauso wie in der gängigen Literatur der Epoche über Missionäre dar: „sowohl Chilenen als auch Indianer, wohnten weit zerstreut auf dem Lande und in den Wäldern, bekamen Jahre lang keine Kirche, keinen Priester zu sehen, hörten keinen Unterricht. So hatten sie keine höheren Ideen als den Kampf ums tägliche Brot und die Sorge um Vermehrung ihrer Güter“<sup>22</sup>. Die Fotos repräsentieren die Zusammensetzung und Wahrnehmung der verschiedenen Gruppen, indem sie je nach abgebildeter sozialer Gruppe die Unterordnung oder das Lob hervorheben und gleichzeitig die beinahe Unsichtbarkeit mancher Bevölkerungsgruppen suggerieren.

19. Jorge Pinto, *La formación del Estado y la Nación, y el pueblo Mapuche. De la Inclusión a la exclusión*, 234.

20. Carolina Odone, „Entre la luz y la sombra: Fragmentos de la familia Valck-Wiegand a través del tiempo“ in *Los Pioneros Valck, un siglo de fotografía en el sur de Chile*, Hg. Margarita Alvarado und Mariana Matthews (Santiago: Pehuén, 2005), 13.

21. Margarita Alvarado, „Pose y montaje en la fotografía mapuche. Retrato fotográfico, representación e identidad“, in *Mapuche: Fotografías Siglo XIX y XX. Construcción y montaje de un imaginario*, Hg. Margarita Alvarado, Pedro Mege und Cristian Baez (Santiago: Pehuén, 2001), 13–28.

22. P. Burchard und O von Röttingen, „Deutsche Missionäre unter den Araucaner“, in *Deutsche Arbeit in Chile*, Hg. Deutscher Wissenschaftlicher Verein (Santiago: Deutscher Wissenschaftlicher Verein, 1913), 27.



**Bild 3:** Guillermo Manns und sein Henkel Guillermo Manns, Fernando Valck Wiegand (Quelle: Dirección Museológica, Universidad Austral de Chile, 1907).

Valck und seine Zeitgenossen stellten die Mapuche auf eine diskursive und visuelle Weise als exotisch und uralt dar. Sie verorteten sie dadurch nicht in der Gegenwart, so als ob ihr kulturelles Universum der Vergangenheit angehörte und eine Art verlorenes Paradies gewesen sei. Dem hielt Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts der Schriftsteller Johannes Unhold in der Zeitschrift „Der Kampf um das Deutschtum in Chile. Ein ruhmreicher Zeuge deutscher Kulturarbeit“ die „Rechtschaffenheit, Besonnenheit und Sparsamkeit“ als Merkmale der Deutschen entgegen<sup>23</sup>. Im einleitenden Text von Carolina Odone, schrieb sie den Einwanderern „sobriedad“ (Nüchternheit) und „aire decidido“ (Entschlossenheit) zu<sup>24</sup>. Die Fotografen und Autoren fügen sich dadurch in den Kontext einer Epoche ein, in der die Eliten zwischen Bevölkerungsgruppen unterschieden, sie herabstufte und aufwerteten. Texte, Fotos und andere bildliche Darstellungen betonten in erster Linie die Unterschiede zwischen den ethnischen und sozialen Gruppen des Landes. Im Einklang mit dieser Darstellung publizierten die Fotografen die Fotos in Bildbänden, stellten sie einander gegenüber, damit die Leser die Trennlinien verinnerlicht und die aktuelle soziale Struktur nicht in Frage stellten. Die Montage ist das visuelle Verfahren, das die Fotografen dieser Epoche in ihren Büchern für die Lesbarkeit ihrer Arbeit verwendeten. Sie unterschieden damit nicht nur die Bevölkerungsgruppen, sondern schufen auch Serien, die einen Erzähltext imitierten und die Bilder als lesbare Elemente anboten. Das traf auch auf die fotografischen Abbildungen der Landschaft, der Industrie und des Arbeitslebens zu.

In den Bildbänden „Erzählungen des Auges und der Kamera“ sind die Fotos von Christian Valck, Rodolfo Knittel und Roberto Gerstmann so sortiert, dass sie den Lesern den Eindruck einer Erzählung vermitteln. Die folgenden Fotos von der „Plaza de la República“ (Bild 4 und Bild 5) wurden auf den Seiten 38 und 39 des Buches „Los Pioneros Valck. Un siglo de fotografía en el sur de Chile“ publiziert. Auf diese Weise konstruierten sie Kontinuität aus Diskontinuität heraus<sup>25</sup>. Die zeitliche Entfernung zwischen der Aufnahme und dem aktuellen Leser verzerrte sich damit und verlor an Gewichtung.

23. Johannes Unhold, *Der Kampf um das Deutschtum in Chile. Ein ruhmreicher Zeuge deutscher Kulturarbeit*, 63.

24. Carolina Odone, „Entre la luz y la sombra: Fragmentos de la familia Valck-Wiegand a través del tiempo“ in *Los Pioneros Valck, un siglo de fotografía en el sur de Chile*, Hg. Margarita Alvarado und Mariana Matthews (Santiago: Pehuén, 2005), 17.

25. John Berger und Jean Mohr, *Otra Manera de Contar*, 86.



**Bild 4:** Plaza de la República, Valdivia, Cristián Valck (Quelle: Dirección Museológica, Universidad Austral de Chile, ca. 1858).

**Bild 5:** Plaza de la República, Valdivia, Cristián Valck (Quelle: Dirección Museológica, Universidad Austral de Chile, ca. 1876).

Laut den Berichten der ersten Forschungsreisenden, die Südchile Mitte des 19. Jahrhundert besuchten, war das, was sie dort vorfanden „weiter nichts als ein mit Binsen und Gestrüpp bestandenes Sumpfgelände“<sup>26</sup>. Im Rahmen der Feierlichkeiten des 100. Jahrestages der Ankunft der ersten deutschen Siedler, fasste es der deutsche Schriftsteller Gerhard Wunder folgendermaßen zusammen: „In wenigen Jahrzehnten lichtete sich in Südchile das Gestrüpp, fielen die hohen Bäume, wuchsen die Weizenfelder, entstanden Städte. Jenseits des Indianerlandes der „Frontera“ gewann das Land auf friedliche Weise eine neue fruchtbare Provinz“<sup>27</sup>. In Einklang beschrieb Carolina Odone den Süden als „el fin del mundo“<sup>28</sup> „das Ende der Welt“.



**Bild 6:** Angachilla – Valdivia, Rodolfo Knittel (Quelle: Dirección Museológica, Universidad Austral de Chile, ca. 1898).

Die Fotografen präsentierten die Landschaft Südchiles entweder als eine einsame Wüste oder ein wilder Wald (Bild 6). Sie verwendeten dafür die Auflösung kultureller Referenzen<sup>29</sup> und die Unterbrechung des Zeitverlaufes<sup>30</sup> als visuelle Verfahren. Dafür zeigten sie auf ihren Bildern unbewohnte Gebiete, in denen die Zeit still zu stehen schien. Gleiches galt auch für ihre Inszenierung in den Büchern und

26. Kurt Bauer, Helden der Arbeit, 54.

27. Gerhard Wunder, „Das Gesicht einer Landschaft. Zum hundertjährigen Gedanken der deutschen Einwanderung in Südchile“, *Übersee-Rundschau* (1949), 62.

28. Carolina Odone, „Entre la luz y la sombra: Fragmentos de la familia Valck-Wiegand a través del tiempo“ in *Los Pioneros Valck, un siglo de fotografía en el sur de Chile*, Hg. Margarita Alvarado und Mariana Matthews (Santiago: Pehuén, 2005), 13–19.

29. Margarita Alvarado, „Estética de una mirada itinerante. El paisaje de la América del sur bajo el lente de Roberto Gerstmann“, in *Roberto Gerstmann, fotografías paisajes y territorios latinoamericanos*, Hg. Margarita Alvarado, Mariana Matthews und Carla Möller (Santiago: Pehuén: 2009), 31–40.

30. Carla Möller, „Roberto Gerstmann (1896-1964). Del tiempo, la distancia y otros espacios“, in *Roberto Gerstmann, fotografías paisajes y territorios latinoamericanos*, Hg. Margarita Alvarado, Mariana Matthews und Carla Möller (Santiago: Pehuén: 2009), 23–30.

die Beschriftungen. Damit folgten sie dem Ziel der Regierungen in Santiago, den chilenischen Süden als das Ende der Welt zu präsentieren, welcher erst durch die Ankunft der Migranten zu existieren begann. Die Fotografen rechtfertigten damit die Kolonisierung und konstruierten ein positives Image des Migrationsprozesses<sup>31</sup>.

### Kulturelles Erbe, Nostalgie und Konsens

In ähnlicher Weise verfuhr die politischen Entscheidungsträger und die Fotografen mit der Darstellung der industriellen Entwicklung (Bild 7). Auch hier betrieben sie eine Inszenierung, die darauf abzielte, die Bedeutung des Südens für die nationale Wirtschaft zu betonen. Diese Vorgehensweise ist in Teilen auch heute noch erkennbar. Der deutsche Historiker Jens Jäger beschrieb die Fotos der Industrie, beziehungsweise der Betriebe und Fertigungsanlagen als die „Selbstinszenierung von Unternehmen nach innen wie außen. Modernität, Größe, Ordnung und Leistungsfähigkeit kennzeichnen die Industriefotografie nach außen, das heißt gegenüber möglichen Kunden, aber auch gegenüber der Belegschaft“<sup>32</sup>.



**Bild 7:** Cervecería Roepke – Barrio Manzanito – Valdivia, Rodolfo Knittel ca. 1890 (Quelle: Dirección Museológica, Universidad Austral de Chile).

Diese Aufwertung gilt nicht nur für die historischen Quellen, sondern auch für die zeitgenössischen Publikationen über das kulturelle Erbe außerhalb der Wissenschaft. Die Bildbände „Relatos del Ojo y la Cámara“ ist ein Beispiel dafür, wie sich die akademische Diskussion und die öffentliche Politik gegenüber dem kulturellen Erbe verhalten. So können unterschiedliche Meinungen wie diejenige von Carolina Odone mit der kritischen Analyse von Margarita Alvarado im selben Buch erscheinen. Für eine Gesellschaft wie die chilenische Bevölkerung, die die Schließung zahlreicher Fabriken und das Ende des Eisenbahnsystems miterlebte, haben die Fotos von Industrie, Bahnen oder der damaligen Arbeitssituation einen nostalgischen Wert. Was man heute als kulturelles Erbe bezeichnet, ist in diesem Sinne ein Zufluchtsort, der an „bessere“ Zeiten erinnert. Das gilt nicht nur für die damaligen Arbeiter, sondern auch für die Eigentümer und ihre Nachkommenschaft, die ihre Privilegien als Erbschaftsrechte verstehen und stärken wollen. Durch die Rettung des kulturellen Erbes (*patrimonio*) verändert sich dessen Status. Es wird nun im öffentlichen Diskurs als unwiderleglich wertvoll oder sogar heilig betrachtet. Für die besprochenen Bücher bedeutet es, dass man ihren Inhalt nicht anzweifeln darf.

Wenn das Kulturerbe als etwas betrachtet wird, was für die ganze Nation ohne Ausnahme als wichtig zu schätzen ist, könnte man meinen, dass die Traditionen außerhalb der politischen Dimensionen stattfinden. So als ob die Kulturen nicht innerhalb einer sozialen Struktur existieren würden. Anfang des 21. Jahrhunderts beschrieb Marta Cruz-Cocke, damalige Direktorin der für ihren Erhalt geschaffenen staatlichen Institution *Servicio Nacional del Patrimonio Cultural* (Nationaler Dienst des Erbes) das Kulturerbe als Quelle der nationalen Identität<sup>33</sup>. Dieser Ansatz kann als „traditionalistisch“ verstanden werden, weil er impliziert, dass es ein ontologisches Zusammentreffen zwischen den realen Gesellschaften und der Sammlungen der Symbole, die sie darstellen<sup>34</sup> gibt. Das würde bedeuten,

31. Daniela Senn, „Propaganda de la migración europea y el proyecto estado-nación chileno“, *Revista Antropologías del Sur* 11, no. 21 (2024), 76. <https://doi.org/10.25074/rantros.v11i21.2641>.

32. Jens Jäger, *Fotografie und Geschichte*, 113.

33. Ilonka Csillag, *Conservación de fotografía patrimonial*, 15. <https://www.cncr.gob.cl/sitio/Contenido/Publicaciones/4942:CONSERVACION-DE-FOTOGRAFIA-PATRIMONIAL>.

34. Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, 160.



dass die Elemente und Gesamtheiten, mit denen das Territorium repräsentiert wird, seinem realen Erscheinungsbild damals wie heute entsprechen würden.

García Canclini hat den auf das Kulturerbe ausgerichteten Traditionalismus (*tradicionalismo patrimonialista*) als Vermögensschutz eines folkloristischen Erbes und verknöchertes apolitisches Archiv<sup>35</sup> bezeichnet. Denn dieses Erbe bietet Inhalte, mit denen die Bevölkerung sich identifizieren kann. Die damaligen und aktuellen Eliten verfolgen das Ziel, eine verstärkte kulturelle Verknüpfung zwischen der Bevölkerung und dem Territorium zu erreichen. Dadurch können sie soziale Konflikte und Ungleichheiten überdecken. Durch diese Form der Verschleierung prekärer Lebensumstände verhindern sie, dass die Verfahren sichtbar werden, mit denen das Kulturerbe „inszeniert“ wurde und wird<sup>36</sup>. Die vermittelten Traditionen sichtbar zum Beispiel in Fotografien werden dadurch als apolitische Elemente betrachtet, die keine Meinungsverschiedenheiten wiedergeben.

Aus dieser konservativen Sicht versteht man die patrimonialisierten Fotos nicht als eine Perspektive oder eine von jemandem gemachte Darstellung, sondern als einen konkreten Teil der historischen Erinnerung. Mittels der Nostalgie und dem permanenten Bezug auf die Tradition helfen die Fotos dabei, eine einvernehmliche Erzählung zu bilden und gleichzeitig, unangenehme Themen wie Diskriminierung, Armut oder soziale Konflikte zu verbergen.

Wenn man die breite Spanne der heutigen Initiativen zur Rettung des kulturellen Erbes betrachtet, ist deutlich zu erkennen, dass die Migranten (oder Siedler, wie sie sich identifizieren) als „Helden der Arbeit“ verstanden werden, die sogar die schlechte Behandlung der Regierungen überwinden mussten. Diesen Diskurs prägte insbesondere Ricardo Krebs, ehemaliger Professor der Universität zu Köln<sup>37</sup> und im Jahr 1982 Träger des chilenischen Nationalpreises in Geschichte<sup>38</sup> mit seiner Definition des Begriffs der Tradition, welche aussagt, die Geschichte sollte die Tradition für die Menschen verständlich machen<sup>39</sup>. Der Familie Krebs war es seit der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts gelungen, einflussreiche Positionen in der Verwaltung des kulturellen Erbes in Chile zu besetzen. Hier zeigt sich ein weiteres Problem der chilenischen Gesellschaft: der große Einfluss privater Interessen auf die Politik. So war es möglich, dass andere Deutungen bis heute unterrepräsentiert sind.

### ZUM SCHLUSS: EIN FOTO LESEN, EINE ERZÄHLUNG WAHRNEMEN

Was man heutzutage als kulturelles Erbe einer Nation, beziehungsweise eines bestimmten Territoriums oder einer Kollektivität anerkennt, ist das Resultat einer Verfahrensserie, bei der eine einvernehmliche Darstellung gestrebt wird. Das heißt, dass ein Teil der Gesellschaft die historischen und zeitgenössischen Quellen interpretiert, um Güter, Erinnerungen und Bräuche als „traditionell“ festzulegen. Diese Gesamtheit von Merkmalen wird zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts dafür benutzt, die Identität einer Region wie dem Süden Chiles gemäß internationalen Werten zu „erfinden“. Insofern sind Bilder wesentlich für die Analyse dieser Festlegung von Werten, denn „die Bildfrage liefert, wenn sie als kulturelle Frage versteht, den Schlüssel für eine kulturspezifische Denkweise, die sich in Bildern ausdrückt“<sup>40</sup>.

Sowohl die Repräsentation als auch die Patrimonialisierung von Fotosammlungen und die Publikation der Büchersammlung „Relatos del Ojo y la Cámara“ sind insofern eine Praxis, bei der der chilenische Staat im Rahmen der Zweihundertjahrfeier seine nationale Identität festlegte. Aufgrund der Integration des Südens, der nach der Enteignung der Araucanía der zentralen Bürokratie untergeordnet wurde, wird Chile auch heutzutage als ein Land mit einem starken europäischen Einfluss dargestellt und auf diese Weise von anderen lateinamerikanischen Ländern unterschieden. Visuelle Referenzen wie Fabriken mit

35. Néstor García Canclini, *Políticas culturales en américa latina*, 32.

36. Laurajane Smith, „Industrial Heritage and the remaking of the class identity. Are we all middle class now?“, in *Constructing Industrial Pasts: Heritage, Historical Culture and Identity in Regions Undergoing Structural Economic Transformation*, Hg. Stefan Berger (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 128–145.

37. Margarita Serrano, „Ricardo Krebs. Una historia abierta“, *Mundo Diners Club*, no. 60 (1987): 115. <http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-82562.html>.

38. Patricia Arancibia, „Ricardo Krebs Wilkens, Premio Nacional de Historia 1982“, *Dimensión histórica de Chile /Academia Superior de Ciencias Pedagógicas de Santiago V*, no. 4-5, (1987-1988): 179. <http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-74747.html>.

39. Margarita Serrano, „Ricardo Krebs. Una historia abierta“, *Mundo Diners Club*, no. 60 (1987): 117. <http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-82562.html>.

40. Hans Belting, „Zu einer Ikonologie der Kulturen. Die Perspektive als Bildfrage“, in *Ikonologie der Gegenwart*, Hg. Gottfried Boehm und Horst Bredekamp (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2009), 14.

deutschen Namen, landschaftliche Embleme, die sich vom Norden des Landes unterscheiden sowie Porträts europäischer Familien werden bis heute dafür benutzt, ein „Land der Weißen“ durch eine „visuelle Kolonisierung“<sup>41</sup> zu erfinden.

Da die Fotografie das Potenzial hat, einen präzisen Zeitpunkt wiederzugeben und gleichzeitig einen Zeitraum zu synthetisieren, sind die Bildbände eine effektive Methode für die Patrimonialisierung des Blickwinkels auf die Gesellschaft. Die in diesem Artikel identifizierten visuellen und diskursiven Verfahren dienen dazu, nicht nur die Lesbarkeit der Bilder zu ermöglichen, sondern auch die damals aufgenommenen Motive zu kategorisieren, sie einzuschätzen und an sie zu erinnern.

Durch Elemente, die synchron und synthetisch wahrgenommen werden, wie im Falle der Fotos, ist die fotografische Erzählung der Migration ein Resultat der Imitierung von Schriftsprache, um die Entwicklungsprozesse und die Werte, mit denen der Süden vor etwa einem Jahrhundert verbunden wurde, darzustellen und zu repräsentieren „im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes“<sup>42</sup>.

**Acknowledgement:** Dieser Artikel ist eine Zusammenfassung der Dissertation der Autorin: „El relato fotográfico de la migración. Entre la consolidación del Estado-nación y la patrimonialización de la mirada en el sur de Chile“ Universität zu Köln, Deutschland: <https://kups.uni-koeln.de/12077>. Die Forschung wurde von ANID (N° 261509) der chilenischen Regierung finanziert. Die Nutzung der Bilder dieses Artikels wurden von der Dirección Museológica Universidad Austral de Chile für Akademische Zwecke genehmigt.

### Bibliography

- Alvarado, Margarita. *La fantasía fotográfica del otro—La estirpe Valck y sus imágenes de los mapuche* [The photographic fantasy of the other—The Valck lineage and their images of the Mapuche]. In *Los pioneros Valck, un siglo de fotografía en el sur de Chile* [The Valck pioneers, a century of photography in southern Chile], edited by Margarita Alvarado and Mariana Matthews, 26–31. Santiago: Pehuén, 2005.
- Alvarado, Margarita. *Estética de una mirada itinerante. El paisaje de la América del sur bajo el lente de Roberto Gerstmann* [Aesthetics of an itinerant gaze. The landscape of South America under the lens of Roberto Gerstmann]. In *Roberto Gerstmann, fotografías paisajes y territorios latinoamericanos* [Roberto Gerstmann, photographs of Latin American landscapes and territories], edited by Margarita Alvarado, Mariana Matthews, and Carla Möller, 31–40. Santiago: Pehuén, 2009.
- Alvarado, Margarita. *Pose y montaje en la fotografía mapuche. Retrato fotográfico, representación e identidad* [Pose and montage in Mapuche photography. Photographic portrait, representation, and identity]. In *Mapuche: Fotografías siglo XIX y XX. Construcción y montaje de un imaginario* [Mapuche: Photography of the 19th and 20th centuries. Construction and montage of an imaginary], edited by Margarita Alvarado, Pedro Mege, and Cristian Baez, 13–28. Santiago: Pehuén, 2001.
- Arancibia, Patricia. “Ricardo Krebs Wilkens, Premio Nacional de Historia 1982” [Ricardo Krebs Wilkens, National History Prize 1982]. *Dimensión histórica de Chile V*, no. 4–5 (1987–1988): 179–188. <http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-74747.html>.
- Bauer, Kurt. *Helden der Arbeit* [Work heroes]. Stuttgart: Schriften des Deutschen Ausland-Instituts Stuttgart, 1929.
- Belting, Hans. “Zu einer Ikonologie der Kulturen. Die Perspektive als Bildfrage” [Towards an iconology of cultures. Perspective as image problem]. In *Ikonologie der Gegenwart* [Iconology of the present], edited by Gottfried Boehm and Horst Bredekamp, 9–20. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2009.
- Berger, John, and Jean Mohr. *Otra manera de contar* [Another way of telling]. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2008.
- Booth, Rodrigo, and Catalina Valdés. “De la naturaleza al paisaje. Los viajes de Francisco Vidal Gormaz en la colonización visual del sur de Chile en el siglo XIX” [From nature to landscape. The travels of Francisco Vidal Gormaz in the visual colonization of southern Chile in the 19th century]. *Anales del IAA* 46, no. 2 (2016): 199–216. <http://www.iaa.fadu.uba.ar/ojs/index.php/anales/article/view/214/347>.

41. Rodrigo Booth und Catalina Valdés, „De la naturaleza al paisaje. Los viajes de Francisco Vidal Gormaz en la colonización visual del sur de Chile en el siglo XIX“, *Anales del IAA* 46, no. 2 (2016): 199. <http://www.iaa.fadu.uba.ar/ojs/index.php/anales/article/view/214/347>.

42. Arthur Danto, „Abbildung und Beschreibung“, in *Was ist ein Bild?* Hg. Gottfried Boehm (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994), 125–147.



- Burchard, P., and von Roettingen, O. "Deutsche Missionäre unter den Araucaner" [German missionaries among the Araucanians]. In *Deutsche Arbeit in Chile* [German work in Chile], edited by Deutscher Wissenschaftlicher Verein, 26–35. Santiago: Imprenta Universitaria, 1913.
- Csillag, Ilonka. *Conservación de fotografía patrimonial* [Conservation of heritage photography]. Santiago: Centro Nacional del Patrimonio Fotográfico, 2000. <https://www.cncr.gob.cl/sitio/Contenido/Publicaciones/4942:CONSERVACION-DE-FOTOGRAFIA-PATRIMONIAL>.
- Danto, Arthur. "Abbildung und Beschreibung" [Illustration and description]. In *Was ist ein Bild?* [What is an image?], edited by Gottfried Boehm, 125–147. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Remontagen der erlittenen Zeit* [Remontages of the time suffered]. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2014.
- Frittbogen, Gottfried. "Von Philippi bis Anwandter. Die Entwicklung des Gedankens der deutschen Einwanderung in Südchile" [From Philippi to Anwandter. The development of the idea of German immigration in southern Chile]. *Iberoamericana Editorial Vervuert. Ibero-amerikanisches Archiv* 10, no. 3 (1936–1937): 271–286. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43134838>.
- García Canclini, Néstor. *Políticas culturales en América Latina* [Cultural policies in Latin America]. Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1987.
- García Canclini, Néstor. *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* [Hybrid cultures: Strategies for entering and leaving modernity]. Barcelona: Paidós, 2012.
- Jäger, Jens. *Fotografie und Geschichte* [Photography and history]. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2009.
- Kaltmeier, Olaf, and Mario Rufer. *Entangled heritages. The uses of heritage and postcolonial condition in Latin America*. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Kindermann, Franz. *Chile: mit Berücksichtigung der Provinz Valdivia, als zur Auswanderung für Deutsche besonders geeignet* [Chile: with consideration of the province of Valdivia, as particularly suitable for emigration for Germans]. Berlin: Trowitzsch, 1849. [https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11248686\\_00003.html](https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11248686_00003.html).
- Lenzi, Teresa. "La fotografía contemporánea como dispositivo discursivo y/o narrativo" [Contemporary photography as a discursive and/or narrative device]. *Digital 2*, no. 3 (2009). <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/3370/337027035005.pdf>.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. "Bildwissenschaft" [Image science]. In *Ikonomie der Gegenwart* [Iconology of the present], edited by Gottfried Boehm and Horst Bredekamp, 99–111. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2009.
- Möller, Carla. "Roberto Gerstmann (1896–1964). Del tiempo, la distancia y otros espacios" [Roberto Gerstmann (1896–1964). About time, distance, and other spaces]. In *Roberto Gerstmann, fotografías paisajes y territorios latinoamericanos* [Roberto Gerstmann, photographs of Latin American landscapes and territories], edited by Margarita Alvarado, Mariana Matthews, and Carla Möller, 23–30. Santiago: Pehuén, 2009.
- Odone, Carolina. "Entre la luz y la sombra: Fragmentos de la familia Valck-Wiegand a través del tiempo" [Between light and shadow: Fragments of the Valck-Wiegand family through time]. In *Los pioneros Valck, un siglo de fotografía en el sur de Chile* [The Valck pioneers, a century of photography in southern Chile], edited by Margarita Alvarado and Mariana Matthews, 13–19. Santiago: Pehuén, 2005.
- Pinto, Jorge. *La formación del estado y la nación, y el pueblo mapuche. De la inclusión a la exclusión* [The development of the state and the nation, and the Mapuche people. From inclusion to exclusion]. Santiago: DIBAM Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, 2003.
- Prats, Llorenç. "Concepto y gestión del patrimonio local" [Concept and management of local heritage]. *Cuadernos de Antropología Social*, no. 21 (2005): 17–35.
- Rufer, Mario. "La memoria como profanación y como pérdida: comunidad, patrimonio y museos en contextos poscoloniales" [Memory as desecration and loss: Community, heritage, and museums in postcolonial contexts]. *Contra Corriente* [Against the tide] 15, no. 2 (2018): 149–166. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6303754>.
- Senn, Daniela. "Patrimonialización e ingreso a la modernidad: El caso de las iglesias de Chiloé" [Patrimonialization and entry into modernity: The case of the churches of Chiloé]. *Isla Flotante*, no. 7 (2017). <https://bibliotecadigital.academia.cl/xmlui/handle/123456789/4266>.
- Senn, Daniela. "Propaganda de la migración europea y el proyecto estado-nación chileno" [Propaganda of European migration and the Chilean national-state project]. *Revista Antropologías del Sur* 11, no. 21 (2024): 69–85. <https://doi.org/10.25074/rantros.v11i21.2641>.

- Serrano, Margarita. "Ricardo Krebs. Una historia abierta" [Ricardo Krebs. An open history]. *Mundo Diners Club*, no. 60 (1987): 112–116. <http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-82562.html>.
- Smith, Laurajane. *Uses of heritage*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Smith, Laurajane. "El espejo patrimonial. ¿Ilusión narcisista o reflexiones múltiples?" [The patrimonial mirror. Narcissistic illusion or multiple reflections?]. *Antropol. Arqueol.* 12, no. 262 (2011): 39–63.
- Smith, Laurajane. "Industrial heritage and the remaking of class identity. Are we all middle class now?" In *Constructing industrial pasts: Heritage, historical culture, and identity in regions undergoing structural economic transformation*, edited by Laurajane Smith and Stefan Berger, 128–145. New York: Berghahn Books, 2020.
- Stegmaier del Prado, Andrea, and Jochen Bender. "Wer nicht arbeiten will, soll nur draußen bleiben. Chile-Auswanderung aus Nelligen und Ruit in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts" ["Those who don't want to work should just stay outside." Chilean emigration from Nelligen and Ruit in the mid-19th century]. In *Aus der Geschichte Ostfilderns* [From the history of Ostfildern], edited by Stadt Ostfildern, 176–215. Ostfildern: Stadt Ostfildern, 2006.
- Unhold, Johannes. *Der Kampf um das Deutschtum in Chile. Ein ruhmreicher Zeuge deutscher Kulturarbeit* [The struggle for Germanness in Chile. A glorious witness to German cultural work]. Munich: Lehmann's Verlag, 1899.
- Vargas-Cetina, Gabriela. *Anthropology and politics of representation*. EBSCO Publishing: eBook Collection, 2013.
- Von Thüngen, Maximiliano. *Ruinas jesuíticas, paisajes de la memoria. El patrimonio cultural de los antiguos pueblos guaraníes* [Jesuit ruins, landscapes of memory. The cultural heritage of the ancient Guaraní peoples]. Buenos Aires: SB, 2021.
- Wunder, Gerhard. "Das Gesicht einer Landschaft. Zum hundertjährigen Gedanken der deutschen Einwanderung in Südchile" [The face of a landscape. On the centenary of German immigration in southern Chile]. *Übersee-Rundschau*, Otto Meissner's Verlag, (1949): 61–63.





# Enhancing Resilience Against War-Related Disinformation: Insights from Diagnostic Studies and Interventions at Polish Schools

Katarzyna MOLEK-KOZAKOWSKA

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, University of Opole

Corresponding author emails: molekk@uni.opole.pl

---

## Enhancing Resilience Against War-Related Disinformation: Insights from Diagnostic Studies and Interventions at Polish Schools

**Abstract:** This paper reports on design and results of implementation of a series of diagnostic studies and interventions devoted to building up resilience against disinformation regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, with a special focus on Polish teenagers. The initiative, called DisInfoResist, was conducted in the spring of 2024, and was motivated by the need to engage in co-creation with partner schools in order to propose a series of tailored actions given the ongoing hybrid war. However, adequate resilience-enhancing interventions can only be based on a thorough diagnosis of needs and competence gaps. Such diagnosis was undertaken in DisInfoResist with localized data collected through thematic analysis of 20 oral histories, 2 focus group sessions and 87 narrative auto-ethnographies. The subsequent piloted interventions addressed to a group of Polish secondary school students represented a way to boost their resilience against war-related disinformation by allowing them to practice their critical media literacy competences via a variety of specifically tailored activities related to critical language awareness, responding to fake news, overcoming disengagement, recognizing sensationalist media practices and algorithmic patterns.

**Keywords:** Russian-Ukrainian war, disinformation, DisInfoResist, diagnostic studies, critical language awareness.

**Citation suggestion:** Molek-Kozakowska, Katarzyna. "Enhancing Resilience Against War-Related Disinformation: Insights from Diagnostic Studies and Interventions at Polish Schools." *Transilvania*, no. 9 (2024): 65-76.

<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2024.09.07>.



## 1. Introduction

In early spring 2024, a community outreach research-based initiative called DisInfoResist coordinated academically by the author and with the active contribution from seven MA/PhD students and two school teachers was approved at University of Opole, Poland. Its main aim was to co-create ways to develop or enhance resilient responses against disinformation in a cohort of Polish teenagers. The project was to deepen the ongoing work within CORECON—a research project on the coverage and reception of Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the media—with a resilience-oriented insights and intervention scenarios. In particular, DisInfoResist initiators planned to empower young people to consume news in a competent manner, for example by being able to successfully spot and identify fake news about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and develop a capacity of remaining alert to possible war-related manipulations.

The initiative was informed by a literature review on most recent media literacy interventions devoted

to false news and language awareness studies,<sup>1</sup> on the history of presentations of Russian-Ukrainian relations before and after the invasion,<sup>2</sup> and on the high levels of distress and anxiety resulting from media exposure to Ukraine war coverage in Poland.<sup>3</sup> It is claimed that while avoiding or minimizing one's exposure to war-related information might lessen the stressful stimulus, this "protective approach" is not conducive to developing resilience.<sup>4</sup> In fact, it is proposed here that allowing young people to work with war-related content in an environment that helps to raise awareness of media practices, mobilize the available social resources, and develop new competences to engage with alienating narratives would offer a better prospect for resilience.

This article reports on how the diagnostic actions undertaken in DisInfoResist yielded a host of preliminary observations about typical teenage media usage patterns regarding war-related content, retention of salient war imagery and information, awareness of journalistic practices in conflict coverage, techniques of coping with unverified information and self-monitoring of emotions and attitudes developed as a result of exposure to conflict coverage. While diverse, these observations led to systematized insights that could be transferred into scenarios for specific interventions, some of which (workshops, games, multimodal presentations) were tested at a partner school. The advantage of this approach was to reach out to various groups of pupils, not only those interested in politics and the media. Given the unequal level of teenagers' media literacy, the project thus sought to equip a larger cohort of young people with language awareness, analytic skills and knowledge of media practices to help resist the spreading disinformation.

## 2. Defining resilience and disinformation: Aims of the project

Resilience is understood here as the capacity to cope with uncertainty and anxiety (stress) related to media exposure (stressor) under traumatic (war) or confusing (disinformation) circumstances, especially by developing adaptive pathways to bounce back to wellbeing, be they cognitive, emotional or behavioral.<sup>5</sup> Personal psychological resilience is not a stable personality trait, but depends, among others, on the types and strength of the stressor as well as on the previously developed adaptation strategies and skills. This approach to resilience is further operationalized in recent models of psychological immunity and elasticity<sup>6</sup> that explain how some individuals are able to deal with difficult or even traumatic experiences. For the purposes of this project, it is sufficient to highlight that a resilient person will be able to demonstrate a "tolerance" of the stressor—here, the prolonged interaction with misleading and alienating war coverage. This also implies that they will not be responding defensively or avoiding situations causing the stress, as withdrawal is not conducive to resilience

Apart from confronting the situation, a resilient person will also be able to make sense of the stressful

---

1. See A. Guess, "A Digital Media Literacy Intervention Increases Discernment Between Mainstream and False News in the United States and India," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 27 (2020): 15536–15545; I. de Andrade Gama and W. Mozgin, "Media Literacy and Its Role in Countering Hybrid Warfare (The Case of Ukraine)," *Future Human Image* 15 (2021): 4–13, <https://doi.org/10.29202/fhi/15/1>; N. M. Tymoshchuk, "Euphemisms in Modern Political Discourse: Joseph Biden's Speeches in the War in Ukraine," *Alfred Nobel University Journal of Philology* 26, no. 2 (2023): 210–224, <https://doi.org/10.32342/2523-4463-2023-2-26/2-13> as examples.

2. See O. Pavlova et al., "The War Between Ukraine and Russia as a Historical and Civilizational Aspect," *Trames* 27, no. 4 (2023): 327–349. <https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2023.4.01>; S. Kot et al., "The Discursive Power of Digital Popular Art During the Russo-Ukrainian War: Re/shaping Visual Narratives," *Arts* 13, no. 1 (2024): 38. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts13010038>.

3. See W. P. Malecki, H. Bilandzic, and P. Sorokowski, "Media Experiences During the Ukraine War and Their Relationships with Distress, Anxiety and Resilience," *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 165 (2023): 273–281.

4. See R. C. IJntema, W. B. Schaufeli, and Y. D. Burger, "Resilience Mechanisms at Work: The Psychological Immunity-Psychological Elasticity (PI-PE) Model of Psychological Resilience," *Current Psychology* 42 (2023): 4719–4731, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01813-5>.

5. Malecki et al., "Media experiences during the Ukraine war", 273–281.

6. See M. Rutter, "Resilience as a Dynamic Concept," *Development and Psychopathology* 24, no. 2 (2012): 335–344; D. Fletcher and M. Sarkar, "Mental Fortitude Training: An Evidence-Based Approach to Developing Psychological Resilience for Sustained Success," *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action* 7, no. 3 (2016): 135–157; IJantema et al., "Resilience Mechanisms at Work," 4719–4731.



interaction and come to terms with it by creating certain (self-)narratives.<sup>7</sup> As noted by IJantema et al.,<sup>8</sup> resilience-oriented narrative construction of the stressful experience is highly personalized and may include incorporating the experience into existing narratives (assimilation) or creating new narratives (accommodation), which represent the self in “constructive” ways in the world. This includes, for example, retaining the sense of benevolence and meaningfulness of the world, or regaining the feeling of self-worthiness. So, if the aim of the intervention is to mobilize one’s constructive responses, both the environmental context and the personal factors must be optimized towards resilience. If successful, an intervention can yield such adaptive outcomes as sustainability (enduring the stressor), recovery (bouncing back to pre-stressor conditions), transformation (changed functioning through narrative reconstruction), or growth (optimization of functioning).<sup>9</sup> In DisInfoResist’s context, an intervention could lead young people to endure war coverage without excessive anxiety, be able to control their own consumption of the media, know how to seek or evaluate credible information, and learn how to feel safer and less prone to media manipulation.

While collective psychological resilience translates into social resilience (the more individuals are resilient, the more resilient the community), social resilience also depends on environmental context, particularly on the risks and resources that affect adaptation. Broadly conceived, the contextual resources for resilience include (1) the access to quality information and knowledge, (2) the opportunity to acquire skills and competences that enable adapting to changes, (3) community networks that provide support, (4) sustainable livelihood and stable connections to place, as well as (5) access to facilities and infrastructures, (6) economic innovativeness and engaged governance.<sup>10</sup> The first two—information/knowledge and skills/competences—were in the focus of DisInfoResist project, which explored tailored ways to educate the youth to develop competences and protocols to deal with misleading, confusing and stress-inducing war-related content disseminated in various mediated formats.

Hence, to operationalize the issue of resources for resilience against disinformation better, the concepts related to misinformation, disinformation and fake news in the context of the hybrid war should be revisited. The umbrella term of “fake news” encompasses any false information, from unintended misrepresentation to deliberate deception,<sup>11</sup> which may be spread for the sake of certain financial or political benefits, with the intent of manipulating larger numbers of people into believing something that is not the case.<sup>12</sup> To make matters worse, fake content often takes the form of journalistic genres and styles in order to appear as credible. It is also spread digitally via strategic use of social networking platforms to achieve higher visibility.<sup>13</sup> While this study does not concern the characteristics of texts that contain fake news, it traces how skillful (young) people are in resisting them in general and then it offers examples of designing interventions that enhance these skills with respect to common false narratives identified by VoxUkraine.

Misinformation is a type of information that, even though not false, is likely to produce incomplete or wrong cognitive schemas or images of social reality in the minds of its target audience, who could then use it to take decisions that are against their best interests. In this vein, misinformation (as well as disinformation) may also refer to the way of providing information that is driven by a manipulative motivation of the communication.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, disinformation refers to deliberate lies or distortions

---

7. See T. D. Wilson, *Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2011).

8. IJantema et al., “Resilience Mechanisms at Work,” 4722–4723.

9. See R. A. Neimeyer, “Re-Storying Loss: Fostering Growth in the Post-Traumatic Narrative,” in *Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and practice*, ed. L. G. Calhoun and R. G. Tedeschi (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 68–80.

10. See K. Maclean, M. Cuthill, and H. Ross, “Six Attributes of Social Resilience,” *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 57, no. 1 (2014): 144–156.

11. See G. Di Domenico et al., “Fake News, Social Media and Marketing: A Systematic Review,” *Journal of Business Research* 124 (2021): 329–341, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.11.037>.

12. See X. Zhang and A. A. Ghorbani, “An Overview of Online Fake News: Characterization, Detection, and Discussion,” *Information Processing and Management* 57, no. 2 (2020): 102025; G. Pennycook and D. G. Rand, “The Psychology of Fake News,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 25, no. 5 (2021): 388–402.

13. See Simina Maria Terian, “What Is Fake News: A New Definition,” *Transilvania*, no. 11-12 (2021): 112–120. <https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2021.11-12.17>.

14. See T. Van Dijk, “Discourse and Manipulation,” *Discourse and Society* 17, no. 3 (2006): 359–383.

that may be disseminated as news or other types of content.<sup>15</sup> It has long been recognized that disinformation campaigns are well-planned efforts to propagate false and harmful information on a mass scale by entities that are not always apparent.<sup>16</sup>

The design of DisInfoResist initiative was based on the understanding that a thorough mapping and assessment of current levels of media literacy regarding teenagers' awareness of disinformation would allow to collect concrete observations, good practices and preliminary insights. On this basis, workshop scenarios and pilot interventions could be tailored and piloted to address specific needs and competence gaps, regarding, among others, critical language awareness, responding to fake news, overcoming disengagement, countering some media corporate practices and algorithmic patterns.

### 3. Design of the diagnostic studies and interventions

As a reliable diagnosis of the current or baseline situation is a precondition for any successful recommendation toolkit or remedial intervention, the preparatory step in the DisInfoResist project was to find out as much as possible about what young Poles know about the Russian-Ukrainian war and if any of this information is false, where they get that information from, and how they form their opinions and judgments about the conflict participants. This could be done by asking young people to provide specific insights through oral histories (section 3.1.), to participate in issue-related focus groups (section 3.2.), or share narrative auto-ethnographies (section 3.3.) for more specific mappings of knowledge and competence gaps, awareness-raising needs and emotional or attitudinal dispositions.

#### 3.1. Collecting oral histories to map evolving patterns in the reception of war coverage

Oral history is a qualitative method where researchers ask people about their memories of past behaviors or actions or past beliefs or attitudes.<sup>17</sup> While oral histories tend to be subjective and determined by the material and social circumstances of the persons who deliver their reflective accounts, they may also shed new light on historical events and bring multiple perspectives into public discourse, in a way akin to interview-based journalism.<sup>18</sup> Here, oral histories can expand the baseline of the researchers' understanding of war-related media consumption patterns, specific reactions to war developments and ways of feeling and acting that have been discontinued or have been evolving due to new technological advancements or social situations.

In the context of the reception of Ukraine war narratives in Poland, it is important to track the memory and knowledge accumulation, attitudes and dispositions that are evolving as a result of over two years of media presentations of the conflict, as well as the personalized characteristics of resilient media use. In this part of the analysis, for ethical reasons, only adult participants were admitted, as detailed interviews about memories of war footage and being a victim of disinformation campaigns might expose minors to the risk of compromising the emotional and mental wellbeing.<sup>19</sup> As a result, for the diagnostic purposes of this project, four areas of memories were identified and each was operationalized through two personal questions to be asked of interviewees:

Memory of initial situation: (1) How did you learn about the war breaking out? (2) What was the dominant terminology or sentiment used by news media at the beginning of the war?

Memory of personal reaction to initial situation: (3) Did you change your routine media consumption patterns in the first few days and weeks of the war? (4) Did you start following or did you abandon any media outlets due to pursuit of war-related information?

Memory of exposure to disinformation: (5) Was any information you had learnt about the war discredited as false, can you give an example? (6) Are you aware of any false information that was disseminated in the early stages of the war?

Memory of habituated or cumulative exposure: (7) Have you ever been in a situation where you withdrew from consuming media because of feelings of alienation? (8) How and how often do you

15. See W. L. Bennett and S. Livingston, eds., *The Disinformation Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

16. See P. Herson, "Disinformation and Misinformation Through the Internet: Findings of an Exploratory Study," *Government Information Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1995): 133–139, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0740-624X\(95\)90052-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0740-624X(95)90052-7).

17. See P. Leavy, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); J. Stokes, *How to Do Media and Cultural Studies* (Sage Publications, 2012).

18. See M. Feldstein, "Kissing Cousins: Journalism and Oral history," *Oral History Review* 31, no. 1 (2004): 1–22.

19. Leavy, *Oral History*.



tend to get the news about war now as opposed to early stages?

The oral histories were collected throughout mid-March and mid-April 2024, almost exactly two years after the full scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The interviewers were 6 MA students of English language and communication major at University of Opole taking their academic research course. The 8 questions (above) were translated into Polish/Ukrainian, as the interviews were to be conducted in the native language of the interviewees and the replies were recorded or noted down (basing on informed consent arrangements). The material obtained from interviewees was then transcribed, processed and translated into English by students using manual literal translation techniques. The MA students represented advanced/proficient level of English (C1-C2) and the transcription was double-checked by the supervisor-author to ensure the content and sentiment were conveyed faithfully. Within one month, 20 oral histories were elicited from 18 Poles and 2 Ukrainians settled in Opole (unacquainted with one another), using convenient sampling based on availability (gender: male—9, female—11). Given the exploratory nature of this diagnostic action, MA students reached mainly young adults (11: in their 20s—9, 30s—2), or older adults who were parents or grandparents to teenagers (9: in their 40s—4, 50s—5).

The overview of the collected insights from oral histories presented below has been co-created by 6 students (interviewers) and the author through close reading of translated transcriptions individually and then collectively in class. A synthetic overview of memory presented below was obtained through induction basing on (1) frequency of mentions of certain aspects, (2) semantic overlaps in variously worded accounts, and (3) the quality of vivid details shared by interviewees. Because of the qualitative nature of oral histories, unique personal memories are included, provided they are representative of self-reflection. Obviously, the exploratory nature of this small-scale diagnostic activity prevents DisInfoResist from generalizing the insights to the whole population but has proved to be useful for follow-up activities.

*Memory of initial situation:* Most people interviewed have had a relatively vivid memory of the way they learnt the war broke out on 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2022. Approximately half were informed by family or friends, another half through a phone notification, from the internet, or received the news about the invasion while watching news on TV or from the radio. The Ukraine war coverage in Poland was ubiquitous, so even people who do not have a habit of following news were aware of the invasion. Participants tend to remember reading flashy and aggressive headlines, as well as seeing televised imagery of destroyed property including ruined civilian buildings. They also have vivid memories of seeing images of Ukrainian refugees in overcrowded trains or at border crossings. Most interviewees report a very negative sentiment that dominated the coverage, especially outrage, anger and fear, expressed with terms: “tragedy”, “war”, “invasion”, “attack”, “crisis”. A strong condemnation of Russia and solidarity with Ukraine prevailed, and new military terminology was introduced to media discourse. Some participants recall the invasion being represented as some kind of historic watershed—a new era in Europe, and the economic prospects reduced from bad to worse. Some younger participants admit to anxiety (using such words as “stress”, “panic”) and wondering who else would be attacked. The negativity was more marked in online portals, where the sense of outrage against Russia was laced with pity on Ukrainians as a nation and a people. Some social media users applied profile modifications and used flag colors to express solidarity.

*Memory of personal reaction to initial situation:* According to most interviewees, it was impossible for them to avoid the intense coverage. Those who had previously consumed much media content reported receiving an increased frequency of updates, and spending more time surfing more channels. However, also those who were not usually interested in news and opinion started reaching out for more news, or consulted a preferred credible source (a news bulletin on TV, a subscribed media channel). They also remember some online spaces that started ridiculing Russia and ultimately also Russians. Social media consumption dominated for younger segment of the participants and day or evening television news for older or working people. Within a few weeks, younger people reported signs of fatigue or anxiety, and the need to reduce the amount of time spent online, mute alerts, unsubscribe from content. Yet, with the war entering another year, there was a growing desensitization to war coverage, the habit of “scrolling over” the war news. A quarter of respondents did not report much change in their media consumption routines at all.

*Memory of exposure to disinformation:* Information overload was reported by some participants. Initially, there was an awareness of sensationalism, profit motive in reporting, and the possibility of spreading misinformation. Many interviewees reported their reliance on trusted media channels or

joining new online groups to get very specific content (e.g., on military technology, help for refugees). While most individuals were aware of propagandas released on both sides, there was no urgent need for fact-checking, although some added the word “regrettably” or “unfortunately” when they looked back on the early days. Others just increased the number of outlets they consulted (especially when in doubt) to make sure they have access to a variety of perspectives. Some report talking with other people and comparing if what they know overlaps with what others are aware of. This indicates that a few people are aware of informational bubbles and of algorithms leading them to more of the same information and diminishing the diversity of news they get. Some interviewees report an awareness of Russian propagandas and being exposed to war euphemisms (e.g., “special operation”). They know that there is a “Russian side of the story” about self-defense, which they do not believe in or approve of. Approximately half have a memory of being informed about something about the attacks, military technology and seizure of territory, or political developments that was later disconfirmed. There is a near universal acknowledgement of Russia’s blame for disinformation tactics and some individuals report still consuming content that continues to expose the false information that is circulated to discredit Ukraine. At the same time, no mentions were made on propaganda actions undertaken by Ukraine, which is an indication that people tend to attribute disinformation only to the opposing side.

*Memory of habituated or cumulative exposure:* While a small group of interviewees report taking short breaks from media so as not to feel anxious, most insist that it is very important to follow the coverage, and that it would be wrong (ignorant, weak) not to. There is an understanding that the less one knows the easier it is to manipulate them and the more susceptible one is to fake news. In the longer perspective, few people report significant changes to their media consumption routines (except for attending to a few more channels, and having higher frequency of updates and conversations). Some interviewees admit that they have more awareness of misinformation now and the mental and emotional investments are mostly back to normal after two years. Most people can also see that some political actors use the ongoing war for political benefit (electoral politics, economic pressure).

In summary, the overview of the material collected via oral histories, even though it is hardly representative of the whole adult population, is useful as a diagnostic tool to trace what aspects of media reception of war are brought to the conversation by ordinary media users. While dealing with personal experiences at the ethnographic level, these oral histories allowed to spotlight the larger issues that can be worked on in the context of resilience. These issues correspond to the four areas of memory mapped above: (1) the tension between credible war reporting and media’s preoccupation with sensational and negative coverage; (2) the role of self-monitoring of emotional reactions and media-generated effects from panic to desensitization; (3) the forging of critical skills of fact-checking and consulting multiple sources, especially in the algorithm-driven environment of social media platforms, (4) the understanding of the nature of hybrid wars with the continuous attempts at misrepresentation and disinformation.

### **3.2. Focus groups to identify youths’ awareness of sensational misrepresentation**

Given the articulations of tension between legitimate and proportional war coverage and sensationalist coverage in the course of analyzing oral memories, subsequently two large focus groups were organized around the topic of clickbait headlines and media sensationalism.<sup>20</sup> Some adult oral history interviewees mentioned that they refrained from following war coverage because they had a sense of the war reporting not presenting it objectively and proportionally, but politicizing it and stirring up panic, sense of threat and feelings of fear and uncertainty. The notion of sensationalist misrepresentation is related to disinformation as well as to emotional and cognitive resilience.<sup>21</sup> As a result it was offered as a relatively self-contained issue that could be addressed with teenagers from partner schools.

In the course of co-creation with the teachers, the two larger focus groups of 15 and 17 persons each, lasting for about 20 minutes each, were organized in early June 2024. Polish secondary school pupils from the partner school (aged 15-16) were asked to collectively explore the broad question “why click?”. This relatively open issue was then refined allow them to reflect on various aspects determining what kinds of news and mediated information tends to be ultimately followed and explored. The focus groups were conducted within DisInfoResist project related to the coverage of Ukraine war, so the

20. Stokes, *How to Do Media and Cultural Studies*.

21. See K. Molek-Kozakowska, “Towards a Pragma-Linguistic Framework for the Study of Sensationalism in News Headlines,” *Discourse & Communication* 7, no. 2 (2013): 173–197, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481312471668>.



focus group participants were instructed to keep that context in their minds. It needs to be noted that each group included a person of Ukrainian origin, as this is the natural arrangement in the majority of Polish schools at this moment with over 1,477 thousand Ukrainians residing in Poland.<sup>22</sup>

Teenagers' comments were noted down in shorthand writing on a whiteboard by 2 focus group moderators and facilitators—MA students of English language and communication major at University of Opole—because it was deemed that recording pupils speaking could prevent them from freely expressing their thoughts. Additionally, two other focus group co-organizers made “field notes” of examples and comments that were voiced, but not noted. The two datasets emerging in the discussion were archived, compared and then analyzed thematically. As a result, teenagers' answers to the question “why click?” could be classified into the following areas:

*Comments pertaining to the characteristics of the person clicking.* Teenagers ventured to specify that their motivations to click include: “being curious about the world”, “wanting to know more, have more knowledge about a given theme”, “having a sense of information deficit and wanting to remedy it”. This points to a relatively rational and motivated media use, especially as for young people who are still in the process of learning how societies work and how to prepare better for being a citizen and voter in the near future.

*Comments pertaining to the characteristics of the situation of media consumption* included “being bored”, “just scrolling and finding a piece of information by chance”, “clicking by accident because it is prominent and attention catching”, “being attracted to or interested in a given topic, person, country”. These comments can be interpreted as showing that teenagers have an understanding that not all routine media consumption patterns are purposeful, deliberate and can be rationalized. Sometimes people click on some information because it is simply accessible, easy to reach, brought to them by the media provider, and made available in an attractive manner.

*Comments pertaining to presenting content as attractive* highlighted the following features: “originality—something not found before or elsewhere”, “the element of surprise—something unexpected, not part of the routine”, “carrying a reference to a known person, a celebrity”, “having a nice picture, e.g., esthetic photo, mysterious image”, “reference to a military expert”, “with slogans, keywords that draw attention”, “references to concrete persons; these could be children or even cute animals”. The reflections and examples indicate that teenagers are aware of the media editors “tricks of the trade” when it comes to packaging even trivial and unsolicited information in an attractive, palatable and seemingly credible way.

*Comments pertaining specifically to the language patterns (headlines)* listed such observations as: “short, energetic, slogan-like phrases”, “not specific, not much revealed, general information that requires clicking to find out the details”, “something that is happening right now”, “suggesting a twist in the war, a turning point in a longer process”, “emotional words—could be anger or outrage, could be joy or pride”, “a lot of negative, strong, fear-inspiring words or phrases”, “exclamation points and capital letters”. These specific observations indicate that when pressed to identify the linguistic mechanics and rhetorical maneuvers in clickbait, the Polish teenagers can spot many instances.

It is worth noting that in the large focus groups, the questions and answers were framed in non-personal ways, so that the teenage participants could share their observations, but were not pressed to reveal their personal experiences. However, when the focus group discussion subsided, the facilitators attempted to boost it by reversing the question, namely by asking “what would make you avoid clicking?”. The answers included very open and personal responses that touched on “boring topics”, “badly phrased, incomprehensible titles”, “clearly false or exaggerated information or gossip”, “a topical issue that has been revisited over and over again to the point of fatigue”, “a clichéd teaser—like ‘check this out’ that clearly wants people to jump on it”, “a place that first requires accepting cookies or registering for some kind of subscription”. This type of reverse-engineered reflection may be indicative of some teenagers' capacity for a relatively skillful self-monitoring when it comes to avoiding certain information. However, a focus group discussion may only reveal what the participants know and declare they do, not their actual behavior. Last but not least, one person's voicing an opinion or an insight in the focus group discussion cannot be seen as representative of the whole group, let alone a cohort.

---

22. See Główny Urząd Statystyczny (Polish Central Statistical Office), *Ukrainians in Poland. Data for January 2024*. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.gov.pl/attachment/831fe2c9-ecbc-4c06-a9d5-7380e82457ea&ved=2ahUKEwiKIsWn7N2JAXd-wlHHSdVIZwQFnoECCsQAQ&usq=AOvVaw2DIYhxrzP9KFpm4IIS4939>.

DisInfoResist's thematic analysis of focus group discussions also revealed certain blind spots.<sup>23</sup> For example, what the teens did not seem to be aware of is how the algorithmic design of social media platforms and online portals determines their exposure to certain recurrent information. They largely missed the fact that, by clicking cookies, accepting terms of use, and allowing access to personal data, the users are training the algorithm to continue suggesting certain material that might be preferable and thus sealing off other important or interesting content. In fact, the facilitators left the teenagers with an additional task: to be attentive if—given that their smartphones are capable of picking up their conversations—they would get an increased number of suggestions to access political news or war-related information in the following days.

### 3.3. Narrative auto-ethnographies mapping media induced war-related attitudes

Another diagnostic action in the DisInfoResist project was to consult with the school history and civics teachers to establish how much Polish teenagers know about the Russian-Ukrainian war and if any of this information is false, as well as where they get that information from, and how they form their opinions and judgments about the conflict participants. This was done by asking pupils to provide narrative auto-ethnographies, in order to elicit more information from a larger cohort. With that, DisInfoResist team could better diagnose the general level of awareness of various mechanics of propagation of disinformation and insidious media influence. The teachers from the partner school selected a cohort of secondary school first-graders (15-16-year-olds) due to their being relatively vulnerable to media influence, and to their proneness to emotional volatility in some cases. Instead of a questionnaire or a structured interview, students were given 40 minutes of lesson time to express themselves in writing through a narrative. The instruction was consulted with teachers and included six prompts, asking teenagers to share on:

- any associations or images of the war starting or any memorable media coverage (with the aim here being to set the mood for auto-ethnographic detail);
- their preferred sources of information about the war and the way they customarily made use of them (with the aim being to establish whether the pupils used the (social) media, the family/friends or the school as their dominant sources, and if news exposure was deliberate or occurred incidentally as a by-product of other activities);<sup>24</sup>
- any changes to the way they approached media coverage since the war started (in order to check if the pupils took any precautions against possible disinformation campaigns that might have been launched as part of hybrid war);<sup>25</sup>
- reactions and feelings they had in relation to the way the war developments were reported at the beginning and now (to spark reflection about media-induced emotions may have been driving their reactions);<sup>26</sup>
- the attitudes with respect to the participants in the conflict, primarily Ukraine/Ukrainians and Russia/Russians (to elicit specific sentiments, attributions and salient representations);<sup>27</sup>
- expressing their expectations for the future (with the aim being to bring closure to their reflections, or introduce additional nuances or examples).

The narratives were anonymized; the pupils were allowed to write as much or as little as they preferred, but they were incentivized to be open about their opinions. The teachers ensured that the instruction was given in a language that teenagers understood and offered additional assistance during the writing session. It was made clear that pupils should not treat writing the narrative as "schoolwork". The format of the unstructured first-person narrative was chosen by the school as a preferred form of elicitation because it was deemed as able to bring a broad spectrum of reflections, especially from shy

23. Stokes, *How to Do Media and Cultural Studies*.

24. Cf. S. Schäfer, "Incidental News Exposure in a Digital Media Environment: A Scoping Review of Recent Research," *Annals of the International Communication Association* 47, no. 2 (2023): 242–260.

25. Cf. G. Pennycook and D. G. Rand, "The Psychology of Fake News," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 25, no. 5 (2021): 388–402, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2021.02.007>.

26. Cf. M. Mousoulidou, L. Taxitari, and A. Christodoulou, "Social Media News Headlines and Their Influence on Well-being: Emotional States, Emotion Regulation, and Resilience," *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education* 14, no. 6 (2024): 1647–1665.

27. Cf. E. Kubin and C. von Sikorski, "The Role of (Social) Media in Political Polarization: A Systematic Review," *Annals of International Communication Association* 45, no. 3 (2021): 188–206.





or foreign students (including Ukrainians).

Over the course of May and June 2024, the DisInfoResist team (6 MA students and the author) processed 87 (25+20+24+18) pupils' narratives and coded and classified the data. Each narrative was analyzed by several individuals and prominent keywords, patterns of expression and themes were identified. A list of pupils' reflections and evaluations was compiled and recurrent content categories, themes or labels were grouped and hierarchized. Ultimately, the analysts were able to sort out some patterns emerging from the data and produce more or less neat thematic categorizations, which they were also able to generalize and represent numerically and visually.

Classifying the preferred sources of war news (prompt 2) was not very challenging, as pupils admitted to drawing on both people (family members and friends, or teachers and experts) and media (established outlets or internet or social media platforms). However, it was harder to establish the level of trust or criticality that the teenagers exerted in approaching these sources (cf. prompt 3). The data related to expressions of individual reactions, feelings and evaluations (prompts 4 and 5) was also very diverse and unstructured, so it was important to classify and reclassify different keywords in order to establish and validate characteristic patterns. However, the multiple close readings, the discussions during two joint coding sessions and the possibility to compare and elaborate on selected interpretations allowed for a relatively streamlined assessment of teenage media literacy and resilience and offered ideas for the intervention. The results regarding the four prompts are listed below:

*Sources of information.* Family and friends are popular sources of information that is relatively easy for teenagers to reach out to, but these individuals have partial knowledge, subjective opinions and may not be as well informed about details as experts. Ideally, the teenagers should have access to a variety of sources of information, in order to be able to compare information, assess credibility and identify biases. They should remember that the author/institution that releases information may have vested interests in promoting some issues (e.g., financial benefits, fame and recognition).

*Media usage patterns.* Some young people express concern about false information and are becoming more careful and scrupulous in examining news. Some also notice that various news media outlets are presenting contradictory information—either because they report news before facts are confirmed, or because they have a political agenda. The teenagers are aware that media outlets may favor clickbait and sensation over fact and verification, so it is important to refrain from making final judgments. It would not be wise to accept the information received in an “incidental” way (a random broadcast, odd notification, casual conversation) at face value; the widespread access to the internet means that a lot of unverified information is reposted, publicized and propagated.

*Feelings and reactions.* High levels of stress are related to the understanding of brutality and destruction brought by the war, as well as its possible long-term consequences for Europe. The sense of threat is enhanced by the feelings of confusion and uncertainty in relation to disinformation, the lack of credibility and contradictory accounts or outlooks for the future. Nevertheless, some young people do continue to explore war coverage despite adverse reactions, in order to gain a better understanding of causes and consequences of war, and to prepare for active citizenship. Hopes for peace and resolution are high because they allow teenagers to engage in positive values and constructive attitudes.

*Evaluating the conflict participants.* Political and military conflicts are accompanied by high emotional investments, polarized debates and hate speech. It is important for young people not to simplify the complexities and lump together the country's political regime, its military and the civil population (in case of Russia), especially when the context is crucial to the understanding of political decisions. Making subtle distinctions between refugees, migrants, citizens, military actors, political decision-makers and the nation state (in case of Ukraine/Ukrainians) also allows for a more informed and resilient approach to the conflict.

The narratives were rich in content and detail, but they need to be filtered down to the essential points that could be used as bases for intervention design. The points that seemed most relevant to DisInfoResist's aim of resilience building include the following observations: (1) avoiding contact with war-related news sources may be counterproductive, as having some orientation about current developments is helpful in assessing credibility of sources and reliability of content; (2) it is important not to share or promote dubious posts; instead, it is worth doing some double-checking across credible sources to verify information rather than to accept it at face value; (3) experiencing strong negative emotions inhibits rationality and proportion, so without a coping strategy of incorporating the negative experience into meaningful narratives, one can be pushed into panic or mental health crisis; (4) it is important not to rush to judgment, blaming and scapegoating, as this can escalate into hate speech.

#### 4. Piloting remedial actions through workshops and interventions

To design and perform adequate interventions with teenagers, the DisInfoResist team not only had to acquire a bottom-up understanding of a variety of teenage media practices in the context of Russian-Ukrainian conflict coverage, but also had to be trained to understand war-related disinformation mechanisms themselves in a structured way. To that end the MA students were given a theoretical overview and a practical workshop developed by an expert researcher of fake news.<sup>28</sup> Also, to be able to competently verify whether a piece of news on the war in Ukraine is false, the team consulted a large dataset of fake news in various languages and across various media related to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict that was compiled by the experts and activists of VoxUkraine. The reports, lists of fake narratives and media sources that are pushing them are available online as *Propaganda Diary*<sup>29</sup> and can be used both for routine fact-checking, and for more in-depth understanding of mechanics of disinformation campaigns. That is why, by using this resource, DisInfoResist analyze and assess whether any fake news could be found in teenagers' narrative auto-ethnographies and to expose them in an intervention.

One example of such issue that was addressed in the intervention was the notion of Ukrainian separate national identity,<sup>30</sup> which was taken up by the Ukrainian-born DisInfoResist student participant and the school history teacher. The overview of Ukrainian history that is largely missing from Polish curriculum, presented from the point of view of a Ukrainian could make a strong case for the understanding why Ukrainians are not a Russian tribe, why they are resisting the Russian invasion, and why giving up territory and making peace on Russian terms is not acceptable to many Ukrainians.

For most teenagers taking part in a focus group discussion analyzing media tricks used to draw attention and sensationalize the coverage, or putting in some effort to write an auto-ethnographic narrative with self-reflections on their own emotions, habits and media consumption practices must have been an opportunity to confront a stressful topic and compare different adaptive pathways that they could use to come to terms with an alienating and anxiety-ridden topic. Also on the basis of the insights drawn from the analysis of oral histories, focus groups and narratives (found in the concluding paragraphs of sections 3.1., 3.2. and 3.3.), it was possible to get an overview of the typical media reception patterns and to assess young people's needs and competence gaps. Thanks to the involvement of school teachers it was possible to develop and pilot some interventions aimed to strengthen critical literacy, resilient media consumption and language awareness. The intervention was piloted for two groups of approximately 20 pupils in a partner school in June 2024. The activities in a 90-minute session for each group included:

- a practical workshop where participants would identify the linguistic mechanisms through which media sensationalized the war coverage, based on a corpus of authentic headlines from online versions of two Polish tabloids collected in CORECON research project;
- a Kahoot quiz to check the level of teens' ability to differentiate between fake news and true information related to the war, with subsequent discussion on the cases that were problematic and with references to *Propaganda Diary* repository;
- an online role-playing game developed by media education specialists that shows how disinformation campaigns tend to be organized. The player is advised by a bot on the subsequent steps how to impersonate, misinform, and troll other media users—this reveals some of the traps that media users are likely to fall into when disinformation campaigns are coordinated by malicious agents. The game is available in multiple languages <https://www.getbadnews.com/books/polish/>;
- a tailor-made board game that teaches responsible media use under critical circumstances by awarding points to players with dispositions to media literacy, fact-checking and civic engagement and eliminating players that chose to use media only for entertainment.

The DisInfoResist team that conducted the interventions in cooperation with the school teachers noted high engagement and willingness to discuss the topic on the part of the pupils. The evaluation of the piloted intervention is pending.

28. See E. Ilis, "Researching Fake News: Understanding the Challenge," presentation given at the fake news workshop at the University of Opole, Opole, PL, April 8, 2024, <https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon/conferences-workshops/>.

29. See "Propaganda Diary," Vox Ukraine, accessed from February 2022 to June 2024, <https://russiandisinfo.voxukraine.org/en>.

30. Pavlova et al., "The War Between Ukraine and Russia," 327–349.



## 5. Conclusion

This paper reported on the design and results of implementation of a series of diagnostic studies and follow-up interventions devoted to building up resilience against disinformation regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The DisInfoResist project was conducted in early 2024 and targeted primarily Polish teenagers in partner schools. It assumed that in order to propose a series of tailored actions, a thorough diagnosis of needs and competence gaps should be undertaken first. Given the ongoing informational (hybrid) war, adequate resilience-enhancing interventions—workshops, games, multimodal presentations—need to be based on localized data. The insights, syntheses and inputs into intervention scenarios in DisInfoResist were collected through a thematic analysis of 20 oral histories, 2 focus group sessions, and 87 narrative auto-ethnographies. The subsequent piloted interventions addressed to a group of Polish secondary school students represented a way to allow them to form adaptive pathways in an alienating context of war media coverage and boost their resilience against war-related disinformation. The implemented pilot allowed teenagers to practice their critical media literacy competences via a variety of specifically tailored activities related to critical language awareness, responding to fake news, overcoming disengagement, recognizing sensationalist media practices and algorithmic patterns.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to evaluate the short-term and long-term learning outcomes of these interventions, it is worth sharing the insights from the incremental process of developing the bases for tailored media literacy interventions in a localized setting, in a co-creative manner with partner schools, and in alignment with current academic knowledge in the field of resilience. Following the evaluation and upscaling of the DisInfoResist project, broader recommendations could be proposed, even though it is clear that in the evolving media scape of war reporting there are multiple adaptive pathways to resilience against disinformation.

**Acknowledgement:** This work was partly funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania – Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

The collaboration with partner schools was supported by European Union through FORTHEM European University Alliance – Project number 101089463 in ERASMUS-EDU-2022-EUR-UNIV-1, "Work Package 10 Labs and Co-creation", within *Resilience, Life Quality and Demographic Change Lab's* student-driven project *DisInfoResist 2024* coordinated at University of Opole, Poland.

Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders, who cannot be held responsible for them.

Special thanks go to UO MA students: Julia Wnuk-Lipińska (student coordinator of DisInfoResist), Dominika Płaczek, Bozhena Korhunyuk, Paweł Kuderewicz, Wojciech Polański, Samuel Strąk, ULBS PhD student Ecaterina Ilis; partners: LO przy Zespole Szkół im Jana Kilińskiego, Krapkowice, woj. opolskie (Public Secondary School in Krapkowice, Opolskie region), and VoxUkraine for *Propaganda Diary*.

## Bibliography

- Bennett, W. L., and S. Livingston, eds. *The Disinformation Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- De Andrade Gama, I., and W. Mozgin. "Media Literacy and Its Role in Countering Hybrid Warfare (The Case of Ukraine)." *Future Human Image* 15 (2021): 4–13. <https://doi.org/10.29202/fhi/15/1>.
- Di Domenico, G., J. Sit, A. Ishizaka et al. "Fake News, Social Media and Marketing: A Systematic Review." *Journal of Business Research* 124 (2021): 329–341. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.11.037>.
- Feldstein, M. "Kissing Cousins: Journalism and Oral History." *Oral History Review* 31, no. 1 (2004): 1–22.
- Fletcher, D., and M. Sarkar. "Mental Fortitude Training: An Evidence-Based Approach to Developing Psychological Resilience for Sustained Success." *Journal of Sport Psychology In Action* 7, no. 3 (2016): 135–157.
- Guess, A. "A Digital Media Literacy Intervention Increases Discernment Between Mainstream and False News in the United States and India." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 27 (2020): 15536–15545.
- Hernon, P. "Disinformation and Misinformation Through the Internet: Findings of an Exploratory Study." *Government Information Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1995): 133–139. [75](https://doi.org/10.1016/0740-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

624X(95)90052-7.

- IJntema, R. C., W. B. Schaufeli, and Y. D. Burger. "Resilience Mechanisms at Work: The Psychological Immunity-Psychological Elasticity (PI-PE) Model of Psychological Resilience." *Current Psychology* 42 (2023): 4719–4731. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01813-5>.
- Ilis, E. "Researching Fake News: Understanding the Challenge." Presentation Given At The Fake News Workshop At The University Of Opole, Opole, PL, April 8, 2024. <https://grants.ulbsibiu.ro/corecon/conferences-workshops/>.
- Kot, S., A. Mozolevska, O. Polishchuk et al. "The Discursive Power of Digital Popular Art During the Russo-Ukrainian War: Re/Shaping Visual Narratives." *Arts* 13, no. 1 (2024): 38. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts13010038>.
- Kubin, E., and C. Von Sikorski. "The Role of (Social) Media in Political Polarization: A Systematic Review." *Annals of International Communication Association* 45, no. 3 (2021): 188–206.
- Leavy, P. *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Maclean, K., M. Cuthill, and H. Ross. "Six Attributes of Social Resilience." *Journal Of Environmental Planning And Management* 57, no. 1 (2014): 144–156.
- Malecki, W. P., H. Bilandzic, and P. Sorokowski. "Media Experiences During the Ukraine War and Their Relationships with Distress, Anxiety and Resilience." *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 165 (2023): 273–281.
- Molek-Kozakowska, K. "Towards A Pragma-Linguistic Framework for the Study of Sensationalism in News Headlines." *Discourse & Communication* 7, no. 2 (2013): 173–197. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481312471668>.
- Mousoulidou, M., L. Taxitari, and A. Christodoulou. "Social Media News Headlines and Their Influence on Well-Being: Emotional States, Emotion Regulation, and Resilience." *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education* 14, no. 6 (2024): 1647–1665.
- Neimeyer, R. A. "Re-Storying Loss: Fostering Growth in The Post-Traumatic Narrative." In *Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and Practice*, edited by L. G. Calhoun and R. G. Tedeschi. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006.
- Pavlova, O., I. Kuchynska, V. Gorbalski et al. "The War Between Ukraine and Russia as a Historical and Civilizational Aspect." *Trames* 27, no. 4 (2023): 327–349. <https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2023.4.01>.
- Pennycook, G., and D. G. Rand. "The Psychology of Fake News." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 25, no. 5 (2021): 388–402.
- Rutter, M. "Resilience as a Dynamic Concept." *Development and Psychopathology* 24, no. 2 (2012): 335–344.
- Schäfer, S. "Incidental News Exposure in a Digital Media Environment: A Scoping Review of Recent Research." *Annals of the International Communication Association* 47, no. 2 (2023): 242–260.
- Stokes, J. *How to Do Media and Cultural Studies*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2012.
- Simin Maria Terian. "What Is Fake News: A New Definition." *Transilvania*, no. 11–12 (2021): 112–120.
- Tymoshchuk, N. M. "Euphemisms in Modern Political Discourse: Joseph Biden's Speeches in the War in Ukraine." *Alfred Nobel University Journal Of Philology* 26, no. 2 (2023): 210–224. <https://doi.org/10.32342/2523-4463-2023-2-26/2-13>.
- Van Dijk, T. "Discourse and Manipulation." *Discourse And Society* 17, no. 3 (2006): 359–383.
- Vox Ukraine. "Propaganda Diary." Accessed from February 2022 to June 2024. <https://russiandisinfo.voxukraine.org/en>.
- Wilson, T. D. *Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2011.
- Zhang, X., and A. A. Ghorbani. "An Overview of Online Fake News: Characterization, Detection, and Discussion." *Information Processing and Management* 57, no. 2 (2020): 102025.



# Conflict Representations: Analyzing the Polarization of Men's and Women's Images in Romanian Media Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian War

Denisa-Maria BÂLC & Iulia-Maria TICĂRĂU

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Faculty of Letters and Arts

Corresponding author emails: [denisa.fratean@ulbsibiu.ro](mailto:denisa.fratean@ulbsibiu.ro), [iulia.deaconu@ulbsibiu.ro](mailto:iulia.deaconu@ulbsibiu.ro)

---

## Conflict Representations: Analyzing the Polarization of Men's and Women's Images in Romanian Media Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian War

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to analyze according to what criteria the image of woman is reflected in the news regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war in the Romanian mass media using content analysis, critical discourse analysis and imagology as research methods. The starting point of our research is the compilation of a representative corpus of 750 news texts published in 2022, from which we will analyze those containing keywords referring to the female gender in the title in order to highlight the approach used in the media discourse to frame the image of women during military conflicts. In our analysis we will consider three main directions: (1) a representation of the image of the woman using the thematic classification and the concepts of front line, respectively homefront, (2) a polarization of the image of the woman compared to the image of the man, and (3) a panorama of the way in which the two belligerent states of Ukraine and Russia are reflected in the Romanian press from an ethnic and a gender outlook.

**Keywords:** women, Russian-Ukrainian conflict, image, polarization, Critical Discourse Analysis

**Citation suggestion:** Bâlc, Denisa-Maria and Iulia-Maria Ticăreău. "Conflict Representations: Analyzing the Polarization of Men's and Women's Images in Romanian Media Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian War." *Transilvania*, no. 9 (2024): 77-83.  
<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2024.09.08>.

---



## Preliminaries

Military conflicts have a major impact locally and also globally through the economic, political and social changes they cause. Since 24 February 2022, with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia's troops, society has entered a phase of uncertainty and fear, fueled by the media, which is an important factor in the generation and distribution of information. While men are active pillars of the military conflict, women, less represented in the media discourse, also experience decisive impacts of the conflicts, as Lindsey German suggests:

"War is a brutal and forceful factor in bringing about social change. Wars have been and are a major source of danger and dislocation, which impacts disproportionately on women. But they can also mark a breakdown of traditional values and allow women more freedom, ushering in changes in their lives."<sup>1</sup>

All these aspects of the representation of the conflict and its effect on the population are also reflected

---

1. Lindsey German, *How a Century of War Changed the Lives of Women* (London: PlutoPress, 2013), 201.

in the Romanian journalistic media, but the aim of this article is to focus in particular on the various images of women generated by the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in relation to the male-centric imaginary.

The aim of this study is to analyze the way in which women are described in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, problematizing the differences in participant representation in terms of ethnicity and gender. By comparing the political, military and social discourse, we focus on the images of women and men presented in the media discourse in order to identify a hegemonic relationship at the news level, and in order to emphasize that, regardless of the social status (being politicians, entrepreneurs, campaigners, activists, volunteers even refugees establishing new lives for themselves and their children), women are not “passive” in military conflicts. As research methods we use thematic analysis, critical discourse analysis and imagology. Through the thematic analysis, we sought to highlight the types of news about women in the corpus compiled to determine the predominant female image by referring to the role played in the war. Simultaneously with this approach, we used critical discourse analysis, more precisely, Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive theory applied at the macro textual level, with an emphasis on how social dominance and inequality are promulgated through discourse. This research is also sustained by imagology, which is used to analyze linguistically constructed images only. We apply them to a corpus of 750 news items published between 24 February 2022 and 31 December 2022 in Romania’s mainstream channels: hotnews.ro, stirileprotv.ro, libertatea.ro, stiripesurse.ro, romaniatv.net and digi24.ro. They are classified by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism as the most accessed by Romanians since the beginning of the conflict.<sup>2</sup> An advanced search based on relevance and keywords was used to select the news texts that covered women. From the corpus of 750 news items collected, we found 76 news items containing keywords in the title referring to the female gender.

Thematically, we assigned the 76 news items into four categories: political, military, social and various news, with these four being the only categories found in the corpus analyzed. According to John Hartley, the first three categories fall into the class of hard news, which “are characterized by conflict and violence”<sup>3</sup>, and the last one represents category belongs to the category of soft news, referred to in the critical literature as world news. Political news items (n=9) includes information about women in domestic and foreign policy, such as Maia Sandu, Diana Șoșoacă, Simona Cojocaru, Giorgia Meloni, Irina Vereșciuk, Emine Džaparova and Maria Zaharova, based on their statements on the conflict situation in Ukraine. Military news (n=20) focuses on three main areas: women’s direct participation on the battlefield, the representation of women as victims of war, and women’s testimonies and statements on the military conflict. The third category, the most numerous, is social news (n=25), covering topics such as migration, volunteering, sexual assault, livelihoods and motherhood. The last category is based on a heterogeneous perspective on celebrities that indirectly influences how conflict is perceived by civilians.

### **I. Images of women in relation to the notion of the front**

Analysing the image of women in the four thematic categories presented above, we can extend the classification into two major classes, home front women and front line women, according to the theory set out by Susan R. Grayzel in the book *Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War*, and based on the criterion of women’s direct or indirect participation in the conflict. The home front falls into the soft news category, being the most representative in the corpus analyzed, while the front line is included in the hard news category, being less represented. “The term home front began to be used in English during World War I, intensifying the use of the war front structure as intrinsically masculine and the term home front as exclusively feminine.”<sup>4</sup> This “idea of separate fronts helped to maintain the status quo of gender identities and enabled the reinterpretation of popular assumption about the appropriate roles of men and women during the war without threatening the social order”<sup>5</sup>, but nowadays this distinction is realized through classification is changed by the active presence of women on both sides, changing the stereotypical view that women have mainly a passive role in military conflicts. The two classes mentioned above can

2. See <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024/romania>.

3. John Hartley, *Discursul știrilor*, translated by Monica Mitarcă (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 47.

4. Susan R. Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 11.

5. *Ibid.*, 11.



in turn be divided into several subcategories<sup>6</sup> in the news analyzed as summarized here for what we call *Images of women in the corpus*: **Home front women**: Activist/ Voices of change; Leadership role; Victim; Flesh and blood (mother/ daughter/ wife); Business owner; Humanitarian; Sexualized woman; **Front line women**: Combatant; Military nurse; Victim; Sexualized woman.

Thus, the *front line* women are reflected in the four representations: **combatant, military nurse, victim**, and **sexualized woman**. The first one presents women on the battlefield, in news stories such as "The Ukrainian army now has 38,000 women / How many of them are fighting on the front line against the Russian soldiers"<sup>7</sup> (*hotnews.ro*) or "Almost 40,000 women have joined the Ukrainian Army. How many are fighting on the front line" (*stirileprotv.ro*), or women in senior positions in the army, "Men called up for conscription in Dagestan refuse to go to war and argue with a female recruiting officer: *You go and fight!*" (*libertatea.ro*). The second representation outlines a woman directly involved in the war by providing medical aid to the wounded, an image perpetuated over time by the virtues she embodies: "Paramedic Yulia Paievskia, liberated from the hands of the Russian forces" (*libertatea.ro*), and the third and most frequent representation is that of the victim, murdered, mutilated and imprisoned, with women whose testimonies, through the intensity of the emotions conveyed, are intended to condemn the war: "Daria Kurdel, Ukrainian sports dance champion, was killed in the Russian bombing of the town of Krivoi Rog" (*libertatea.ro*), "Oksana, a Ukrainian nurse who lost her legs in an explosion, honoured by Volodimir Zelenski. *God let me live for my children*" (*libertatea.ro*), "A woman was a captive in the hell of Azovstal, passed through the hands of the Russians, and now she has given birth to a baby girl" (*stiripesurse.ro*). The last category is represented by women seen as a sexual object, which reinforces the gendered stereotype since women on the front are represented through references to their looks and not skills: "A drop of beauty in a sea of blood – Ukrainian female soldiers are all the rage on the internet" (*stiripesurse.ro*). The coverage presents women combatants on the front as few (not radically challenging the gendered distinction), as nurses caring for soldiers (reinforcing the caring role of women) and as victims (easy targets). Editors represent women this way in order to strengthen the social norms and keep the social order regarding the gendered barriers. The power relations between the social classes represented at the level of the news in the analyzed corpus can also be highlighted through the CDA categories, which "focuses on studying the ways in which power, abuse and inequality are instituted, reproduced and legitimized through discourse, in sociopolitical contexts," through the use, in this study, especially of passive constructions, of participial adjectives and directive acts that emphasize the superiority of the male over the female in military conflicts: *was killed, liberated, You go and fight!*

The second category, the *home front* women, more numerous than the *front line* women, can also be divided into several subcategories. The first subcategory is the **activist woman, or the voice of change**, campaigning for an end to the war, political equity and support for Ukraine: "EXCLUSIVE. The author of the novel 'The Tattooist of Auschwitz' talks about the war in Ukraine: *It makes me angry that history repeats itself and we allow one man to do so much harm*" (*libertatea.ro*). The image of the **leader and opinion-maker woman** also appears: "Zaharova asks Romania to publicly admit sending arms to Kiev: "From now on it's clear what 'humanitarian' aid means" (*libertatea.ro*), at the antipode to that of a psychological and physical **victim** of sexual aggression caused by forced migration and the presence of Russian soldiers in Ukraine: "Father Agaton Oprișan, accused of sexually assaulting a Ukrainian woman, defends himself: he touched her *only as a father*" (*stirileprotv.ro*), "Three Russian soldiers who raped a mother and her daughter in Ukraine, beaten with chairs by their own comrades and superiors" (*stirileprotv.ro*). It is also representative the image of the woman as a **mother**, which we analyzed through the classification made by Mihai S. Rusu in the study "Fascist Femininities: Models of Womanhood in the Romanian National Legionary State": *birth-giving motherhood, nurturing motherhood, nourishing motherhood* and *social motherhood*.

Applied to the articles identified in the Romanian media reporting on the Russian-Ukrainian war, it can be seen that the image of the woman as a mother falls only into the category of *social motherhood*, which "covers those messages encouraging women to extend their maternal instinct beyond the socio-biological microcosm of the family to exert their mothering care over the vulnerable categories

6. These subcategories were labeled by the authors in the process of thematic analysis.

7. News' titles were translated from Romanian into English by the authors.

of the wider society.”<sup>8</sup> This subcategory is represented in news stories such as “All mothers in Russia hate Putin. A few days after saying this, a woman found out that her son died in Ukraine” (digi24.ro). The other categories are not in our corpus, but there is another category which is not mentioned in Mihai S. Rusu’s classification, namely *a cry for help motherhood*: “A mother in Russia saw her son, a soldier captured by the Ukrainian army, on TV: Which door should I knock on to take my child home?” (libertatea.ro). This category also includes the daughter, often associated with the image of the victim, and the wife, presented as a moral and emotional support for the family.

The news reports presenting the image of **women entrepreneurs** adapting to the new social conditions following migration by opening small businesses, especially in the service sector, are also suggestive at the corpus level: “Housewives from Ukraine started small businesses with traditional food in Romania. Let’s see what is the price of the food” (*stirileprotv.ro*) or that of the **humanitarian** who offers support and counselling to refugees, paying even with her own life: “Psychologist from Ukraine who offers free therapy to autistic refugee children: How can I help other people if I just sit and cry?” (*libertatea.ro*). The same category encompasses the women who gives financial support to migrants in material need: “Fuego’s ex-girlfriend, now a PNL sub-prefect, donates her salary to Ukrainian refugees” (*stiripesurse.ro*), as well as a **sexual object**, valorized by emphasizing provocative or ironized physical beauty, an image meant to contrast with the horrors of war: “Russian girls run out of Botox as a result of war” (*stiripesurse.ro*).

## II. The woman-man relation

Regarding the woman-man relationship, the news reports under discussion highlight that “women are constituted, variously, as mirrors to male war-making (a kind of civic cheerleader) or as a collective ‘other’, embodying the softer values and virtues out of place within, and subversive of, *realpolitik*,”<sup>9</sup> a stereotype that persists to this day in both the media discourse and the literary discourse to which Jean Bethke Elshtain refers. This stereotype influences public perception of the roles played by women and men in war, highlighting the fact that women are vulnerable and substantially emotionally affected by the conflict. Comparing the images of the two genders represented in the media, the image of the male gender is thematically categorized in the 76 news stories identified with women-related keywords as follows:

*Images of men in the corpus according to the thematic category of the news*

Thematic category	Categories	Sub-categories
Political news	Politician	Presidents, Romanian politicians, Foreign politicians
Military news	Soldier	Ukrainian soldiers Russian soldiers
Social news	Flesh and blood	Father, Son ,Husband, Other relatives
	Sexual aggressors	Russian aggressor, Ukrainian aggressor, Romanian aggressor
	Civilian	Possible war recruit, Philanthropist, Business owner

The political news shows the image of the politician represented by heads of state, ministers, prime ministers and other categories related to the political world. Most news stories are about Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin, presented in opposition.<sup>10</sup> Zelensky is portrayed as a symbol of empathy to the people through his active presence on the frontline, his messages of encouragement to the Ukrainian people and his calls for an end to the war: “President Zelenski is also on the battlefield, fighting together with his country’s military and unwilling to surrender to the dreaded Russian enemy.” (“The

8. Mihai S. Rusu, “Fascist Femininities: Models of Womanhood in the Romanian National Legionary State,” *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, no. 42 (2020): 25.

9. Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Reflections on War and Political Discourse: Realism, Just War, and Feminism in a Nuclear Age,” *Political Theory* 13, no. 1 (1985): 42.

10. Our data confirm the representations that dominate other outlets. See: Richard Wood, *Psychoanalytic Reflections on Vladimir Putin. The Cost of Malignant Leadership* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022); Geoffrey Robertson, *The Trial of Vladimir Putin* (Biteback Publishing, 2024); Andrew L. Urban, Chris McLeod, *Zelensky: The Unlikely Ukrainian Hero Who Defied Putin and United the World* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2022); Lisa Rogak, Daisy Gibbons, *Volodymyr Zelensky – In His Own Words* (New York: Pegasus Book, 2022).





wife of Ukraine's vice-president has gone to war. Her gesture made world headlines!" – romaniatv.net). Compared to the Ukrainian president, Vladimir Putin is described in the women-related reporting as a tyrant, a ruthless leader and a possible enemy for other countries not directly involved in the war. For example, in "Giorgia Meloni, the elected head of the future Italian government, said on Friday that Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian regions` has no legal or political value` and would show that Vladimir Putin `threatens` European security [...]" ("Giorgia Meloni: Putin once again demonstrates his neo-imperialist vision of the Soviet character threatening Europe's security" – *digi24.ro*). Regarding military news, one can observe a polarization of the image of the soldier, dichotomously presented depending on nationality. Thus, the image of Russian soldiers is the same as that of ruthless invaders who kill in cold blood: "Child executed by Russian soldiers in front of his mother. They pretended to let them go and even waved at them. Then they opened fire" (*digi24.ro*), or who are victims of revenge: "Back on the case of the grandmother with the poisoned cakes for the Russian soldiers. Ukraine's secret service confirms other cases" (*romaniatv.net*). In contrast, the Ukrainian soldiers are portrayed as defenders who are willing to sacrifice for the people: "His wife, on the other hand, who went to Portugal with their young child, keeps asking him: `Maybe you could come somehow?` To which he replies: `How could I come? Even if all the borders were open, I couldn't go because I wouldn't be able to look the boys who are fighting, my comrades, in the eye`" ("Life in Kyiv after six months of war. A young woman's testimony: `Every time I leave the house carrying three essential things`" – *digi24.ro*). The social theme can be divided into news about the image of the man in the family environment, the aggressor and civilians. The *flesh and blood* category includes news about fathers, husbands, sons and close relatives directly affected by the war through family dramas suffered by both Russians and Ukrainians. Although the image of motherhood is frequently associated in the media discourse with emotion, this is also seen in news stories that also focus on fatherhood: "Liza's father, Artem Dmytriev, remained silent, tears falling down his face." ("`Evil cannot win: Killed by a Russian missile, Liza was buried in the town of Vinnytsia`" – *stirileprotv.ro*). The image of the son focuses on three aspects: victim, moral support and means of propaganda, while the image of the husband is doubled by that of the politician or soldier. The sex offender is mentioned in a number of news reports, with representatives from multiple camps: Russian, Ukrainian and even Romanian aggressors. In all three cases, the victims are Ukrainian women, abused both in their own country and in the countries to which they migrated: "Father Agaton Oprișan, accused of sexually assaulting a Ukrainian woman, defends himself: he touched her `only as a father`" (*stirileprotv.ro*), "Castrated men, raped women and abused children: How Russian soldiers terrorize Ukrainians. `This is just the tip of the iceberg`" (*digi24.ro*).

Last but not least, civilians are presented as future conscripts who refuse to go to war, "Men called up for conscription in Dagestan refuse to go to war and argue with a female recruiting officer: `You go and fight!`" (*libertatea.ro*), philanthropists, "Who is Princess Diana's ex-boyfriend who now helps rescue Ukrainian refugees" (*stirileprotv.ro*) and entrepreneurs. Comparing the image of women and men in the Romanian media, one can see that "the news is a reflection, in short, of our gendered society, and thus naturally frames men and women within the boundaries of societal gender stereotypes."<sup>11</sup> These stereotypes are shaped in particular by the *aggressor* (male) – *victim* (female) polarization in the two perspectives, military and social. From the military perspective, there is a predominance of the *strong* - *weak* opposition, and many news reports present women as victims of war and exploitation, as opposed to men, who are predominantly associated with the brave combat. From a social perspective, the same hegemonic relationship is maintained, highlighted by the image of women as sexual objects as opposed to men as abusers. This is also noted by Ginette Verstraete, who says that "Stereotypical gender arrangements and the binary images of men and women that they sustain - men are supposed to be strong, rational, and to operate in the public sphere while women are seen as weak, emotional and ideally suited for the private sphere - enable subjects to order their many complex interrelations along recognizable terms, often to the advantage of men."<sup>12</sup> However, the image of women in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict breaks down these stereotypes at times through their active presence in the war and on the political stage, where they show courage and determination, and the image of man is also represented in opposition to all stereotypes, often indulging in aggressive acts, being irrational and abusers.

11. Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant, *Gendered news: media coverage and electoral politics in Canada* (Vancouver, Toronto: UBC Press, 2013), 110.

12. Ginette Verstraete, "Gender," in *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Character*, ed. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2007), 329.

### III. The image of the two warring groups from an ethnic perspective

Extending the polarization to the ethnic category level, we comparatively analyzed the way in which the image of Ukrainian and Russian women and the image of Ukrainian and Russian men is reflected.

“The nationality represented (the *spected*) is silhouetted in the perspectival context of the representing text or discourse (the *spectant*). For that reason, imagologists will have particular interest in the dynamics between those images which characterize the Other (*hetero-images*) and those which characterize one’s own, domestic identity (*self-images* or *auto-images*). Both *spected* and *spectant* are usually categorized in national terms, but in both cases the scholar will be wary of seeing in this appellation a straightforward reflection of empirical real-world collectives.”<sup>13</sup>

Based on this statement, we shall analyze the way *the spected* is reflected in the Russian-Ukrainian *spectant*, focusing on *hetero-images*, presented from the perspective of Romanian journalists, **in what we call *Ethnic hetero-images: comparative analysis: Ukrainian women:*** politician; soldier; victim; military nurse; war prisoner; patriot; grieving mother; young frightened civil; struggling for life; entrepreneur; sexual abused women; sexual worker; volunteer; public figure; immigrant worker; sexualized women; **Russian women:** victim; pacifist/ protestors against the war; mother (grieving mother, pacifist mother, and indoctrinator); public figure; frivolous women; **Ukrainian men:** soldier; sexual abuser; **Russian men:** politician; soldier; victim; sexual abuser; aggressor; traitor.

Thus, we noticed that in the selected news items there are predominantly images of Ukrainian women as opposed to Russian men. On the other hand, Russian women and Ukrainian men are poorly represented in this sample. Another point that catches one’s attention is that Russian women, contrary to expectations, are largely presented as pacifists or protesters against Putin’s invasive policies.<sup>14</sup> The pacifist image of the Russian mother is complemented by the grieving mother and a single case of a mother indoctrinating her own child in support of Russian policy: “In Russia, a mother cut her son’s hair in the shape of the letter Z, the symbol of Putin’s offensive in Ukraine” (*libertatea.ro*). In contrast to Russian women, Russian men appear as ruthless soldiers, aggressors, abusers and deserters, rarely as victims, which suggests that they support the military conflict, unlike women who condemn it. Most news reports present images of Ukrainian women, mainly as victims and refugees, but also as patriots through female military fighters and other social groups who, by various means, fight against the conflict.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Ukrainian men are mentioned in very few news items in the analyzed corpus, generally presented as soldiers and are not singled out.

#### Concluding remarks

On the basis of the previous classifications, through a critical analysis of Romanian media discourse we can see that the image of women as an active presence in the conflict is still poorly reflected in the media, and the focus is on social aspects, tangential to the conflict. Thus, the content analysis conducted highlights the fact that there is more *soft* news than *hard* news, minimizing the role of women in the war. Gender stereotypes persist, and this is highlighted in the comparative analysis between the image of men and women, which reinforces the fragile-strong polarization. The news analyzed shows that in the Romanian media discourse journalists are pro-Ukrainian, focusing on providing aid to refugees, the way Ukrainian women have integrated into Romanian society, and condemning the atrocities committed against women and the Ukrainian people. From the point of view of the hegemonic and ethnic relationship, there is a presence of the superiority of Ukrainians over Russians and of men over women in the media discourse of the selected corpus.

In conclusion, we have analyzed in this article the way in which the image of women is represented in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict along three axes. The first axis is based on women’s direct or indirect

13. Joep Leerssen, „Imagology: history and method”, în *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Character*, ed. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2007), 42.

14. For a better understanding of news value of unexpectedness, see M. Bednarek and H. Caple, *The discourse of news values: How news organizations create ‘newsworthiness’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

15. For a broader perspective on the importance of communication in social crises, see Samuel Bălc, *Perspective ale comunicării în contextul crizelor sociale [Perspectives of communication in the context of social crises]*, Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință, Editions IARSIC, France, 2016.



participation in the conflict, as classified by Susan R. Grayzel. The second axis followed the polarization women – men, which highlighted the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, which are also found in the third line of research, at the ethnic level, where the two conflicting groups, Ukrainians and Russians, were analyzed. Regarding the way in which the image of women is reflected in the media discourse of the mainstream sources analyzed, we believe that this overview illustrates the hegemonic relationship existing at the level of society, which needs to be re-evaluated. It is well known that mainstream press (not radical or alternative) is always reinforcing the society's norms, however the newness of this article consists in highlighting this aspect through linguistic strategies of labelling, taking agency away from women, invoking stereotypes (mother, nurse) rather than breaking them but also by highlighting the fact that the image of women is mainly presented as external pawns of the military conflict.

**Acknowledgement:** This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania - Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *The coverage and reception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Polish, Romanian and English-language media: A comparative critical discourse study with recommendations for journalism training (CORECON)*, contract no. 760244/28.12.2023, code CF 25/27.07.2023.

### **Bibliography**

- Bauer, Martin W., and George Gaskell, eds. *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage Publications, 2007.
- Bâlc, Samuel. "Perspective ale comunicării în contextual crizelor sociale" [**Perspectives of communication in the context of social crises**]. *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință*, France, 2016.
- Bednarek, M., and H. Caple. *The Discourse of News Values*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Beller, Manfred, and Joep Leerssen, eds. *Imagology. The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Character*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2007.
- Bethke Elshtain, Jean. "Reflections on War and Political Discourse: Realism, Just War, and Feminism in a Nuclear Age." *Political Theory* 13, no. 1 (1985): 39–57.
- Flowerdew, John, and John E. Richardson, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 2018.
- German, Lindsey. *How a Century of War Changed the Lives of Women*. London: Pluto Press, 2013.
- Goodyear-Grant, Elizabeth. *Gendered News: Media Coverage and Electoral Politics in Canada*. Vancouver & Toronto: UBC Press, 2013.
- Grayzel, Susan R. *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War*. Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Hartley, John. *Discursul știrilor [Understanding News]*. Translated by Monica Mitarcă. Iași: Polirom, 1999.
- Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Liliana, ed. *Dicționar de pragmatică și de analiză a discursului (DPAD) [Dictionary of Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis (DPDA)]*. Iași: Institutul European, 2023.
- Richardson, John E. *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Robson, Deborah Carol. "Stereotypes and the Female Politician: A Case Study of Senator Barbara Mikulski." *Communication Quarterly*, no. 48 (2000): 205–222.
- Rusu, Mihai S. "Fascist Femininities: Models of Womanhood in the Romanian National Legionary State." *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, no. 42 (2020): 19–38.
- Tannen, Deborah, Heidi E. Hamilton, and Deborah Schiffrin, eds. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis. Vol. 1*. Oxford & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

# O incursiune în patrimoniul arheologic al comunei Gura Râului, jud. Sibiu (II)

Cristian Ioan POPA & Cristinel PLANTOS

1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia

Corresponding author emails: cristian.popa@uab.ro; cristinel.plantos@uab.ro

---

## An Incursion into the Archaeological Heritage of the Gura Râului, Sibiu County (II)

**Abstract:** If in the first part of the research the archaeological heritage of Gura Râului was presented, on this occasion data are given on the religious buildings from the medieval ("Cuvioasa Paraschiva") and modern („Sts. Archangels Michael and Gabriel") periods, respectively on the disappeared medieval monastery (Schwarzen Klosters). The presentation of the medieval, pre-modern and modern heritage of Gura Râului revealed a different potential from the one found by classification. On the one hand, the well known one, of which the "old church" is not missing, on the other hand, a known but ignored heritage. Particular attention is drawn to the two 18th-century objectives whose existence, although proven, has not aroused sufficient interest or a coherent effort to map, classify and protect them: the stone quarry and the Gura Râului - Sibiu navigable canal, part of a project dating from 1702-1703. Their identification in the field, aerial photographic documentation and cartographic recovery of the period have been the preoccupations of the last years, materialized in this article.

**Keywords:** Gura Râului, medieval church, stone quarry, navigable canal, technical heritage.

**Citation suggestion:** Popa, Cristian Ioan and Plantos, Cristinel. "O incursiune în patrimoniul arheologic al comunei Gura Râului, jud. Sibiu (II)." *Transilvania*, no. 9 (2024): 84-96.

<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2024.09.09>



## Introducere

În numărul 9 din anul 2023 al revistei *Transilvania* am oferit publicului larg prima parte a unui studiu privitor la patrimoniul arheologic al comunei Gura Râului (jud. Sibiu).<sup>1</sup> Cu acel prilej aduceam în atenție noi puncte de interes arheologic, ce veneau să arunce o altă lumină asupra locuirilor umane în acest areal, ce coboară până în preistorie, dar anunțăm și continuarea prezentării cercetării, dedicată patrimoniului medieval, premodern și modern. Această ultimă parte o dedicăm, prin urmare, edificiului bisericii „Cuvioasa Paraschiva", (în proximitatea căreia în anul 2023 s-a realizat și un diagnostic arheologic), dar și unui patrimoniu ignorat, al canalului ce lega Gura Râului de Sibiu, necesar transportării pietrei din cariera utilizată de sibieni acum 300 de ani. Reamintim că teritoriul comunei Gura Râului (Guraró, Auendorf, Gurarou) se desfășoară la poalele nordice ale Munților Cindrelului, într-o zonă de deal și munte, cu un hotar alungit ce cuprinde și o zonă de câmpie. Această așezare geografică și-a pus amprenta asupra tipurilor de locuire și activități dar și asupra patrimoniului, parte moștenit până azi.

## I. Bisericile satului

I.1. Gura Râului-Biserica *Cuvioasa Paraschiva* [cod RAN 143815.02: Biserica Cuvioasa Paraschiva din Gura Râului; cod LMI SB-II-m-B-12397: Biserica „Cuvioasa Paraschiva"-Biserica Mică]. Singurul monument/sit din localitate cuprins în prezent atât în LMI cât și în RAN este „Biserica veche", cum o numesc localnicii. Lăcașul, cu hramul „Cuvioasa Paraschiva", aparținând cultului ortodox, se află pe o

---

1. Cristian Ioan Popa, Cristinel Plantos. „O incursiune în patrimoniul arheologic al comunei Gura Râului, județul Sibiu (I)", *Transilvania*, nr. 9 (2023): 86-96.

terasă mai înaltă, la răscrucea dintre *Ulița Mare* cu *Gărdurelele* (str. Principală, nr. 220). Edificiul este de zid și însumează o suprafață de 95 m<sup>2</sup>, fiind format dintr-o navă alungită, cu dimensiunile de 6 x 4,25-4,45 m<sup>2</sup>, ușor mai lărgită spre altar, cu câte trei goluri de ferestre pe laturile de nord și sud. Altarul este decroșat, mai mare decât nava, și are o formă poligonală, cu cinci laturi. Spre vest a fost ridicat turnul clopotniță, azi acoperit cu țiglă. Remarcăm deviația destul de mare a bisericii de la axul est-vest (fig. 4). Vechimea edificiului este incertă. Conform pisaniei pusă în anul 1869<sup>3</sup>, biserica ar fi fost zidită în anul 1202<sup>4</sup>, însă nicio sursă documentară nu o confirmă. Iată și pisania, copiată direct după originalul păstrat azi în altarul bisericii<sup>5</sup> (fig. 1):

„Aceasta Sântă Biserică sau Edificatu in Anulu 1202 și sau prefăcutu prin stredania parte și cheltuiala Preotului Petru Stoitia in 1802. Turnulu sau facutu prin urmatoriulu acestuia 'era Petru Stoitia in Anulu 1834. Altariulu sau prefăcutu și măritu prin stredania parte și cheltuiala totu a acestui Preotu în Anu 1869. Ioane Piso și Magdalena soția sua Tutori// Gurariului in 8 Augustu 1869// Petru Stoitia Paroh Greco Catholicu Ioane Stoitia cooperatore”

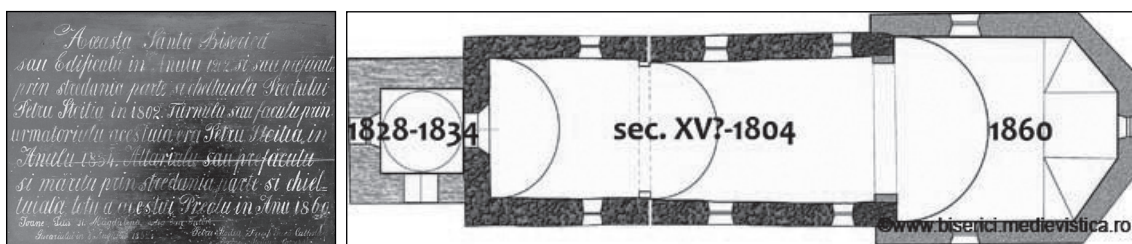


Fig. 1. Pisania bisericii „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” din Gura Râului, din anul 1869 (foto 2023)

Fig. 2. Planul bisericii ortodoxe „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” din Gura Râului (după [www.medievistica.ro](http://www.medievistica.ro))

Marius Porumb consideră că biserica a fost construită, probabil, în secolul al XVI-lea, din vechiul edificiu păstrându-se naosul și pronaosul<sup>6</sup>. După alte informații, care credem că au la bază, parțial, tot pisania din interior, biserica s-ar fi construit în anul 1802, pe locul unei biserici mai vechi din lemn<sup>7</sup>. Din planul postat, în trecut, pe site-ul [www.medievistica.ro](http://www.medievistica.ro)<sup>8</sup> (fig. 2), se sugerează posibilitatea ca la originea actuala navă să fie medievală, fiind datată cu probabilitate în secolul al XV-lea, cu alte lucrări la altar încheiate în anul 1804, prin adăugarea de elemente noi (altar, turn) în veacul al XIX-lea (altarul la 1860 iar turnul clopotniță între anii 1828-1834)<sup>9</sup>. Potrivit celor consemnate în anul 1896 de către preotul Ioachim Muntean, se pare bazate pe date mult mai concrete, recuperate din arhivă, între 1828-1830 s-ar fi ridicat turnul clopotniță, iar la 1860 altarul s-ar fi înnoit, cu suma pentru materiale de 671 fl. și 29 cr. v.a.<sup>10</sup>. Același preot observa că sătenii ortodocși din Gura Râului nu ar fi avut biserică între anii 1700 și 1767, „ci cel mult vreo capelă provizorie, pe când cei greco-catolici aveau acum biserica cea veche”<sup>11</sup>, cu referire la acest monument istoric. De altfel, știm că biserica a trecut în secolul al XVIII-lea, pe rând, de la uniți la ortodocși și invers; în anul 1759 avem știre, de pildă, că a fost luată de ortodocși<sup>12</sup>. Tot la mijlocul

2. Ileana Burnichioiu, *Biserica ortodoxă Cuv. Paraschiva din Gura Râului (Auendorf, Guraró). Secolele XV?-XIX* (Mss., 2010), 1.

3. Pisania este reprodușă și la Marius Porumb, *Dicționar de pictură veche românească din Transilvania, sec. XIII-XVIII* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 1998), 152; Dumitru I. Arsenie, *Gura Râului. Sat din Mărginime* (Sibiu: Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, 2000), 12. Însă este copiată parțial sau greșit în privința anului redactării ei.

4. Ioachim Muntean, *Monografia economico-culturală a comunei Gurariului* (Sibiu: Tiparul Institutului Tipografic, 1896), 155; Arsenie, *Gura Râului*, 12, 77.

5. Mulțumim protopopului Teodor Damian, paroh al bisericii, pentru amabilitatea de a ne facilita accesul la pisanie și la alte informații privitoare la edificiu.

6. Porumb, *Dicționar*, 52.

7. *Civilizația apei în Gura Râului: micromonografie pentru încurajarea turismului* (Sibiu: Casa de Presă și Editură Tribuna, 2015), 14.

8. La momentul de față, site-ul nu mai este activ, fiind dezactivat.

9. <http://www.medievistica.ro/biserici/obiective/gura-raului/index.html>.

10. Muntean, *Monografia*, 156.

11. Muntean, *Monografia*, 155; vezi și Arsenie, *Gura Râului*, 76.

12. Greta Monica Miron, *Biserica greco-catolică din Transilvania. Cler și enoriași (1697-1782)* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2004), 257.

aceluiși veac sunt amintite împreună parohiile greco-catolice din Poplaca, Gura Râului, Orlat și Săcel, însă doar în dreptul bisericii de la Poplaca se spunea că era foarte veche, neștiindu-se când s-a ridicat<sup>13</sup>, restul, înțelegându-se de la sine că ar fi de dată mai recentă. Din aceeași perioadă aflăm și că biserica nu avea nici un fel de terenuri<sup>14</sup>, lucru reconfirmat la 1850<sup>15</sup>. Devenită neîncăpătoare după jumătatea secolului al XIX-lea, comunitatea hotărăște construirea unei alte biserici, ridicată la 1887 în vecinătate, spre piața centrală<sup>16</sup>.

Materialul de construcție, vizibil la exteriorul navei, a fost piatra locală și cărămida. Printre cele vizibile, unele cărămizi, prin dimensiuni și textură, sunt medievale sau chiar mai vechi, degresantul cu fine pietricele albe sugerând chiar o posibilă proveniență romană (fig. 6).

La exterior, edificiul conservă panouri picturale murale, puse în evidență și restaurate în cursul anului 2008<sup>17</sup>. Diferențele, destul de evidente, de compoziție, culoare și tematică, sugerează etape diferite în zugrăvirea lor. Pe latura nordică se conservă o pictură murală, executată în trei firide speciale, cu imaginile „Sfintei Cuvioasa Paraschiva”, „Sfinții Apostoli Petru și Pavel” și „Sfântul Ierarh Nicolae” (fig. 10). Pictura s-a realizat până sub cornișă și este ornamentată cu motive vegetale și geometrice (fig. 9). Datarea icoanelor este precisă, fiind cuprinsă în textul scris în chirilică ce le însoțește – 1804 – astfel încât trebuie corijată datarea acestora, plasată de unii autori în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea<sup>18</sup>.

Pe latura sudică, în schimb, fragmentele picturii murale se dovedesc a fi mult mai vechi. O primă apreciere este de făcut în legătură cu o scenă a „Răstignirii lui Iisus”, pe jumătate acoperită la 1860 prin construirea altarului (fig. 8). Deci, scena este anterioară însă vechimea ei este greu de precizat, mai cu seamă în condițiile în care la restaurarea din anul 2008 s-a ajustat și completat cu părțile lipsă. Din pictura originală se păstrează doar partea inferioară a crucii și un fragment din silueta Fecioarei Maria. Cu toate acestea neajunsuri, scena a fost încadrată în stilul postbizantin și datată, cu probabilitate, în secolul al XVII-lea<sup>19</sup> însă nu a fost exclusă și o posibilă datare medievală a sa<sup>20</sup>. Atrag atenția, prin compoziția lor aparte, resturile unei picturi de pe mijlocul navei. Astfel, se mai distinge o friză în zigzag, de culoare roșie-sângerie și neagră, pictate cam la jumătatea înălțimii edificiului, între cele două ferestre dinspre altar. Între fereastră și turn se conservă frânturi dintr-o pictură *al secco* în care se disting unele volute (pline sau doar cu contur) de culoare neagră<sup>21</sup>, precum și un motiv fitomorf, probabil un brad, pictat cu aceeași culoare, alături de care apare o mică sferă plină, identică cu cea care marchează limita frizei în zigzag (fig. 7). Acest ultim mic amănunt ne determină să conchidem că picturile sunt contemporane. Desigur, este greu de deslușit tema compoziției însă subliniem insolitul ei pentru decorul pictural al unei biserici. După aspectul său, apreciem că pictura s-ar putea data în perioada Renașterii transilvănene (secolul al XVII-lea?). Așa cum deja anticipăm, cel mai probabil, scena „Răstignirii lui Iisus”, aflată pe aceeași latură, face parte dintr-un alt proiect pictural și există toate indiciile să fie considerată mai veche.

În interior, naosul păstrează vechea zestre picturală în frescă, (acoperită de mai multe straturi de var), realizată de către un zugrav rămas anonim. În cadrul acesteia se disting scenele cu sfinții militari, prezente pe ambii pereți ai navei, ale căror nume au fost scrise cu caractere chirilice (fig. 11-12). Datarea picturii este incertă. Dacă Marius Porumb crede că ea s-ar fi executat în prima jumătate a secolului al XVIII-lea<sup>22</sup>, preotul Ioachim Muntean relatează, în schimb, că în anul 1811 biserica s-a rezugrăvit cu 200 fl.<sup>23</sup> astfel încât, fiind vorba de suprafețe mari picturale, este posibil ca, în fapt, această pictură să fie cu un secol mai recentă, datând deci de la începutul secolului al XIX-lea. Alt strat pictural s-a realizat în cursul secolului al XX-lea, acoperind părți din turn, navă și altar, ultimul aproape în întregime.

13. Miron, *Biserica greco-catolică*, 337.

14. Miron, *Biserica greco-catolică*, 373. Preoții uniți din Gura Râului erau, la 1755, Coman, Iuon și Arsenie, dar rezidau și preoții Constandin, Șerban și Iacob (Miron, *Biserica greco-catolică*, 424).

15. Ciprian Ghișa, *Episcopia greco-catolică de Făgăraș în timpul păstoririi lui Ioan Lemeni 1832-1850*, vol. I (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2008), 205, 207–208, nota 109.

16. Muntean, *Monografia*, 5.

17. La baza unei firide pictate pe latura nordică se poate distinge semnătura și datarea restauratorului „Restaurat Liviu '08”.

18. Porumb, *Dicționar*, 152.

19. Porumb, *Dicționar*, 152.

20. Burnichioiu, *Biserica*, 1.

21. Una dintre volutele mai bine conturate lasă impresia unei cifre („6”) (Burnichioiu, *Biserica*, 1-2), însă credem că asemănarea este doar întâmplătoare.

22. Porumb, *Dicționar*, 152.

23. Muntean, *Monografia*, 156; Arsenie, *Gura Râului*, 77.

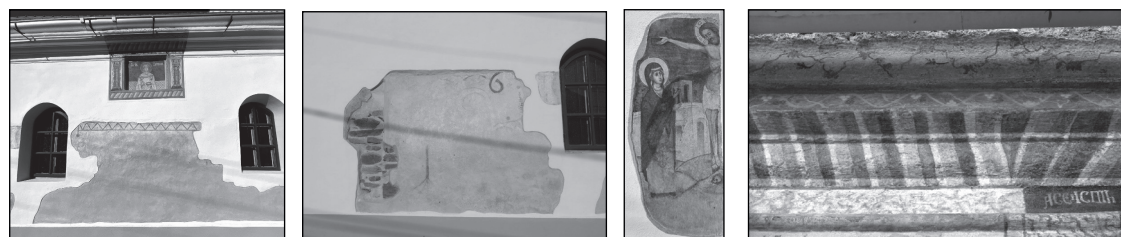
În pronaos atrage atenția, prin modul aparte al execuției, un panou de pe latura sudică a navei cu scena „Sfânta Maria Egipteanca împărtășită de Preotul Zosima”, reprezentată ca o pustnică, cu bustul gol, înfășurată doar de la brâu în jos cu mantia pe care i-a aruncat-o Sf. Zosima (fig. 5). Locul ales pentru pictură este cel consacrat sfintei, situat la trecerea dinspre pronaos în naos, elocvent exprimată în relație intimă între iconografie și arhitectură, de pildă, prin imaginea sfintei pe portalurile de trecere, în bisericile medievale moldave<sup>24</sup>. Scena din biserica de la Gura Râului, rar abordată în istoriografie, o găsim menționată la Maria Streza care a interpretat-o ca reflectând condiția eremitică a sfintei și o încadra în intervalul cuprins între sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea și începutul secolului al XIX-lea, prilej cu care oferă și date statistice, ce relevă prezența Sf. Maria Egipteanca în pictura murală a nouă biserici sibiene<sup>25</sup>. Prin maniera sa de execuție, pictura se detașează, în opinia noastră, ca fiind cea mai veche, putând fi legată, mai degrabă, de bănuita fază medievală târzie a edificiului (sec. XV-XVI?). O fotografie de la începutul secolului XX indică peisajul zonei monumentului: o parcelă destul de generoasă în care se distinge doar silueta bisericii (fără alte detalii față de cele actuale), delimitată spre nord printr-un gard de terenul școlii satești, lipsind orice altă construcție în acest perimetru (fig. 3).



**Fig. 3.** Biserica ortodoxă „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” și parcela sa din Gura Râului – detaliu dintr-o fotografie de la începutul secolului XX. **Fig. 4.** Biserica ortodoxă „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” din Gura Râului (foto 2019). **Fig. 5.** Biserica ortodoxă „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” din Gura Râului. Panou pictural interior, de pe latura sudică a navei (probabil sec. XV-XVI), cu scena Împărtășirea Sf. Maria Egipteanca (foto 2023)



**Fig. 6.** Materiale de construcție din zidăria navei bisericii (foto 2019) (1) și vedere parțială cu latura sudică a bisericii și zona cu picturi murale (foto 2023) (2)



**Fig. 7.** Biserica ortodoxă „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” din Gura Râului. Pictură murală exterioară de pe latura sudică (foto 2019). **Fig. 8.** Biserica ortodoxă „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” din Gura Râului. Pictură murală exterioară de pe latura sudică cu scena Răstignirii (foto 2019). **Fig. 9.** Biserica ortodoxă „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” din Gura Râului. Detaliu cu pictura de pe cornișa laturii nordice (foto 2019)

24. Vezi Ancuța-Maria Ilie, „Zonele de intrare și trecere în spațiul sacru al bisericii. Teme iconografice”, *Transilvania* 4 (2019): 59-60, fig. 6.

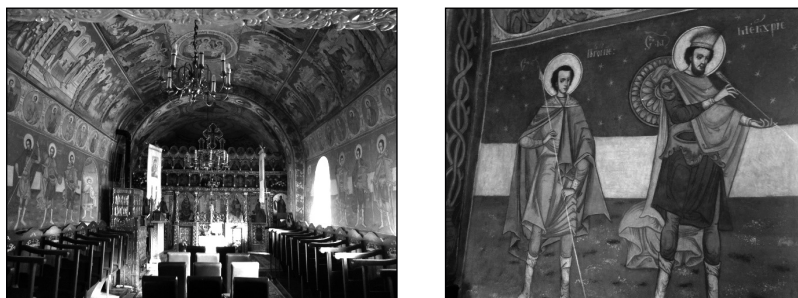
25. Vezi o mențiune la Maria Streza (Modi), *Cele trei paradigme feminine ale iconografiei creștine. Condiția feminității exprimată în decorul mural al bisericilor ortodoxe din județul Sibiu (sfârșit de secol XVIII și început de XIX)*, rezumatul tezei de doctorat (Cluj-Napoca, 2019), 6, 13-14.



**Fig. 10.** Biserica ortodoxă „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” din Gura Râului. Panourile picturale de pe latura nordică, din anul 1804 (restaurare anul 2008) (foto 2019).



**Fig. 11.** Biserica ortodoxă „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” din Gura Râului. Panouri picturale cu sfinții militari (1811?) (foto 2019).



**Fig. 12.** Biserica ortodoxă „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” din Gura Râului. Detaliu cu pictura din anul 1811 (?) (1) și imagine de ansamblu din interior (2) (foto 2019)

Există indicii, prin urmare, care susțin plasarea începuturilor bisericii „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” din Gura Râului la finele Evului Mediu (sec. XV-XVI), răstimp din care se păstrează cel puțin o parte a navei, pe latura sudică. Materialul de construcție a fost piatra locală de carieră și cărămida. Pictura interioară cu scena *Sfintei Maria Egipteanca* o legăm de începuturile probabile ale edificiului, posibil contemporane scenei *Răstignirii*. Pictura cu aspect laic, de pe latura sudică, se poate data în epoca Renașterii transilvănene (sec. XVII). Intervențiile ulterioare, din secolul al XIX-lea, au vizat modificări esențiale (un nou altar și un nou turn clopotniță) la care se adaugă zugrăvirea, în anul 1811, a vechii picturi interioare.

În sprijinul datelor medievale ce vizează satul în secolul al XV-lea aducem și un document ce datează din anul 1476 care se referă la eliberarea condiționată a românilor Nanu Borbath (Nanu Bărbat), Tattul Becza (Tatu Beța), Dragan (Drăgan) și Ireann (Irean) din *Awendorff* (Gura Râului), precum și a lui Iwgaschann (Iugășan) și Thoma Czemeran (Toma Țemeran) de *villa Wlachicali villanorum de insula Christiana*<sup>26</sup>. Informația este importantă în subiectul de față întrucât îi amintește și pe preoții Iacob și Petre din *Awendorff* iar forma de *popa*, sub care apar menționați<sup>27</sup>, ne oferă convingerea că

26. Gustav Gündisch, Herta Gündisch, Konrad Gündisch, Gernot Nussbächer, *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, vol. VII (1474-1486) (București: Editura Academiei Române, 1991), 85. Identificarea cu Gura Râului o întâlnim și la Hermann Fabini, *Atlas der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kirchenburgen und Dorfkirchen* Band I (Hermannstadt: Monumenta Verlag; Heidelberg: Arbeitskreis für siebenbürgische Landeskunde e.V., 1998), 30; *Insula Christiana* era denumirea medievală a localității Cristian (jud. Sibiu).

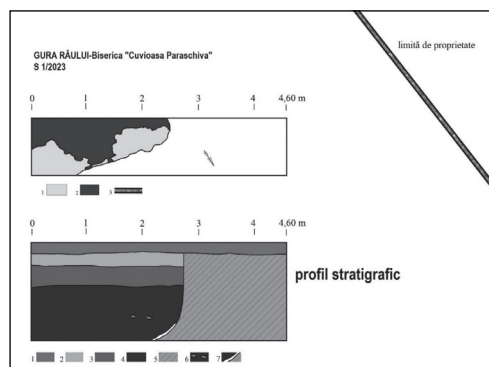
27. *Urkundenbuch* VII, 86, doc. nr. 4104.



se referă la preoții români ortodocși ai satului Gura Râului care ar fi putut oficia chiar în acest lăcaș. O altă informație, publicată de A. Berger în anul 1894, face referire la un recensământ din anul 1488 unde apare și localitatea *Bleschdorff* (*Awer Blessdorf*), sat în care locuiau 33 de oaspeți, o casă fiind părăsită<sup>28</sup>. Satul a fost asimilat de către H. Fabini cu Gura Râului<sup>29</sup> deși nu excludem ca acesta să fie lăcașul medieval, (numit în săsește *Beleschdorff*). În cursul secolului al XVI-lea, fără o datare mai precisă, satul apare pentru prima oară cu denumirea românească actuală, în forma *Gura Roii*<sup>30</sup>. Ulterior, la 1611 satul se numea *Guraro*, un mai târziu, la 1612, apărând din nou sub numele german de *Auendorf*<sup>31</sup>.

În secolul al XVIII-lea, biserica este cert atestată atât prin documente scrise cât și cartografice. Dacă la 1702 o hartă ilustrează un singur edificiu, cu certitudine cel al „bisericii vechi” (fig. 18/1), la mijlocul aceluiași veac se cunosc deja parcelele pe care apar ambele lăcașuri de cult ale satului, așa cum sunt ele consemnate pe prima ridicare topografică militară austriacă a Transilvaniei (1769-1773). Gura Râului avea atunci două biserițe din piatră. Cea nordică se poate identifica cu vechiul edificiu al bisericii cu hramul „Sfinții Arhangheli Mihail și Gavriil” în timp ce al doilea edificiu se află exact pe amplasamentul actualei biserici „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” (fig. 18/2).

Un sondaj arheologic efectuat în toamna anului 2023<sup>32</sup>, la nord de edificiul bisericii, a permis cunoașterea stratigrafiei parcelei în acest sector (fig. 13, 17). Astfel, s-a constatat că terenul, aflat la o cotă inferioară celei pe care se află monumentul, nu a fost utilizat pentru înmormântări și nici nu conținea resturile unor structuri. Singurul complex identificat, o groapă de var contemporană (fig. 14), ce datează de la începutul secolului trecut, transformată în groapă de deșeuri, indică utilizarea terenului în diverse activități constructive și de reparații. Inventarul recuperat ilustrează resturi, probabil, în relație cu vesela și obiectele utilizate de muncitori (vase ceramice smălțuite, farfurii din porțelan, sticle, vase din tablă smălțuite) (fig. 15/C), potcoave de cai și boi, alături de alte artefacte metalice (fig. 15/A)<sup>33</sup>. În groapă au fost găsite însă și oase umane (fig. 16) și cuie forjate folosite la închiderea sicriilor (fig. 15/A, 6), cel mai probabil antrenate din pământul săpat cu prilejul gropii. Stratigrafia depunerilor din vecinătatea acestei gropii (fig. 13-14) indică, între adâncimile – 0,25-0,30 m și – 1,60 m, un sol de culoare maroniu-gălbuie (aflat deasupra solului steril) format din pământ rezultat probabil în urma unei amenajări mai recente, în care au ajuns întâmplător oase umane, precum și materiale de construcție (cărămizi, țigle, olane) fragmentate (fig. 15/B). Prezența lor atât în acest nivel cât și în groapă o punem pe seama resturilor aruncate fie din săparea unor gropi de morminte vechi în jurul bisericii fie ca resturi rezultate în urma unor șantiere ale edificiului. Prin urmare, existența unor înmormântări în arealul bisericii este certă doar că localizarea va trebui precizată cu alt prilej. Cum între terenul investigat arheologic și terasa pe care s-a ridicat biserica există o diferență de nivel semnificativă, de cca. 2-3 m, apreciem că vechile morminte s-au practicat doar în zona cea mai înaltă a parcelei, cea cu edificiul.



**Fig. 13.** Gura Râului-Biserica „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” –imagini cu sondajul S1/2023 și groapa de var Cx 1. **Fig. 14.**

28. Albert Berger, „Volkszählung in den 7 und 2 Stühlen, im Bistritzer und Kronstädter Distrikte vom Ende des XV. und Anfang des XVI. Jahrhunderts”, *Korrespondenzblatt* XVII/6 (1894): 49-59, 54.

29. Fabini, *Atlas*, 30.

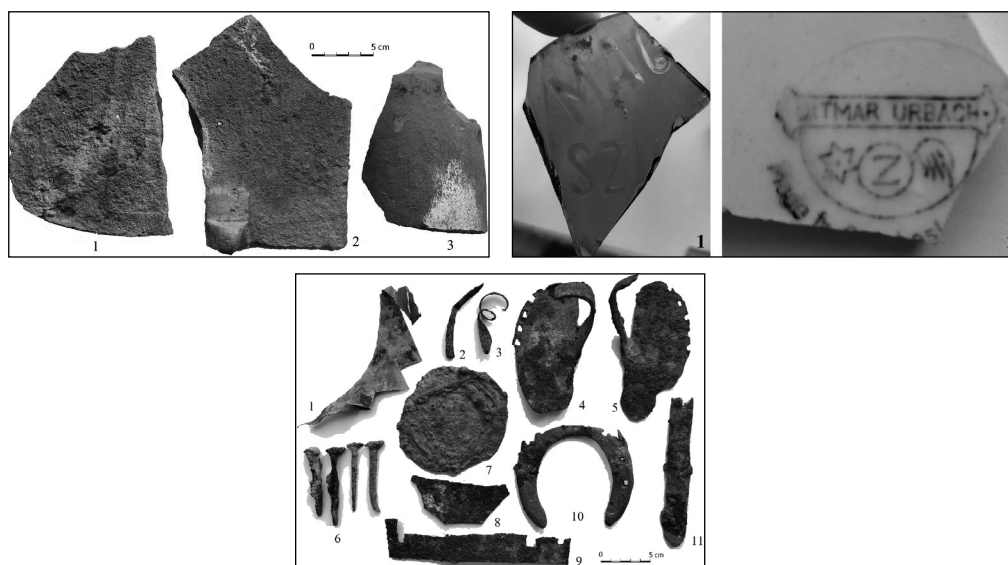
30. <http://arhivamedievala.ro/>.

31. Fabini, *Atlas*, 30.

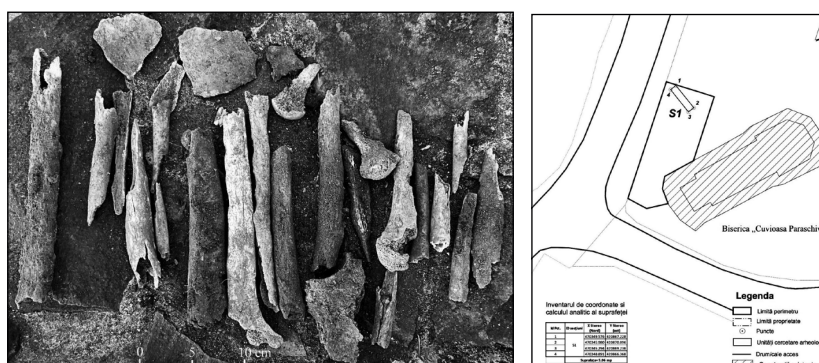
32. Cercetări efectuate de către CNM ASTRA din Sibiu, responsabil cercetare – dr. Cristinel Plantos.

33. Un indiciu în acest sens ni-l oferă sigla firmei „Ditmar Urbach” pe un porțelan produs în Cehoslovacia (cu ștampila „Made in Czechoslovakia”) (fig. 15/2), ce poate fi datat ulterior anului 1918, dar și prezența unor recipiente din sticlă cu marca în limba maghiară (fig. 15/1), aflate încă în uz în perioada umplerii gropii.

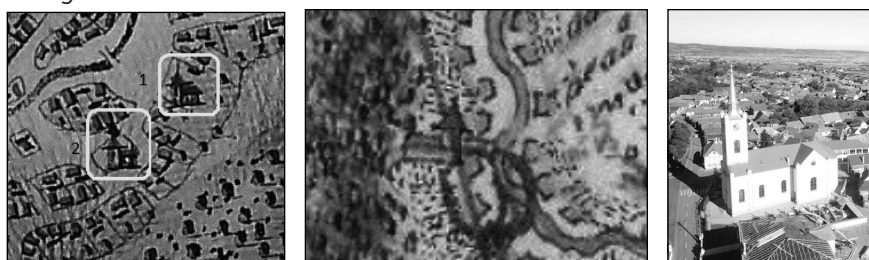
Gura Râului-Biserica „Cuvioasa Paraschiva”. Planul S1/2023 și profilul stratigrafic al S 1/2023, cu groapa Cx 1/2023: 1 – strat vegetal; 2-4 – nivele de umplutură ale gropii Cx 1; 5 – nivel de pământ deranjat; 6 – piatră de râu; 7 – nivel de var; 8 – steril arheologic



**Fig. 15.** Gura Râului-Biserica „Cuvioasa Paraschiva”. Cultură materială recuperată din groapa contemporană: piese din fier (A), materiale de construcție (B), recipient din sticlă și farfurie din porțelan, cu mărcile de producție (C)



**Fig. 16.** Gura Râului-Biserica „Cuvioasa Paraschiva”. Oase umane provenite din morminte deranjate găsite în sondajul arheologic din 2023. **Fig. 17.** Plan de situație, cu biserica ortodoxă „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” și plasarea diagnosticului arheologic din anul 2023

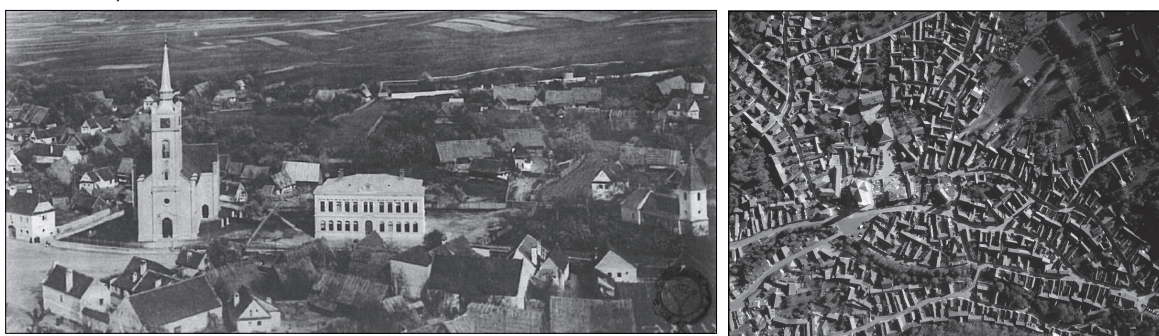


**Fig. 18.** „Biserica veche” pe o hartă din anul 1702 (1) și cele două lăcașe de cult cartate la Gura Râului e o harta iosefină (1769-1773) (2). **Fig. 19.** Gura Râului-Biserica ortodoxă „Sfinții Arhangheli Mihail și Gavriil” (aerofotografie 2023)

### 1.2. Gura Râului-Biserica „Sfinții Arhangheli Mihail și Gavriil”

Cel de-al doilea edificiu religios al comunei domină latura estică a pieței localității (fig. 19-20). Cu toate că nu este clasată ca monument, biserica și amplasamentul acesteia au o istorie care obligă la o aplecare mai serioasă asupra subiectului, întrucât, după cum vom vedea, constatăm suprapunerea a

cel puțin trei nivele de edificare ale lăcașului. Începuturile se leagă de o veche biserică ortodoxă, inițial construită din lemn<sup>34</sup>. Fără a ști când aceasta s-a ridicat, cunoaștem doar când ea a fost înlocuită, în contextul noilor politici confesionale imperiale, prin zidirea unei biserici din piatră, între anii 1763 și 1767. În condițiile în care biserica „mică” sau „veche” aparținea greco-catolicilor din sat, noua ctitorire era destinată comunității ortodoxe, aflată atunci sub păstoria preotului Popa Ștefan Șerban (Arsenie). Edificiul a fost construit de zidarii Johann Roth și Tobias Lammer din Sibiu și datorită contractului păstrat, (datat 9 iulie 1763), îi cunoaștem unele detalii: corul, nava, o tindă și o ușă la intrare, toate boltite. Încheierea lucrărilor s-a realizat în 3 iunie 1767<sup>35</sup> în condițiile în care, în anul respectiv, ni se spune că satul beneficia până atunci de o singură biserică și trei preoți uniți<sup>36</sup>. Zugrăvirea sa interioară a fost realizată peste doi ani, în 1769, iar cea exterioară în 1773. Mult mai târziu, în 1799, s-a zidit și turnul clopotniță. În anul 1802 biserica primește un zid împrejmuitor al curții, realizat din cărămidă. Cu toate investițiile amintite, edificiul nu a fost trainic, rezistând doar un secol, întrucât în anul 1885 îl aflăm în ruină, fiind necesară scoaterea sa din funcțiune, iar peste un an demolat. Pe același amplasament, dar cu o planimetrie mult mai generoasă, a urmat a treia edificare, prin construirea impozantului edificiu actual, sfințit în 1887<sup>37</sup>.



**Fig. 20.** Cele două lăcașe de cult din Gura Râului, (în stânga edificiul ridicat în 1887 iar în mijloc școala) – vedere de la începutul secolului XX. **Fig. 21.** Aerofotografie cu trama stradală și parcelarul zonei centrale a satului Gura Râului - în mijloc Biserica „Cuvioasa Paraschiva”

## II. Mănăstirea Neagră (*Schwarzen Klosters*)

Într-un document din anul 1558, păstrat în arhivele sibiene, se face referire la construcția unei *Mănăstiri Negre* (în original *Schwarzen Klosters*), plasată la Gura Râului<sup>38</sup>. Adrian A. Rusu apreciază că mențiunea documentară trebuie interpretată în funcție de realitățile istorice, cele puțin cunoscute, ale localității. La acea dată, satul era unul românesc iar sașii făcuseră trecerea la Reformă. Din această perspectivă, mănăstirea nu putea fi decât una ortodoxă. Ulterior documentului mai sus amintit, nu se mai cunosc alte informații despre acest lăcaș<sup>39</sup>. Datele istorice cunoscute privitoare la Gura Râului, (prezentate mai sus, în dreptul bisericii „Cuvioasa Paraschiva”), nu pot fi relaționate în nici un fel cu această mănăstire. Rămâne de verificat, ca posibilă ipoteză de lucru, dacă nu cumva vechea fază a bisericii cu hramul „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” să fie aceeași cu a *Mănăstirii Negre*, deci să fi funcționat pe același plasament. După cum i-ar sugera numele, lăcașul se poate să fi trecut printr-un incendiu, asemenea *Bisericii Negre* brașovene.

Informații despre vechi biserici, mănăstiri sau cimitire, căutate de noi în vechile monografii sau în tradiția locului, deși indică existența lor, nu lămuresc posibila lor relație cu mănăstirea dispărută. Un

34. Porumb, *Dicționar*, 152.

35. Muntean, *Monografia*, 157-161, 172; Arsenie, *Gura Râului*, 77, 79.

36. Daniel Dumitran, Ana Dumitran, Florean Adrian Laslo (ed.), *„virtuti decreti tolerantiae beneficia clero Graeci restituenda...”. Biserica românească din Transilvania în izvoarele statistice ale anului 1767* (Alba Iulia: Editura Altip, 2009), 174, 251.

37. Muntean, *Monografia*, 157-161, 172; Arsenie, *Gura Râului*, 77, 79, unde autorul publică un document emis de Andrei Șaguna la 18 septembrie 1855, în care „dă comunei bisericesti din Gura Râului binecuvântarea arhierască, ca din cauza îngustimii și a stării ruinoase, actuala veche biserică să se rupă jos și să se zidească alta nouă”.

38. Fabini, *Atlas*, 30.

39. Adrian A. Rusu (coordonator), *Dicționarul mănăstirilor din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000), 146; vezi și Sabin A. Luca, Zeno K. Pinter, Adrian Georgescu, *Repertoriul arheologic al județului Sibiu* (Sibiu: Editura Economică, 2003), 107, nr. 99.

cimitir ar existat, totuși, în secolul al XIX-lea pe *Calea Scofinoasă*, urmat de un alt cimitir, dezafectat și el înainte de 1896, în locul numit *La Cruce / La Morminte*. Locuitorii din partea de sus a satului, („gălișenii”), aveau o veche progadie *Pe Vale*, lângă grădina lui Toader Cioran, informația corespunzând, deasemenea, tot pentru secolul al XIX-lea<sup>40</sup>. Toponimia veche nu ne ajută nici ea prea mult, cu toate că numele de locuri cu adjectivul „negru” sunt întâlnite și consemnate în Gura Râului încă din același veac. Însă, relaționarea lor cu mult căutată *Mănăstire Neagră* sunt aproape imposibil de făcut. Astfel, avem o *Baltă-neagră*, în *Câmpul cel Mare* al satului<sup>41</sup> și o *Fântână Neagră*, sub Vf. *Curmătura* (1439 m), în zona montană. La 1896 sunt atestate prima dată, în zona înaltă a satului, toponimele *Călugăru* și *Părău Călugăru*, atribuite unui deal, respectiv unui pârau<sup>42</sup>, pe cursul superior al *Văii Lupului*, la sud-est de sat.

### III.1. Canalul navigabil pentru transportul pietrei de carieră de la Gura Râului și Rășinari (1702-1703)

În anul 1702 au început lucrările pentru construirea unui canal navigabil între Gura Râului și Sibiu, lung de 13 km și lat de 6 m, pe care curgea apă din râul Cibin. Rostul acestuia a fost acela de a transporta piatră din cariera aflată la Gura Râului în Sibiul ce își începuse construirea unei noi cetăți<sup>43</sup>. Datele privitoare la acest canal sunt, în parte, contradictorii. Cert este că avea un port de încărcare în Gura Râului și unul de descărcare la Sibiu, respectiv că ar fi fost finalizat în anul 1703. Utilizarea lui până la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea nu este certă dar există argumente pentru o astfel de supoziție. De lungul său, acesta ar fi avut 37 de puncte de triaj naval. Bărcile pentru transport erau încărcate cu piatră de carieră, pietriș și nisip<sup>44</sup> (fig. 22) iar pe canal puteau naviga 30 de corăbii trase de cai în amonte, având și 30 de locuri de ocolire<sup>45</sup>.

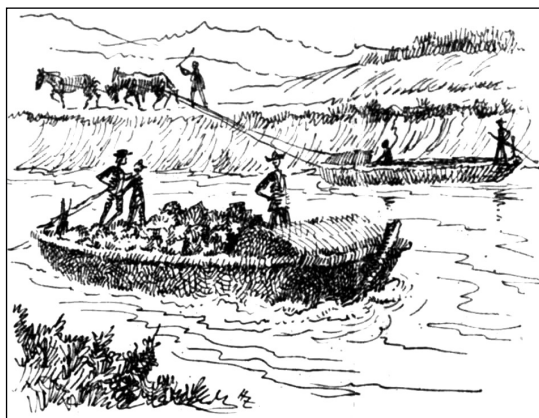


Fig. 22. Reconstituirea activității pe canalul Gura Râului – Sibiu (desen publicat la Czekelius 1976)

O hartă din anul 1702<sup>46</sup> ilustrează traseul acestui canal, realizat începând cu ieșirea râului din munți până la noua citadelă a Sibiului (fig. 23/1). De asemenea, sunt indicate carierele din care era exploatată piatră ce urma să ia drumul apei, una dintre cariere, („a doua carieră”), fiind marcată la poalele muntelui

40. Muntean, *Monografia*, 29-30.

41. Muntean, *Monografia*, 20, 22; Arsenie, *Gura Rîului*, 322.

42. Muntean, *Monografia*, 34; Arsenie, *Gura Rîului*, 38, 137, 321 (loc unde s-au dat lupte grele în timpul Primului Război Mondial). Atragem atenția aici și asupra unui alt toponim, *Biserică*, ce nu are însă valoare istorico-religioasă (cu referire la vreun lăcaș de cult), întrucât Ioachim Muntean îl descrie ca o stâncă mare din care a crescut un brad, ca un „turn cu cruce”, „numit de oameni *Biserică*” (Muntean, *Monografia*, 53).

43. Otto Czekelius, „Rund um den Großen Ring”, *Neuer Weg* (Jg. 28 – 8467 vom 4. August 1976, S. 6ff. bis einschl. Jg. 28 – 4898 vom 10. September, 1976): 4-6. Traseul și resturile acestei cetăți sibiene au fost reconstituite de Răzvan Pop (Răzvan Pop, „Un repertoriu al monumentelor dispărute, construite în perioada habsburgică și a Imperiului Austro-Ungar”, *Brukenenthal. Acta Musei* I.2 (2007): 245-247).

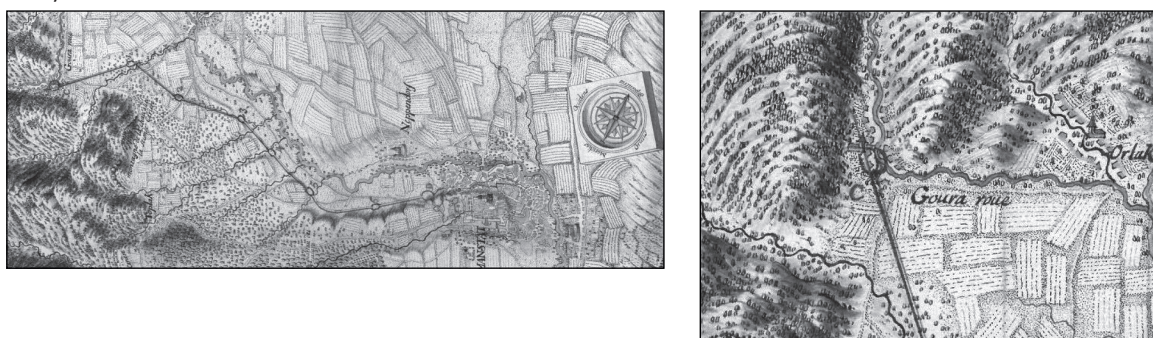
44. Vezi detalii privitoare la canal, la Czekelius, „Rund”; Claudiu Munteanu, Răzvan Pop, „Portul orașului Hermannstadt (Sibiu) din anul 1703”, *Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica* XI (2014): 27-39.

45. Al. Dima, *Sibiu* (București: Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, 1940), 22; Pop, *Un repertoriu*, 247; Claudiu I. Munteanu, *Contribuții la repertoriul arheologic al județului Sibiu* (Sibiu: Editura Armanis, 2018), 88-89, nr. 89; Luca, Pinter, *Georgescu, Repertoriul*, 194, nr. 214.13.

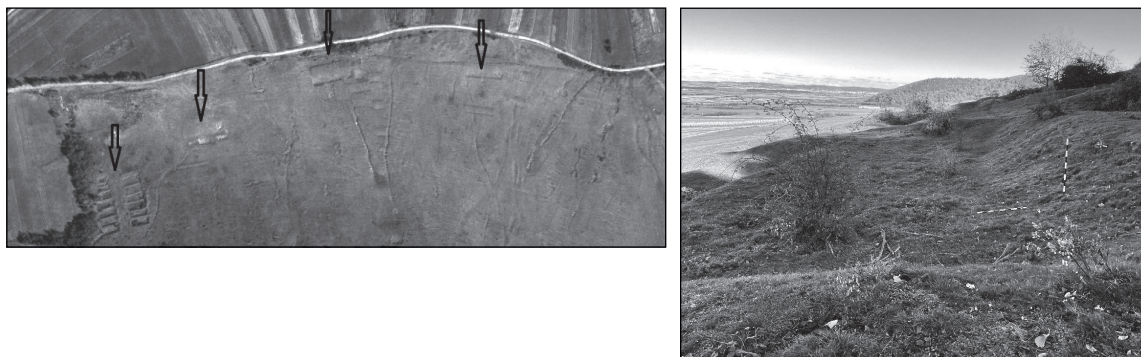
46. <https://maps.hungaricana.hu/en/OSZKTerkeptar/1089/>

*Măgureaua* unde și azi sunt vizibile urmele exploatării. Ductul acestui canal poate fi regăsit, de asemenea, pe hărțile militare din secolele XVIII-XIX, care îl consemnează cu numele de *Alter Kanal* (*Canalul Vechi*) (1769-1773 și 1869-1870), *Landschanze* (*alter Graben*) (1869-1887).

Alte informații pot fi și ele de folos. De pildă, la 1876, Carl Gooss consemna că nu se știe originea canalului dar preciza că J. Ackner nu excludea ca acesta să fie roman<sup>47</sup>. Peste două decenii, Ioachim Muntean menționa că pe strada Lungă, la nr. 102-103, „pe lângă curtea lui Arsenie Tirștiu”, exista un loc numit *Jgheaburile Nemților*, nume sub care erau desemnate niște jgheaburi de unde râul Cibin a fost deviat „printr-un iaz sau canal” spre *Câmpul cel Mare* și de acolo spre Sibiu. Aici s-ar fi găsit și cariera de unde piatra ruptă era transportată cu plutele pe canal. În memoria sătenilor s-au păstrat, de asemenea, și două toponime relevante în legătură cu această lucrare tehnică. Unul dintre acestea este *Pe Șanț / Pe Șanțuri*<sup>48</sup>, explicat prin faptul că pe acel loc se afla nu doar canalul pentru plute ci și un iaz, ale cărui urme încă se mai vedeau la finele secolului al XIX-lea. Aici, pe la 1875, un localnic, Iacob Hanzu, a găsit un trunchi gros de stejar din această lucrare, bine păstrat, pe care l-ar fi transformat în troacă pentru fântână. Un alt toponim cules din hotarul comunei Gura Râului este *La Plute*<sup>49</sup> și se leagă, evident, de aceeași lucrare hidrotehnică.



**Fig. 23.** Canalul Gura Râului-Sibiu pe o hartă din anul 1702 (1) și detaliu cu marcarea carierei (C) (2) (<https://maps.hungaricana.hu/en/OSZKTerkeptar/1089/>)



**Fig. 24.** Urmele exploatărilor din cariera de la Gura Râului, vizibile la poalele nordice ale muntelui *Măgureaua* (captură după Google Earth). **Fig. 25.** Front de lucru în cariera de la Gura Râului (foto 2024)

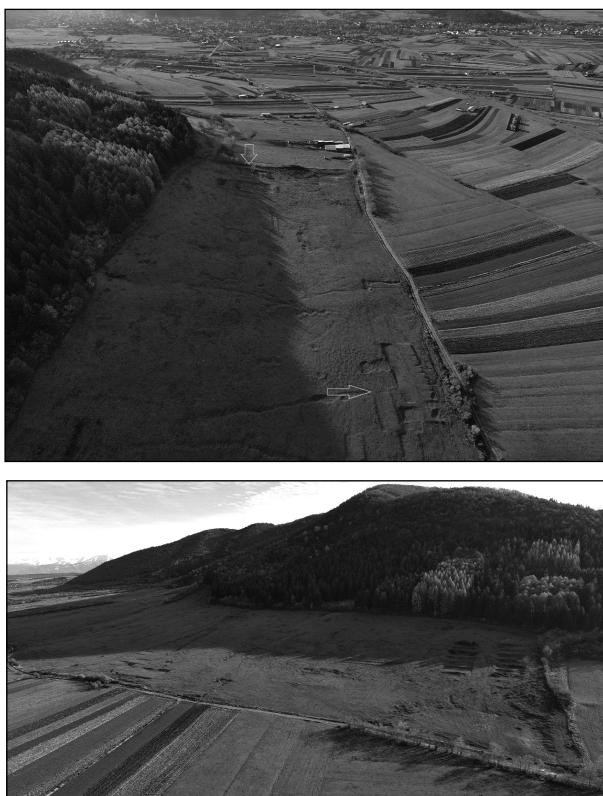
Revenind la cariera de piatră din Gura Râului, în sprijinul localizării acesteia, principalul reper topografic îl oferă cartarea din 1702 în care exploatarea este figurată cu litera „C”, în aval de la ieșirea din munți a râului Cibin, la poalele acestora (fig. 23/2). Cercetări de suprafață, desfășurate în anii 2022-2023<sup>50</sup>, au condus la identificarea pe teren a carierei de piatră, aflată la poalele nordice ale muntelui *Măgureaua*. La fața locului dar și din fotografiile aeriene, se pot observa foarte bine fronturile de lucru în suprafețe regulate, săpate în trepte, sub formă de șiruri pe panta dealului. Arealul exploatat este sub forma unui poligon cu dimensiunile de cca. 500 x 150 m (fig. 24-27).

47. Gooss 1876, p. 279.

48. Muntean, *Monografia*, 12-13; Arsenie, *Gura Râului*, 321.

49. Arsenie, *Gura Râului*, 165.

50. Cercetări efectuate de autorii acestui studiu.



**Fig. 26.** Urme ale exploatăriilor din cariera de la Gura Râului, la poalele muntelui *Măgurea* (aerofotografii 2024)



**Fig. 27.** Urme ale exploatăriilor din cariera de la Gura Râului, la poalele muntelui *Măgurea* (aerofotografie 2024)



## Concluzii

Documentarea patrimoniului medieval, premodern și modern al Gurii Râului, efectuată între anii 2018-2019<sup>51</sup> dar și ulterior, ne-a relevat realități diferite față de cele ilustrate în reglementările legale de până atunci (clasări în LMI și RAN ori în vechiul Plan Urbanistic General, elaborat în anul 2013). Pe de o parte, cel știut îndeobște, din care nu lipsea „biserica veche, cu hramul „Cuvioasa Paraschiva”, pe de altă parte un patrimoniu cunoscut dar ignorat. Chiar dacă a doua biserică a satului considerăm că merită și ea o protecție adecvată valorii sale și rolului său în comunitate, atragem atenția îndeosebi asupra celor două obiective din secolul al XVIII-lea, a căror existență, deși probată, nu au stârnit un interes pe măsură și nici un efort coerent de cartare, clasare, protejare: cariera de piatră, respectiv canalul de transportare a pietrei spre Sibiu. Dacă cel din urmă a intrat în atenția istoricilor de-a lungul timpului, cariera a rămas o „cenușăreasă” a temelor de istorie locală sau zonală. Tocmai de aceea identificarea sa pe teren, documentarea aerofotografică și recuperarea cartografică de epocă constituie un suport documentar care face posibilă elaborarea pe viitor a unor abordări istorice ce trebuie gândite, desigur, în strânsă interdependență de cercetarea canalului navigabil Gura Râului – Sibiu.

Cumulat cu noile informații privitoare la potențialul arheologic, teritoriului comunei se reliefează astăzi ca unul mult mai conectat zonei din care face parte. Desigur, dacă ar fi să propunem noi direcții de investigare, cu certitudine ne-am îndrepta către zona montană a întinsului teritoriu al Gurii Râului, acolo unde o cercetare sistematică folosind mijloace moderne credem că ar fi în măsură măcar să schițeze adevăratul rol al muntelui în diferitele etape istorice și să permită identificarea vechilor căi de comunicație care traversau versanții Carpaților în acest sector.

## Bibliography

- Arsenie, Dumitru I. *Gura Râului. Sat din Mărginime* [Gura Râului. A Village from Mărginime]. Sibiu: Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, 2000.
- Berger, Albert. "Volkszählung in den 7 und 2 Stühlen, im Bistritzer und Kronstädter Distrikte vom Ende des XV. und Anfang des XVI. Jahrhunderts." *Korrespondenzblatt XVII*, no. 6 (1894): 49–59.
- Burnichioiu, Ileana. *Biserica ortodoxă Cuv. Paraschiva din Gura Râului (Auendorf, Guraró). Secolele XV?-XIX* [The Orthodox Church of St. Paraschiva in Gura Râului (Auendorf, Guraró). 15th?-19th Centuries]. Manuscript, 2010.
- Civilizația apei în Gura Râului: micromonografie pentru încurajarea turismului* [The Civilization of Water in Gura Râului: A Micromonograph for Promoting Tourism]. Sibiu: Casa de Presă și Editură Tribuna, 2015.
- Czekelius, Otto. "Rund um den Großen Ring." *Neuer Weg* 28, no. 8467 (August 4, 1976): 4–6.
- Dumitran, Daniel, Ana Dumitran, and Florean Adrian Laslo, eds. "...virtuti decreti tollerantiae beneficia clero Graeci restituenda...". *Biserica românească din Transilvania în izvoarele statistice ale anului 1767* [...virtuti decreti tollerantiae beneficia clero Graeci restituenda...]. The Romanian Church in Transylvania in the Statistical Sources of 1767]. Alba Iulia: Editura Altip, 2009.
- Fabini, Hermann. *Atlas der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kirchenburgen und Dorfkirchen*. Vol. 1. Hermannstadt: Monumenta Verlag; Heidelberg: Arbeitskreis für siebenbürgische Landeskunde e.V., 1998.
- Ghișa, Ciprian. *Episcopia greco-catolică de Făgăraș în timpul păstoririi lui Ioan Lemeni 1832-1850* [The Greek-Catholic Diocese of Făgăraș during the Episcopacy of Ioan Lemeni, 1832–1850]. Vol. 1. Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2008.
- Gündisch, Gustav, Herta Gündisch, Konrad Gündisch, and Gernot Nussbächer. *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*. Vol. VII (1474–1486). Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1991.
- Luca, Sabin Adrian, Zeno Karl Pinter, and Adrian Georgescu. *Repertoriul județului Sibiu* [Repertory of Sibiu County]. Sibiu: Editura Economică, 2003.
- Miron, Greta. *Biserica greco-catolică din Transilvania. Cler și enoriași (1697-1782)* [The Greek-Catholic Church in Transylvania. Clergy and Parishioners (1697–1782)]. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2004.
- Muntean, Ioachim. *Monografia economico-culturală a comunei Gurarâului* [The Economic and Cultural Monograph of the Gurarâului Commune]. Sibiu: Tiparul Institutului Tipografic, 1896.

51. Cu prilejul întocmirii studiului arheologic aferent Planului de Urbanism General al comunei.

- Munteanu, Claudiu I. *Contribuții la repertoriul arheologic al județului Sibiu* [Contributions to the Archaeological Repertory of Sibiu County]. Sibiu: Editura Armanis, 2018.
- Munteanu, Claudiu, and Răzvan Pop. "Portul orașului Hermannstadt (Sibiu) din anul 1703" [The Port of the City of Hermannstadt (Sibiu) in 1703]. *Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica XI* (2014): 27–39.
- Pop, Răzvan. „Un repertoriu al monumentelor dispărute, construite în perioada habsburgică și a Imperiului Austro-Ungar” [A Repertory of Disappeared Monuments Built During the Habsburg Period and the Austro-Hungarian Empire]. *Brukenthal. Acta Musei I*, no. 2 (2007): 230–255.
- Popa, Cristian Ioan, and Cristinel Plantos. "O incursiune în patrimoniul arheologic al comunei Gura Râului, județul Sibiu (I)" [An Incursion into the Archaeological Heritage of the Gura Râului Commune, Sibiu County (I)]. *Transilvania* no. 9 (2023): 86–96.
- Porumb, Marius. *Dicționar de pictură veche românească din Transilvania, sec. XIII-XVIII* [Dictionary of Old Romanian Painting in Transylvania, 13th–18th Centuries]. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1998.
- Rusu, Adrian A., coord. *Dicționarul mănăstirilor din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș* [Dictionary of Monasteries in Transylvania, Banat, Crișana, and Maramureș]. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000.
- Streza (Modi), Maria. *Cele trei paradigme feminine ale iconografiei creștine. Condiția feminității exprimată în decorul mural al bisericilor ortodoxe din județul Sibiu (sfârșit de secol XVIII și început de XIX)* [The Three Feminine Paradigms of Christian Iconography. The Condition of Femininity Expressed in the Mural Decorations of Orthodox Churches in Sibiu County (Late 18th and Early 19th Century)]. Doctoral dissertation abstract, Cluj-Napoca, 2019.