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Contents

Archive of the Matrimonial Court of Sălişte.
Sources for the History of Women in Modern Transylvania

Daniela Deteşan

"George Bariţiu" History Institute Cluj-Napoca, no. 12-14 Mihail Kogălniceanu St., Cluj-Napoca, 400084, Romania, daniela.detesan@acad-cj.ro

Abstract. Very little is known about the family life of Transylvanian women in the modern era. The main explanation is related to the insufficient exploitation of sources. Due to the richness, variety and complexity of the judicial-ecclesiastical archives, we have started building a database on divorce in *Airtable* based on records from the Sălişte, the main village of Mărginimea Sibiului, which has a unique, well-preserved documentary heritage. The ecclesiastical archive is kept at the Museum of the Orthodox Deanery of Sălişte in good condition, undamaged. Although the dissolution of marriage was a marginal phenomenon, the time has come to open the discussion for a debate on the sources and to take some steps forward in this research avenue. The article provides a description of the most important documents related to divorce, with a focus on content, structure, form, style, classification. The advantages but also the limits of matrimonial files are presented, which place the analysis scheme on the border between family history, historical demography, history of law, history of women, history of the church, rural history, history of feelings. The quality of the sources gives us the opportunity to identify divorce patterns characteristic of a highly individualized region within the Transylvanian area.

Keywords: divorce, women's history, matrimonial files, Orthodox Church, Transylvania.

1. Introduction
Matrimonial files have not yet been the subject of a large-scale scientific investigation in Romania. There are several explanations for this. Statistics indicate that the phenomenon of divorce was marginal. Fewer than 1% of the Transylvanian population concluded a divorce according to the censuses of 1890, 1900 and 1910 (Bolovan & Bolovan 2010: 111).

The only form of marriage that existed in Transylvania until the introduction of the "political-ecclesiastical laws"[1] (1894/1895) was religious. Moral perceptions guided the lives of communities in traditional societies such as the Romanian one. As the protector of the family, the church always called for reconciliation according to the biblical principle of "*What God has joined together, let no man separate!*" The far-reaching influence of the church (Orthodox and Greek-Catholic for Transylvanian Romanians) was behind the extremely low divorce rates within this group. Added to this was the long and difficult canonical procedure for dissolving marriage and the prohibitively high procedural fees thus incurred, which could reach up to the equivalent of a teacher's annual income (Deteșan 2020: 369).

Another difficulty is related to the fact that an archival index of sources on divorce has not yet been made. There are uninventoried funds, which makes them inaccessible to research. Dispersed throughout Transylvania in state or church archives, matrimonial files must be followed sequentially and correlated with other categories of sources (family records, marriage contracts, dowry contracts, inheritance files, wills, wealth inventories, general reports on the state/movement of the population, etc.) in order to recompose individual biographies and the day-to-day history of couples.

Many of the files have been preserved in incomplete form. Most often the information and data were recorded unevenly and cannot be compared across time and space. The number of documents included in a file varies from case to case, year to year and from deanery to deanery. Although the research of the ecclesiastical archives has made obvious progress in Romania in recent decades in the direction of documentary valorisation, and from an interpretative point of view, their "stripping" has remained limited and deficient.

The processing and editing of divorce-related documents, with all the stages involved-transcription, translation, collation, regestation, the preparation of critical notes, and the establishment of onomastic and toponymic indices - remains an intensive, challenging, and meticulous task. This undertaking requires, above all, proficiency in the languages of the 19th-century sources: Hungarian, German, and Romanian written in Cyrillic script.
The information and data in matrimonial files are different from sources that provide continuous registration, such as population censuses or civil status

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[1] These are the civil matrimonial legislation (article of law XXXI on civil marriage, XXXII on the religion of children from mixed marriages and XXXIII on civil registration registers) or the so-called "political-ecclesiastical laws", by which the institution of civil marriage and state registration registers were introduced in Transylvania on October 1, 1895. See Bolovan et al., 2009: 864-903.

registers. On the one hand, we get the classic demographic indicators:age at marriage, age at divorce, year of marriage, year of divorce, religion, nationality, place of origin, place of residence, number of children, occupation. What differs from the Western context is the ecclesiastical nature of the formation and dissolution of marriage. In reading the documents we find a diversity of names associated with divorce[2]. In addition, there are details recorded on spouses' education, the dowry received at marriage, moral behavior[3], geographical mobility, family structure, and household formation. On the other hand, we can better understand the mechanisms of divorce and the factors that affected the dissolution of the marriage. „The cause of bad living" can be explained by several determinants: early marriages, arranged marriages, socio-cultural differences between partners (ethnic and/or religious differences, unequal level of education), lack of economic resources, material difficulties, financial risks, unstable macroeconomic situation, poor health, specific local circumstances.

This study presents the most important sources on divorce preserved in the juridical-ecclesiastical archives of Transylvania, covering topics related to the origin and function of the documents, and to their content, structure and typology. In addition, aspects less often addressed in historiography regarding the form and style of documents were taken into account. The advantages and limitations of matrimonial files will be pointed out, which place the analysis scheme on the border among family history, historical demography, history of law, history of women, history of the church, rural history, history of feelings. The main objective is to examine the content and significance of the records of divorce proceedings. Any attempt to explain confrontations in front of the courts relates to women's experiences and lives, which can only lead to a better understanding of women's history. The quality of the sources allows us to identify divorce patterns and characteristics typical of a strongly individualized region within the Transylvanian area.

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[2] *Marital divorce process, divorce process, divorce case/action, total separation, total divorce, dissolution of marriage forever, separation process, matrimonial process.*

[3] The morality of the inhabitants is attested by an „unofficial certificate". For example, the Galeş commune town hall issued a document authenticated by signature by the Orthodox priest Dimitrie Iosof, which specified: „during his husband's absence from home to his economy [Ioana lui Iacob Răchiţan from Galeş, married to Simion Bratu from Tilişca] he advanced in a very demoralized behavior in several branches of moral corruption, without having been shy of the reprimands of one and the other". See the Archive of the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Sălişte (hereinafter A.P.O.R.S.) 131/1873.

2. The region and population studied

Mărginimea Sibiului is a compact Romanian Orthodox area that has gained undeniable fame through the occupations of its inhabitants. Transhumant shepherding, processing of sheep flock products and transit trade were the predominant productive activities, which provided the inhabitants with satisfactory incomes and a high standard of living. From an administrative point of view, the area belonged to the county of Sibiu (covering an area of 1,200 km²), and from an ecclesiastical point of view to the Romanian Orthodox Deanery of Săliște. In terms of size and population, Săliște was one of the small but wealthy deaneries of the Archdiocese of Transylvania. The total population of 24,660 was 11,737 men and 12,447 women (in 1872). In the famous shepherds' villages of Mărginime (Săliște, Gura Râului, Jina, Poiana, Tilișca, Rășinari) there were 15 churches built of solid material, covered with tiles, served by 27 priests, 3 parish administrators and 1 deacon. (A.P.O.R.S. 61/1872).

Located in the Black River Valley, at the border between the Cibin Mountains and the Transylvanian Plateau, Săliștea was a district centre (*centru de plasă*) and the seat of a deanery. It offered a model of organization and development. The jurisdiction of the church of Săliște had in 1883 a population of 4,226 inhabitants (1,370 families, of which 2,226 women and 2,000 men) divided into four parishes where Daniel Marcu (parish priest), Onisifor Borcea (parish priest), Ioan Popa (chaplain) and Alexandru Borcea (chaplain) served. (A.P.O.R.S. 3/1884). The community had a complex social-occupational structure, including individuals who worked as doctors (Dr. Nicolae Calefariu, Dr. Nicolae Comșa), public notaries (Nicolae Henţiu, Ioan Chirca, Octavian Sglimbea), a bank manager (Constantin Herţa), a lawyer (Dr. Nicolae Petra), an accountant (Nicolae Hociotă), a judge (Ioan Maxim), a pharmacist (Dumitru Banciu), a vice-prefect (Petru Drăghici), an inn owner (Dumitru Răcuciu), a painter (Picu Procopie Pătruţ), merchants (Petru Comșa, Ionel Comșa, Ioan Banciu, Iordache Roșca Căpitan, Nicolae ţintea, Teodor Doboiu, Ioan Bârsan, etc.). The village witnessed the opening of the first practical school of economics, the first graft garden, the first dairy in the area. The Great Square paved with boulders and was about three times larger than the square of the capital of Oltenia. Every Monday was a market day. At the Central Hotel in the Square, there was a restaurant run by Ilie Popa (Stoenescu 1905: 474-475). The Great Square brought together 30 Romanian vaulting companies that began to expand to Râmnicu-Vâlcea, Târgu-Jiu, Cluj or Bistriţa. In Săliște and four surrounding communes alone, there were 100 such merchants and tenants (Tribuna 1906: 6).

The capital of Mărginimea had enough resources to support several cultural institutions. The most important, the central school - confessional Orthodox capital[4], boasted qualified teachers speaking German and Hungarian and a high school attendance. Solidarity, respect for the elderly and the poor, as well as a strong associative spirit were all evidence of social conscience. A cluster of associations and corporations demonstrated a vibrant and extensive social life.[5] The literacy level of the population was high. Only 18% of all adults did not know how to read and write (A.P.O.R.S. II/21/1911). Also, one could find a sewing machine in every fifth house, with three quarters of the local women earning their living by tailoring, sewing and weaving. This „republic of Romanian peasants" (Nicolae Iorga) produced 11 academicians, a unique fact in the world compared to such a small community.

3. Sources

Sălişte has a unique, well-preserved documentary heritage. The archive is kept at the Museum of the Deanery of Sălişte, in a building that is over 100 years old. The documents are in very good condition, undamaged. They were inventoried according to the chronological principle. The limit years of the fund are 1848 and 1937. A series of complete, systematic and continuous documents, stretched over almost a century, have been preserved in good condition, which is a great advantage to historical research.

The collection is variously represented in its approximately 15 linear meters. The sources are unique. In terms of content, it provides information related to the church, school, population, administration, social and cultural life. The archive includes documents written in Romanian (97%), German (2%) and Hungarian (1%). Until 1864/1865 the Romanian documents were written in the Cyrillic alphabet (Deteşan 2016: 283).

From the typological point of view, we can find official correspondence and private letters. From the point of view of content, the ecclesiastical documents predominate (church statistics and circulars, protocols, reports, notes and dispatches) followed by school documents

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[4] At the school in Sălişte, 7 teachers and 1 teacher aged between 24 and 53 taught over 500 children. Teachers received a yearly wagebetween 350 and 400 florins. See A.P.O.R.S. 349/1884.

[5] The „Casina Română" Reading Society (1878), the Firemen's Meeting (1882), the Craftsmen's Meeting (1882), the Music and Songs Reunion (1883), the „Casa de Păstrare" / „Keeping House" Joint Stock Company (1884), the Beauty Meeting, the Reunion of the Studious Youth (1890), the Sălişte District of Astra (1894), the Funeral Meeting (1901), the „Binefacerea" Asylum for the Care of the Sick and the Protection of the Helpless (1906), the „Poporul" Bank (1908), the Romanian Orthodox Women's Society of Sălişte (1914), The Romanian Orthodox Youth Society of Sălişte (1916).

(teachers' employment contracts, certificates, certificates, contracts, reports after-school absences, annual reports on the state of schools), demographic resources (matrimonial files, annual lists of marriages performed, statistics of legitimate and illegitimate births, records of population migration), photographs, excerpts from articles from the press of the time or leaflets. All of them attest to complex historical realities and provide a glimpse into individuals' lives (villagers, priests, archpriests) and levels of communities (villages, parishes, deanery), within the Mărginimea Sibiului area.

The sources on divorce used for demographic analyses are matrimonial files. Renowned Romanian historians, such as Simion Retegan, Sorina Paula Bolovan and Ioan Bolovan, Valeria Soroştineanu, Mircea Brie, understood the importance of matrimonial files and used them in their analysis to explore the „causes" judged at the level of the Greek-Catholic Diocese of Gherla, the Matrimonial Court of Sibiu or the Greek-Catholic Diocese of Oradea.

The matrimonial files were created and kept by the church institutions where the divorce occurred. At the end of the nineteenth century, every year, the archpriest drew up a general report of the deanery. In the chapter on „Population Status/Movement" we can read about the number of inhabitants, the number of families, literacy rates, the number of births, marriages, divorces, deaths and changes of religion which occurred in the communes.

In Sălişte, the protopresbyterial seat (the first court) that judged matrimonial disputes met on a monthly basis. It had the obligation to send to the consistory the records of couples faced with „the cause of bad living". All documentation had to be kept in the archive.

The delay of Romanian historiography in utilizing this type of sources, compared to English, French, or German productions, can be remedied by creating databases. For the southern area of Transylvania, we have started the creation of a database for the Sălişte deanery. The representativeness of these files at the provincial level is yet to be established, and the research into other regions is to be extended. In addition, the evolution of divorce among Romanians, Hungarians and Saxons should be compared.

The selected documents were digitized (a total of about 14,800 images). The divorce database includes 528 files judged at the level of the Sălişte Orthodox deanery between 1860 and 1890. After going through all the files and transcribing them partially, we introduced the data manually in the Airtable interface. Almost half of the cases – 223 or 42.2% - ended in a total divorce sentence. The remaining share comprised matrimonial disagreements 114 (21.5%), unresolved files 54 (10.2%), incomplete files 49 (9.2%), files in which

the reconciliation of partners was successful 40 (7.5%), files rejected by the court 29 (5.4%), "bed and board separations" 19 (3.5%) (Deteşan 2020: 370).

The documents in the divorce files record important events in the course of life: birth, marriage, divorce, remarriage. Birth and marriage information[6] is derived from civil status registers. The date of birth, the name and surname, the religion, the names of the godparents, the names of the parents (sometimes also the father's occupation), the place of birth, the name of the priest who officiated the baptism, the date of marriage, the age at marriage, the marital status, the number of announcements and the date on which they were made, the godparents, the priest who celebrated the marriage were recorded.

Female voices were heard more frequently at the Sălişte courthouse. Women filed for divorce more often (61%) than men (37%), as was the case in France and the Netherlands (van der Heijden, 2015); in 2% of cases, divorce was granted by mutual consent of the spouses. 68% of the divorced couples had one or more children, and 32% had no children (Deteşan 2020: 371).

The more frequent initiative of women in divorce affairs can be explained by the fact that they managed to gain some financial autonomy, and thus more easily escaped the tutelage of men. At the end of the nineteenth century, over 20 shops and numerous folk costumes workshops led by women were operating in Sălişte. Ana Bucşe ran a colonial shop (groceries, tea, coffee, spices, chocolate, tobacco), Sora Beju owned a small goods shop, Ermina Irhaş, the mother of Archpriest Dumitru Borcea, ran a carpet weaving workshop and initiated and trained generations of young weavers. Wives and husbands viewed the breakdown of marriage from different perspectives and attributed different causes to it. The lives of women, lived within the family, were exposed before an all-male jury. The documentation produced by the women - statements, actions requesting the opening of the divorce process, answers, replies, replies to replies (*rejoinder*, *triple*, *quadruple*, *quintuple*) – proves, once again, the active role and contribution they made in building their own destiny.

Divorce files were centralised at the level of each deanery (court of law), and the ecclesiastical authorities had the task of preserving them. This category of sources is thus well suited for both a qualitative, as well as a quantitative analysis.

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[6] Divorce files contain birth and marriage extracts stamped and signed by the priest.

The divorce was admitted in the Orthodox Church in Transylvania. There were three ecclesiastical courts: the protopresbyterial seat (the first court), the diocesan consistory (second court) and the metropolitan consistory (third court). From a procedural point of view, the divorce included two stages, namely the investigation and the trial.

4. Content, form and style in matrimonial files

Ecclesiastical justice exercised by qualified clergy acted in stages, with debates and deliberations, according to a well-established canonical procedure. Preliminary to the trial itself, „two attempts at peace were carried out before the priests".[7] The priest sought, by all ecclesiastical means, to restore harmony between the spouses. After 15 days, the attempt at reconciliation was repeated in the presence of two distinguished members of the community. In case of failure, the priest issued a certificate with the result of the reconciliation attempts, directing the parties to the archpriest. The archpriest tried to achieve a „reconciliation" and then left a period of 30 days for the preparation of the trial.

From the point of view of the process, the documentation is limited to the documents submitted to the courts: arguments for and against the parties, summonses, setting deadlines, depositions, interrogations and hearings of witnesses, investigations, solutions and sentences.

A selective inventory of the documents in the matrimonial files includes:

a) The plaintiff's action - provides biographical and demographic data: age, sex, place of birth, residence, religion, occupation, date of marriage, duration of marriage, number of children and reason for requesting divorce. The dissolution of the marriage was requested through *the matrimonial action* (*defendant*, *action*). The parties were asked in what form they want the divorce process to take place, protocol or scriptural. Usually, the protocol procedure was chosen. The accusation had to be reported with all the necessary circumstances and evidence: „at first everything was good because the undersigned brought a beautiful fortune as a dowry, but this did not last long because he was not thrifty and did not spare any wealth. He went to Romania to make a fortune, but he became involved with swindlers and thieves, and after two years he sent me a letter informing me that he had taken another wife and if I so wished, I could also marry whomever I wanted." (A.P.O.R.S. 33/1882)

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[7]According to art. 21 of the *Regulation* for the year 1878. See *Regulament, 1878,* 259-292.

b) The respondent's reply, which denies the accusations made;

c) Certificates of several types: medical, marriage, for the appearance of the parties at the parish office, poverty (pauperity);

d) Standard extracts from the register of baptised and/or married couples, investigation protocols, plenipotentiaries;

e) Opinions - could belong to the matrimonial defender, to the official of the dean's seat who was supposed to provide a brief pertaining to the case (Ro. *Referent*) , to the prosecutor of the dean's seat; during the period analysed, the position of marriage defender (*defensor of matrimonial cases*) was held by V. Almăşan and Dr. Ioan Nemeş, lawyer in Sibiu; the formulation of the opinion of the matrimonial defender („between the litigants, there is a mutual perplexed hatred, which makes conjugal cohabitation impossible") held an important place in the economy of the process of divorce.

f) Hearing and formal oath of witnesses - provides information about witnesses: name, religion, age, marital status, children, criminal record, and relationship with the defendants („Do you have any hatred towards the parties?"). The witnesses were being heard one by one, under oath. The depositions were faithfully recorded, signed by handwritten signature or the laying on of the finger. Two categories of questions were asked: general/standard („Do you know why you are called here? Do you know the litigants? What is your name? Where are you from? What religion are you? Are you married? Do you live in enmity with one of the parties? Are you related to any of the parties? What do you eat? Have you ever been punished or under criminal investigation? Did someone from the parties promise you something, to speak in their favor, or do you have any damage or interest from this process?") and special inquiries, which related to the controversial case and its circumstances, with a focus on what the witness knew about the two spouses who had filed for divorce. The oath taken by witnesses before the investigative commission and trusted men was prescribed by the matrimonial procedure according to the following standard formula: *I, X, swear to Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that I will tell all that I know, and what I will be asked in this trial, just and true. May God help me* (A.P.O.R.S. 320/1883).

h) Investigation protocol - includes information about all persons involved in the investigation of the case and their occupation - commissioner, witness, plaintiff and accused;

h) The judgement or sentencing - was drafted in writing; it was a public decision, communicated to the parties, who could challenge it within 15 days. It had to contain a few elements: a brief presentation of the case, the in-facto statement and the decision made. It established whether the parties could

remarry, the amount of the court costs; it could be appealed. The document, with a registration number, stamped and with an original handwritten signature, had to be countersigned by the episcopal secretary. The reason for divorce had to abide by the canons of the Orthodox Church and be fully proven. The separation could be total or partial (the so-called „separation from bed and board" for a fixed period of one year, to reconcile the spouses). The divorce decrees indicated precisely whether and under what conditions the partners could remarry: „dissolve the marriage by allowing the plaintiff to move on to another marriage, the accusation being withdrawn when the accused proves in a trustworthy manner that he/she has cleansed himself/herself of the disease he/she suffers from [insanity]" (A.P.O.R.S. 178/I/1885). Remarriages were mainly due to the death of one of the partners and not to divorce. Women were the most vulnerable, exhausted from repeated childbirths, subjected to household work, raising and caring for children, and preparing clothing, fabrics and bed linen during the winter. At the end of the divorce sentence, the court costs were specified. Usually, the partner found guilty had to pay a fee in the form of a sum of money ranging from 10 fl. to 120 florins (Deteşan, 2020). When children were involved, the divorce decree specified under whose care they would fall: „at the request of the plaintiff, the care of the three legitimate children is left to the named [Ioan Mutu of Topârcea]", and that other civil claims would be resolved by the competent civil court (A.P.O.R.S. 178/I/1885).

The matrimonial files were handwritten by several people, in black or blue ink, in different calligraphy (small, italic, straight). They only contain text, and no illustrations, graphs or tables. When the sheets were tied with thread, the thread had to be sealed so that the sheets did not come loose. Each matrimonial file was accompanied by an opis or itemized list of the documents.

The vocabulary includes archaisms, regionalisms, Latinisms, and terms specific to canon law. The text often contains underlined terms and passages as well as annotations. Many abbreviated words need to be supplemented during the transcription. The forms of address comply with the terminology and protocol norms of the Orthodox Church[8]. For authenticity, a stamp[9], date, holographic signature, stamp or seal are applied. Sometimes the spelling and punctuation are inconsistent. The regime of uppercase or lowercase letters, with reference to the months of the year, the days of the weeks, religious holidays, state and church institutions, differs from the current one. There are

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[8] *Most Honored Archpriest, Venerable Protopresbyterial See, Venerable Archdiocesan Consistory,* etc.

[9] According to Law XXIII/1868, all divorce proceedings were subject to stamp jurisdiction, i.e. the action, the investigation protocol were stamped with 36 seals/sheet and the certificates with 50 seals/sheet.

also lexical peculiarities, specific to southern Transylvania. The genuine, pure Romanian language is fluent and full of charm, reminiscent of the orality of the proceedings.

The need to draw up a glossary of terms is more than obvious. We encounter Latinising terms[10], as well as formal and stereotyped constructions. Canon law involves a specific mode of expression. The style comprises two registers: official and personal.

5. Conclusions

Although they are not the perfect sources, matrimonial files remain the most important historical sources in Transylvania in terms of the information they provide on the phenomenon of divorce. A systematic approach of the Sălişte fund regarding divorce gives us a broader and more in-depth vision of women's lives.

Divorce proceedings have produced a significant number of documents, which come in various forms. They are subject to demographic and family history analyses, but can be analysed in terms of content, form, and style. Divorce papers reveal individuals' level of culture. The vocabulary includes lengthy, explanatory sentences. The style is petitionary.

The divorce casuistry reveals intimate glimpses of the daily existence of the shepherds from Mărginimea, who leave their legal wives and the country to make some fortune. We enter a traditional world where girls just out of childhood become wives after a superficial acquaintance with their future partner.

We have pointed out the very particular impact of religion on the lifestyle of Mărginimea Sibiului. The Church considered divorce as *one of the most shameful wounds of society*. Through the voice of the priests, the church condemned the deplorable moral state of the inhabitants.

The selected case study is a particular one in the Transylvanian area. The pattern of the immovable rural society does not apply to Sălişte. *Perla Mărginimii* was a laboratory of changes, of the circulation of goods and good practices. The fact that the inhabitants here were educated was an indicator that underlines the high level of development of the area, compared to other Romanian communities.

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[10] *Inct* (accused), *actor* (plaintiff), *ursoriu* (request to the archpriest's seat for resolution without delay), *utripoints* (questions addressed to witnesses about spouses), *defensor matrimonial* (marriage defender) who had the role of defending the marriage with all possible arguments; he was a good connoisseur of the canons; he elaborated his opinion in writing in matrimonial cases after a thorough investigation of the documents of the trial; *pertraction* (debating a disputed issue).

The women of the Sălişte deanery seemed to have some economic opportunities and some possibilities to run small local businesses. They were women with judgment, willpower, energy, caution. This was the case of Maria Bârza (divorced) who only through her ability to be economical „can boast that she has the house provided with all the necessities" (A.P.O.R.S. 19/1872). Many women had amassed financial capital to such an extent that they could lend money to men. See the case of Ana Roscoiei from Sălişte (divorced) who gave the sum of 320 fl. to Ioan David Ungurul (A.P.O.R.S. 11/1872). In the same group we can include the merchant Ana, born Zaza (divorced), who traded with belts and cotton in Haţeg and other parts of the country. Since she was providing for herself, she fed herself and her child for more than five years, paid all the hard debts and could afford to shoulder all the communal burdens (A.P.O.R.S. 32/1875). At Săcel, Ana of Simion Dicu (divorced) cared for "all the things of the household and the field as required of a good provider of home and field work, paying each worker his due pay and increasing in her economy" (A.P.O.R.S. 11/1872). In Tilişca, Ioana Nanu (divorced) dealt with various trades. She kept her two sons, Nicolae, 11 years old, and Constantin, 9 years old, on her own expense at the Reformed school in Orăştie. She paid for private classes of German and Romanian for her children. The woman had an exemplary behavior, worthy of all the praise that was due to a true mother (A.P.O.R.S. 38/1876).

In historiography, female characters from the upper layer of society are mainly mentioned: mothers, wives or daughters of political leaders, economic, social, religious elites. We know very little about ordinary women and their everyday existence. The matrimonial files kept in Sălişte allow us to reconstruct the lives of women and the determinants of the dissolution of marriage.

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The Role of the Romanian Film in Correcting Juvenile Delinquency during the Socialist Regime

Elena Stanciu-Gorun

Babeş-Bolyai University, Doctoral School Population Studies and History of Minorities,
elena.stanciu@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract. Feature-length fiction movies were an important instrument of propaganda during Romania's communist regime. As cinema was financed exclusively and controlled by the state between 1948 and 1989, motion pictures were used to convey socialist policies—of course, packaged as fictional drama—to make ideological or regulatory information more easily accepted by society. One of the messages intended to be conveyed in this way was that although the state was looking after the welfare of all citizens, especially the young, families often undermined this effort by neglecting their children, who would end up becoming delinquents. If, on one hand, rules and laws were effective means to control individuals' actions, on the other hand, motion pictures proved to be a powerful tool to shape consciousness and to induce certain beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Films dealing with certain cases of juvenile delinquency, or which brought before the public the stories of crimes, large or small, are also part of this line of prevention and the construction of civic behaviour. In this paper, to explore how the anti-crime message was constructed and what ideas were conveyed, I have set out to analyse three such film productions, from different periods of the communist regime, each of them featuring as a main character a young person who had slipped into deviant behaviour.

1. Introduction

In Romania, the issue of juvenile delinquents—their maltreatment and malnutrition, as well as the failed attempts to re-educate them—was not specific to the communist period. Even before 1948, there were so-called re-education institutes for minors, in practice institutions of detention for those

who had not yet turned 18 and who had been convicted by a court for anti-social acts, theft, or even murder. As various media reports of the time attest to, institutionalization as a result of court sentencing spelled a dire fate for minors. In fact, these accounts are sometimes much more generous with details of the lives of these young people than archival documents. For instance, a newspaper article, published in 1933, described the conditions in which juvenile delinquents were held at one of these re-education institutes, explaining how they lived, cramped in dormitories that were too small for their numbers and wearing worn-out clothes. Furthermore, sanitary rules were non-existent, and the food rations were entirely insufficient. The quote below illustrates life in a re-education institute, located at 10 Kogălniceanu Street, in Cluj:

> "*The minors do not sleep in separate rooms, meaning that there are no individual cells; instead, 20 or so detainees are piled up in rooms of 4-5 beds. Because of the lack of beds, many slept on the floor*" (Lupta 1933:2).

A decade later, the situation was just as problematic. In 1946, as the country's capital, Bucharest, was "besieged by pickpockets", another article published by the newspaper *România liberă*, sounded the alarm that the number of juvenile delinquents was on the rise and claimed that there was a „strong demand for the establishment of re-education schools" (Cobar 1946:3). In another article, the same author states that on a single day, in the autumn of 1946, 80 vagrants were picked up by the police from Bucharest's North Train Station area, including 35 children. Among them, there were young children, teenage boys, and some girls aged 13-15 who were prostitutes. The article goes on to explain that one of the children, a 10-year-old girl, had been abandoned at the train station by her father who wanted to remarry without any hassle (N.C. 1976:1).

Once the communist regime came into power in 1948, it dealt with this issue by strongly denouncing the "disaster" left behind by their predecessors-the bourgeois system - and claiming that the state would take responsibility for finding solutions. To address the issue of juvenile delinquency post-WWII, the communists prioritised setting up more re-education schools during the first decade after assuming power. Then, in 1951, the reform schools for juvenile offenders were transferred under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, commonly known as the "Militia" (national police force, since 1951). If these means of guiding minors to the right path failed, they would be sentenced to correctional prison.

"The militia, among the many activities it has to perform, also works to supervise the way children are guided, so that the youth receive a new, appropriate education, to become useful to our society" argued the militia lieutenant Ion Berte in the press at the time (Berte 1961:2). Re-education schools that were lacking at the end of the war were set up during the first decade of communism, and when all means of guiding the minor to the right path had been exhausted, minors were sentenced to correctional prison. At the same time the newspapers - also under state control, like the cinema - started featuring articles authored by figures of authority: employees of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice mostly, in order to reinforce the message that the school, the society, and especially the family, bears responsibility for the correct education of the child. The model of the communist ideal citizen, the *new man*, was to be embraced by the socialist society as a whole, including its youngest generation:

> *"It must be remembered that if from the starting point of the educational work, in the family, the necessary care has not been taken to instill into the child the skills, habits, and customs corresponding to the moral traits of the new man, then the educational work of all the other factors is greatly hampered, because in this situation the question of re-education arises, with all the difficulties that this presents"* (Doltu 1968: 3).

However, the institutionalisation of minors had limited effects; sending minors to correctional prisons did not solve the issue, but on the contrary, introduced them to an unhealthy, promiscuous environment that fostered anti-social behaviour, which only kept them trapped in a vicious circle.

Despite this evidence, a scientific analysis based on systematic data on juvenile delinquency during the communist regime is difficult to carry out, as sociologists Dan Banciu and Sorin M. Rădulescu found out, for two reasons. First, the secrecy of statistical data in order to deny that juvenile delinquency existed and, second, the so-called "legislative manipulation", another means of hiding the real dimension of the phenomenon (Banciu, Rădulescu 2002: 239). According to an analysis carried out by the authors of the book *Evolutions of juvenile delinquency in Romania: research and social prevention*, between 1980 and 1989, approximately 3,800 minors were sentenced annually by the Romanian courts (Banciu, Rădulescu 2002: 240).

During the communist regime, the main ideological approach to fight against crime among adolescents and young people was to educate them in the spirit of the revolution and promote a new type of consciousness, following the New-Soviet Man model. As one of the key elements of the Soviet Union

Communist Party Programme is the importance given to the formation of the communist *consciousness* of the people, the achievement of this ethical ideal by the individual was a priority for the Romanian state, or, more precisely, for the two communist parties that governed the country during the regime – Romanian Workers' Party (1948-1965) and Romanian Communist Party (1965-1989). As Marxist-Leninist instructions stipulated, to promote these concepts and ideas, the state conducted massive public education and mass communication campaigns. The state-controlled media, as well as most literature and art, were also subject to strong ideological pressures, and turned into instruments of promoting the *new man* model, which individuals were to adopt by any means necessary. Communist propaganda thus no longer had the sole purpose of convincing people of a certain truth outside themselves, which they did not see or experience, but precisely to alter their innermost being and beliefs about themselves.

> *"The natural condition of the individual, that of accepting his limitations and predispositions, was disregarded and brutally replaced by a fiction (i.e. perfection through depersonalization), which tended to become state policy"*(Neagoe 2015: 23).

In the Soviet Union, from the outset, the task of conveying the most refined propaganda message fell to literature, as this was regarded as the most complex means of communication, even when it began to be seriously challenged by film, because works of literature were capable of creating deep connections with the reader. By subjugating all artistic creation *to socialist realism*, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union secured control over content, even in the face of the diversity of writers' creative spirit:

> *"What is socialist realism? It is first of all the skill of showing the truthful man as he is and at the same time as he ought to be. The question may be asked: is it possible to show man simultaneously as he is and as he ought to be? Yes, it is possible, even in the field of nature. The apple as it is in nature is a berry that is sufficiently sour. But the apple obtained by the skilful horticulturist Miciurin expresses the essence of the apple to a greater extent than the wild fruit of the forest. Socialist realism in creation enriches life, showing the progressive, guiding features, the features of tomorrow"* (Carp 1947:1).

In his article entitled *"Towards a New Humanism"*, Carp Dimov points out, as early as 1947, that the role of literature is to present the ideal model, but at the same time not to bypass the difficulties and shortcomings of life which prevent man from attaining that ideal. This is done precisely so that through this virtual experience mediated by literature the individual can, without losing his existence, choose for himself a path by which he can reach his full potential and come closer to the model of the new man, popularized by the Party through all types of media. The role of the message-creating artist thus becomes, in the author's view that of a leader who positions himself ahead of times, so that through his understanding he can show the people the way forward. The model of socialist realism was also swiftly adopted in Romanian literature, as happened in all the countries of the Eastern Bloc.

As far as the Romanian cinema is concerned, *the topical film* became the preferred way of expression of socialist realism, accompanying communist production right from the beginning. The film *Răsună Valea* [*The Valley Echoes*] made in 1949 by director Paul Călinescu, based on a screenplay by Mircea Ștefănescu, was not only the first feature-length fiction film of the communist era, but also the first topical film in Romania. The films of the first communist decade, through characters such as the young peasant Mitrea Cocor in the homonymous film (1952), the fisherman Adam Jora in *Pasărea furtunii,* from 1957 [*Storm Bird*] or the main character, a miner, in *Brigada lui Ionuț* [*Ionuț's Brigade*] produced in 1954, faithfully reproduce the model of the *new man*— strong, handsome, and optimistic. In fact, all the heroes who evoke the *new man* in the first Romanian communist films are young militants who discover in the communist ideology the salvation from a life full of hardships and injustices. All these characters also have in common the struggle to defend their new life in communism, which they propose and explain to others.

However, as a consequence of the Romanian communism moving away from the Stalinist model in 1953, the Romanian cinema started to feature a diverse range of characters. Even if the message remained broadly the same, a diversification in the types of characters, as well as in the stories presented to the public occurred. These reflect the socio-political relaxation that followed destalinisation, movie structure becoming more flexible and richer in how it depicted human nature. This enriched representation of the human condition naturally involves leaning towards less perfect models. If the viewer was initially shown the *new man* as he was meant to be, as Carp Dimov, author of the article *Towards a New Humanism*, put it, cinema had the power to show the face of man as he was, in a less idealised version, and then to focus on his becoming and the obstacles he had to overcome.

2. The child abandoned by the family, a sure victim

Against this backdrop, it was only a matter of time before the delinquent child or teenager in an unfortunate situation became the subject of an educational film. For the purpose of this article, which aims to assess negative illustrations of young people in the Romanian socialist cinema, I will discuss three films produced in different decades, to follow not only distinct characters, but also a historical perspective of the character type, whose traits were certainly influenced by the context in which it was created.

Who Will Open the Door? (*Cine va deschide ușa?*) is a film directed by Gheorghe Naghi, based on a screenplay by Alexandru Andrițoiu and Nicolae Ștefănescu, released in 1967. The main character is a 13-year-old boy – until 1969, when a new Penal Code came into force, the minimum legal age for minors to be held criminally liable was 12 – Ovidiu Codrescu (performed by Armand Oprescu), who has ended up in reform school. The moment the film captures is just before Christmas, two years after Ovidiu's arrival at the establishment. At the time, reform schools had a bad reputation in the Romanian society, which is reflected in the attitudes of some characters, but the film strives to show that, in fact, the young men live in decent conditions, almost as they would have at home. They have access to showers, hot food and clean bedrooms, with the only rough time being when they do their calisthenics in the cold, winter-morning air. The teachers are also depicted as no less than teachers in a regular school, who show understanding and empathy towards their students. In this film, the main character's good behaviour—being quiet and obeying the rules—is acknowledged and the headmistress, nicknamed Tiger, tells Ovidiu that he can go home. "The reform school is not a prison... nor, of course, a pioneer camp" she tells the teenager. Her comment points at the identity and behaviour model the Communists had created for children, *the pioneer*, who encompassed all the aspirational qualities of the new man, a model the character was expected to follow once released from the facility.

The reform school is presented as a re-education school with strict discipline and rules resembling those of a military unit. However, the films illustrates that the children were not subjected to abuse, only re-educated through physical exercise and work. For instance, as Ovidiu is taken by the school van to the train station, other vans are transporting his classmates to their job for the day—shovelling the snow off a public road.

Of course, Ovidiu's journey is just the beginning, a journey on which he is accompanied by the audience and, through his memories and his experiences, the public understands that he is merely a lost child. Through this film, director Gheorghe Nagy is claiming children's right to childhood.

As the school van was driving to the train station, a loud woman (played by Draga Olteanu Matei) jumps in front of it agitating her arms, forcing the driver to stop. She explained that she needed a ride to the station, too. After some convincing, she was allowed on the van. This was going to prove a life-changing coincidence for our character.

On the train, the woman and Ovidiu find themselves in the same compartment, along with a group of pioneers on their way to summer camp, crammed together with scores of other travellers. As the woman desperately tries to get on the train with her seven pieces of luggage, she starts being suspicious of Ovidiu, and even tries to warn everyone that he was released from the reform school. In this moment, Ovidiu understands that the stigma of having been sentenced to reform school would follow him for the rest of his life. This triggers a series of memories, which allow the viewer to gain some insight into his life story.

Ovidiu was the son of a married couple who couldn't get along anymore, and he had greatly suffered from abuse at home before being sent to reform school. His father (performed by actor Ștefan Mihăilescu Brăila) often directed his anger to the child, beating him, while his mother (Corina Constantinescu) would try helplessly to defend her son. In time, the more violent the father became, the more absent the mother became, escaping to rehearsals at the amateur theatre she attended. To avoid the father's wrath, the mother would even leave the boy little notes on the main door, warning him not to enter the house when he got back from school and not to eat until they returned from work. But Ovidiu had a secret refuge: in the attic, he set up a small workshop full of tools and broken appliances he was fixing, as well as an amateur radio station. Florica, his neighbour and childhood friend, would often hang out with him and would be the only one who understood and felt for him. Despite their friendship, he had mixed feelings about the girl; just the thought that she had high marks in school and a home where she could eat whenever she wanted would anger him deeply. As the character still recalls his life before reform school, the film features a scene where the two children imitate a dispassionate married couple, where he pretended to be reading the newspaper absorbedly and flicking a cigarette, and she pretended to be heating a non-existent pot of food, until Ovidiu bursts harshly, "Watch out, woman, it's overflowing"!. This scene provides the viewer with an insight into the life

of some/many couples at the time. As Florica tries to understand what was going on in Ovidiu's life, the boy lies, to cover the parents' quarrels, and tells her that his mother sometimes shouts around the house because she is rehearsing for a play, "they are artistic screams", he would explain.

The film them shifts back to the train scene, where the loud-mouthed woman pulls aside a young man travelling with his wife and baby, warns him that Ovidiu is out of reform school, and asks him to watch her luggage because she wants to go to the dining car for a beer. In the meantime, Ovidiu socialises with the pioneers on the train, reminiscing the times he used to play with his friends back home. Unfortunately, one of those adventures ended badly; they were playing swordsmen in a museum, and one of the children was injured. The sequence is unrealistic, it's not explained what they were doing there alone and why they had access to exhibits that should have been guarded. Following this incident, Ovidiu's case was discussed in the school's chancellery, an opportunity for the writers to use the written dialogues to outline the mentality of the various actors in society towards the issue of the responsibility of raising children. We are in an era that was not far from the inter-war period, when it was not uncommon for teenagers to leave their homes and go to the city on their own in search of a better life. Also, in the era in which the film was created, busy parents could quite easily let a child out of their sight, and after school they could still wander the streets unsupervised, getting involved in various activities.

The teachers blame the street crowd and various other explanations, but the problem remains unanswered. Who is to blame, who is responsible for the child's education: the child himself, the parents, the school, the entourage, society?

Because he couldn't find a place at home and had no support, Ovidiu left and became involved in thefts with two individuals, who were later caught by the militia and the boy ended up in reform school.

On the train, the agitated and talkative woman returns from the dining car two hours later to find a suitcase missing. She makes a big fuss and loudly accuses Ovidiu of stealing her luggage and threatens to send it back to reform school. In a scene similar to the one in which the teachers at the school discussed who is to blame for the children's negative development, the travellers, who are practically a metaphor for society, start to give their opinions: one says that if the child has been released it is not fair to assume that he is still a criminal, another says that he knows better how it is with such individuals, while the pioneers defend Ovidiu, because they had been with him all along and knew what he had done. The ticket inspector is summoned as a

representative of the authority, and at the destination the witnesses, the woman who claims her suitcase was stolen and Ovidiu are taken to the stationmaster's office. It is also the representatives of the state who act wisely (which is one of the basic features of the socialist film) and release Ovidiu, thus calming the whole situation. Even the aggressive woman comes out of the stationmaster's office reconciled to the decision imposed on her. The boy leaves for home with the ticket inspector, Alecu, who watches over the last hours of Ovidiu's childhood. The teenager swings on the swings with gusto, while the driver explains that he is no longer a child, he must take responsibility for his actions and understand that he has been given a second chance.

The film in fact holds society as a whole responsible for the fate of children — careless and indolent individuals such as the woman with a lot of luggage who lost her suitcase solely through her own negligence (there is also the possibility that the individual who took it from her, who is shown in the film but remains unknown until the end, to have mistaken it for his own), even teachers seem guilty of not paying enough attention to the act of education (teachers at the reform school are shown as being much more involved in the children's welfare), but primarily the parents. The film illustrates the official policy, in which the state is the guarantor of an individual's rights. The state appears to be the sole actor acting correctly, through the teachers at the reform school and the figure of the train conductor, who responsibly watches over the boy's last steps home, like a friend.

3. Re-education in employment, the second chance for young people

Cine va deschide ușa? [*Who Will Open the Door?*] is a film that pleads for the defence of childhood, for their right not to lose it because of the mistakes of those who are supposed to protect them:

> *Don't look for black and white in my film. It opens doors to discuss situations where children are the victims and asks questions not only of parents but of everyone around them. I would like this film to convince us grown-ups that any mistake we make towards our children can turn their whole universe upside down and change their whole life"* (Naghi 1967:29).

About a decade later, in 1979, Letitia Popa's film *Cine mă strigă?* [*Who is calling me?*] appeared, which is also a film in which children suffer because of their parents, but this time the parents are almost non-existent, which is also due to the fact that the heroine is slightly older, being over 18 and of age. The film

therefore deals with a different age and therefore a different legal framework - Ina Albu (performed by debutant Mărioara Sterian) would be liable to a prison sentence as she is of age.

The film starts abruptly, directly in the halls of the imposing Palace of Justice in Bucharest, where the 19-year-old Ina appears in front of the court, dressed in the infamous striped coat. As on other occasions, the Romanian topical film is very generous in providing some very technical details. While from films set in the countryside we learn that the furrow must be 35 centimetres deep for the cultivation of crops and not 18, as the tractor driver used to do, while films dedicated to industrialisation showcase the whole process of steel production or oil extraction, from this film we learn precisely, right from the start, what the law is that Ina is convicted under:

> *Sentences the defendant Albu Ina, on the basis of Article 328 of the Criminal Code, to six months' imprisonment. In accordance with the provisions of Article 86, index 1 of the Criminal Code, orders that the sentence be served without deprivation of liberty, by work in a productive unit"*, says the sentencing judge just at the beginning at the film.

The legal provisions cited by the judge are part of the Penal Code of 1968, adopted after Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power in 1965. According to the press at the time, Ceaușescu was personally involved in the drafting and adoption of the body of laws of the Socialist Republic of Romania.

Thus, in 1977, two years before the production of the film, following a Decision of the Political Executive Committee of the Central Committee of Romanian Communist Party, the Decree of the Council of State No. 147 of 1 June was adopted on the amnesty of certain crimes committed by minors and young people aged 18-21. It follows from these pieces of legislation that if the young person is a first-time offender and has not been sentenced to more than two years imprisonment, then they may be sent to serve their sentence in the labour market.

As Prof. Grigore Theodoru, President of the Romanian Society of Criminal Law, member of the Committee of the International Association of Criminal Law, explained at the time, Romania had thus aligned itself with international guidelines, proceeding with more lenient punishments for young people. But he also noted that in Western countries the youth were left to fend for themselves, with the community not involved in the rehabilitation process. As the criminal law specialist explained, if a young person with a suspended sentence was left unsupervised, unemployed and undirected, the chances of

recidivism were very high. This is precisely the aspect that the Romanian Communist Party was correcting, Theodoru argued, by entrusting the young person's fate to the labour collectives, who thus became responsible factors in the re-education of first-time offenders.

> *"Socialist countries — including Romania — have also experimented with other criminal legal means, such as correctional work in freedom, trial of certain acts by labour committees, and the guarantee of the labour collective, means which are based on the force of education of the collective, but which are conceived as simple legal means, applied by specialised bodies"* (Theodoru 1977: 2).

It is from this "profoundly humanist" perspective that the film *Cine mă strigă?* should be interpreted. Despite the fact that the screenplay is written by Rodica Padina, a representative of the legal system, we do not find out until the end of the film exactly what Ina is guilty of, what she was convicted of. Rather, we discover a well-behaved girl, who had been raised by her grandmother, as her parents had divorced when she was young and her mother abandoned her for the various pleasures of life. Reaching her teenage years, Ina, not having become a bad and irredeemable person, but rather a lively and fun-loving young woman, has an escapade with a boy her own age. But his parents come to retrieve him from their aunt's boarding house in Sibiu, where the youngsters had taken refuge, while Ina's parents are non-existent. Left at the mercy of her friend's aunt, who gives her some money to return home, Ina is too ashamed and chooses to go to the seaside with a stranger she meets along the way, thus straying further from the straight and narrow.

From the moment she arrives on site, the beautiful Ina attracts the attention of the team of workers, most of whom are only slightly older than her. The youngsters start making jokes, some of them even naughty, when they find out that the girl has a sentence to serve and one of them refers to her as a "parachute". The team leader, played by the middle-aged craftsman, puts the boys on the spot and points out that the girl has been entrusted to them as a team to supervise and teach her the trade. One can feel the hand of the film's female crew here, though. Basically, this sequence and even others in the film

propose a two-way re-education — both of Ina and of the boys who make up the collective.

> *"This girl was wrong. It's her first offence. She's been given to us to keep her from going crazy. Let's teach her a trade"*, the master builder tells the boys the day Ina shows up on the site, breaking everyone's peace.

Perhaps the Party's interest was that the film should show the "profoundly humanistic" importance of re-education carried out with the help of the working men's collective, but director Letitia Popa also talks in this film about the importance of the collective's recognition of this role... which here seems to miss, at first, the great task given to it. Basically, the film shows how the re-education of the girl and the creation of the collective's conscience are achieved at the same time, especially since this time the collective was also young. The film thus takes a slightly more realistic approach than the ideology of the time imposed, pointing out that Romania is not populated only by collectives of responsible people.

Everyone on the site greets Ina with fear and even contempt, fearing first and foremost that they will be robbed. Anchoring Ina in this landscape that seems hostile, cold and lacking in opportunities for fun is Anica, who wakes up first at five in the morning, makes Ina her coffee, takes care to bring her food and taking care of her when she is sick, and is also a university student. With her help and that of her neighbour Adina (Tatiana Iekel), a woman past her prime who preaches the benefits of the fun she once had, but who is now alone in the world, Ina begins to realise her situation and to want to build another path.

The girl's interaction with the group of boys is initially confusing. When she arrives at the construction site for the first dance, the girl dances with everyone, upsetting the whole community, as many of the workers had wives or fiancées there. Ina's foreman even tries to ask the girl to be moved elsewhere, because the boys had been fighting in the bedroom over her, and he felt that this was a threshold of behaviour that could not be crossed. Later Ina accepts the attention of one of the boys, and spirits in the boys' bedroom subside, and under the power of "recovering love" (Sîrbu 1980:24), Ina manages to overcome the obstacles she faces.

The ending is, as the critic Eva Sîrbu remarks, of a pathetic 1950s style, most likely imposed by the censorship. Ina begs the craftsman to let her weld with him at a height of 40 metres above the ground to demonstrate her skills acquired on the construction site. The crane operator's misjudgement causes

the footbridge on which the two are standing to be knocked over and the craftsman is trapped under the iron. Tudor, the young man in love with Ina, starts shouting instructions downstairs in a desperate attempt to get her to regain her composure, which she does, and Ina starts using the welding machine to cut through the irons holding the foreman pinned down. Eventually, through everyone's efforts, things end well in the aftermath of this accident, which perhaps metaphors other, more personal accidents that people can get out of if they are helped:

> *The sociological study of the film threatens to become more interesting than the story itself. It is also the reproach we bring to the director, for having dealt with the freshness of the setting to the detriment of the determinations, shall we say, of conscience of the heroine. Not in the sense that it didn't deal with them, not in the sense that the ending doesn't 'solve', as they say, the heroine's problem. What was important was that the girl be awakened to a new reality, that she be involved and integrated into the new community''*(Lazăr 1980: 2).

The last film chosen in this short series of socialist film productions that reflect the delinquency of young people presents a totally different perspective. However, it retains the idea of the causality between parental absence and the child's deviation from a successful human path to integration into society. This time, however, it is society that, instead of helping him, turns the young person into a criminal.

4. A hopeless delinquent
Faleze de nisip (1983), directed by Dan Pița, screenplay by Bojor Nedelcovici, Dan Pița [*Sand Cliffs*], is not only a banned film, but it's the film around which Nicolae Ceaușescu built, in August 1983, an entire discourse about the correctness of choosing the character who would embody the model of the new man in literature, poetry, film, theatre, in short, in art in general.

The subject of this controversial film is Vasile (performed by Gheorghe Visu), a 20-year-old boy whose father beat him, whose mother didn't take care of him, and who found refuge in his aunt's house and managed to qualify as a carpenter, working in a workshop in the harbour. The boy loves going to the beach to look at the sea, and on one of these days he is identified by a tourist as the thief of some things stolen the day before. The woman alerts the whole group of tourists, of which he was a member, along with the well-known doctor Theo Hristea (performed by Victor Rebengiuc), his girlfriend

Cristina (performed by Carmen Galin) and a friend of theirs, Stefan, who is a reporter (performed by Marin Moraru).

Vasile is cornered on the beach by all those who wanted to help the victim, doctor Hristea, to recover his belongings - a camera, a gold necklace, a tape recorder and several clothes - and is taken to the militia headquarters. The film takes the investigation step by step - interrogation, statements, confrontations - as if it were a popular guide to investigating a theft. The narrative follows the desperate attempts of the militiaman played by Valentin Uritescu to get Vasile to confess to the theft, but also the insistence of the doctor Hristea, who can't bear to have someone steal from under his nose and not pay, or the reluctance of the journalist Ștefan, who confesses that he didn't actually get a good look at the thief and that resemblance doesn't mean identity, so he refuses to identify Vasile as the perpetrator of the theft.

The film follows the clash between the doctor Theo Hristea, an extremely proud, selfish and combative man who can't stand not being right, and the young Vasile who doesn't want to admit to a crime of which he is not guilty.

"I won't allow anyone to make me do anything other than what I want", Theo Hristea tells his girlfriend Cristina when she tries to get him to drop the investigation, especially since he had declared that he didn't have a problem with losing the things, which he considers to be trinkets, but with the gesture itself. At each appearance at the police headquarters, he insists that Vasile admit to the theft, promising that once he has heard his admission, he will drop the complaint and ask the authorities to stop the investigation.

"I'm not allowed to defend myself!?", Vasile rebels. "Well, I'm going out in the street and shouting: people, I didn't steal, and I didn't kill anyone!".

Complications appear when investigators are told that the child who was found with a head injury on the beach on the day of the theft has died in hospital. Vasile is now under investigation not only for theft but also for murder. Seeing his life destroyed under the pressure of this event and realizing that every day of detention takes him further away from the possibility of returning to a normal life, Vasile confesses to the theft. But instead of dropping the charges, the doctor asks him to take the investigators to the beach where the items were hidden. Vasile accepts but, naturally, not knowing where the things are because he didn't steal them, he digs hole after hole, driving the whole team of investigators, including the Major, mad, and the proud doctor Theo Hristea, who breaks down angrily and beats the young man with his fists.

In the end, everyone is forced to resume their lives, except Vasile, whom Hristea called the Kid. Cristina is the first to go home, but she also decides to give up her relationship with Theo, whom she explicitly tells that he is selfish and only interested in his own self and his personal ambitions:

> *"I really like the way you beat the kid. You don't treat a thief like that, you treat everyone like that, when you get something in your head, that's it! Now, for example, you want to be hospital director, right? You've understood that without a political base you can't rise. And you have... high ideals!"*, Cristina portrays him, revealing to the viewer the doctor's true nature.

Theo Hristea also returns home to Bucharest, leaving the Constanta investigation to run its course and becoming, as Cristina had foreseen, director of the hospital. Months go by and everyone involved meets again, in court, after Vasile has spent all this time in prison. In the meantime, it is established that the child's death was accidental. The young man is released, but loses his job at the workshop, where he worked as a skilled carpenter, and is forced to take a job in a mill as an unskilled labourer, which seriously reduces his prospects for prosperity and a return. Still not at peace with the fact that he has not fully proved Vasile as the perpetrator of the theft, Doctor Hristea goes to his aunt's house, trying to meet him. Here, Vasile's cousin reproaches him for the bad state the young man has ended up in, but more important than this is the way the film's writers choose accusatory words, striking at the practices of the system.

> *"He is now an unskilled worker with vocational school. He's had nothing but mockery from the workshops. He's like a beaten dog. That's the truth! He doesn't trust anyone. Or maybe you're here to do a social survey? To see if the ex-con has integrated into our society? If he was employed in the same job and now he's a leader..."*, Vasile's cousin yells at the doctor.

Obsessed, Theo Hristea eventually finds Vasile in a workshop on the beach where he was working on a boat he wanted to repair. Trying again to extract a confession, he grabs the young man, shaking him into confessing. Vasile pushes him to get free, but he was holding the sharp chisel he was working with. He hurts the doctor and runs away. Theo, oblivious to the injury, starts to chase Vasile, but loses sight of him, reaches the beach and runs madly along the water's edge until he collapses.

According to critic and historian Călin Căliman, the film only ran for three days at the end of January 1983, then was pulled from cinemas following orders from the top (Căliman 1990: 4). In August of the same year, Nicolae Ceaşescu made *Faleze de nisip* [*Sand Cliffs*], without mentioning its name, the basis of a speech about deviations from the political message in art, and then retracted the right path on which literature, theatre and film should go.

> *"Cinematography has important tasks. We need good, revolutionary films that show the great achievements of our people, that mobilise and portray heroes who are a model of work and life. Comrades, we have seen some films that not only do not present models of heroes in life and work, but on the contrary, they present elements that are perhaps still to be found somewhere on the periphery of society, but these are not what our writers and directors or those who direct and organise film production should present. We need to completely eliminate this state of affairs. Not long ago I saw a film showing a young worker on the Black Sea. But the hero of this film is nothing like today's young worker. What does the young worker in our country look like and what does he represent? I meet, as you know, millions of young people all the time. I talk to them, I know them. You see in them a love for work, for the Party and the homeland, for socialism (...) But the writer and director who made the film and those who approved it clearly do not know the young people of our homeland. We can no longer allow such films to be produced"* (Ceauşescu 1983: 3).

The head of state unleashed his anger at all the forums that should have been watching over the launch of ideologically correct stories on the screens and claimed that the film distorts the reality of Romanian society. Theatre and film, he insisted, must show through their characters the essence and the model of the man needed in society, even if this means embellishing things, so that young people know what they should become.

Faleze de nisip, says critic Ştefan Oprea, disturbed by the fact that he dared to bring on the screens a face other than that of the new man, exposing "a lamentable moral condition of a Romanian society adrift" (Oprea 1990:9).

5. Conclusions
Films about juvenile delinquency or young characters who stray from the straight path towards the new man model and end up on the verge of prison sentences, whether suspended or not, are few and far between in Romanian socialist cinema, precisely because of the difficulty of dealing with the subject under the conditions of censorship and respect for the ideological message.

Director Gheorghe Naghi attempts, in the 1960s, with *Cine va deschide uşa* [*Who Will Open the Door?*] an ideologically and politically correct approach and even succeeds in bringing to society a series of questions that are quite necessary for any community: who is to blame for the failure of children? His film is perhaps easier for viewers to digest also because the age of the character is younger, as at the time Ovidiu committed the crime he was under 14. Dealing with delinquency becomes somewhat more difficult in the next film, *Who's Calling Me* [*Cine mă strigă?*], because of Ina's older age, as she is already of age, but also because of the deeper implications of her actions. Though only hinted at, Ina's slip-ups could very easily have led to extremely severe complications, not just legally but also deeply personal — she's an inexperienced young woman, left without a mother's care, who may become a mother in turn, a mother without a husband, without qualifications, without a job.

If in the 1950s and 1960s Romanian cinema offered films such as *Dragoste lungă de-o seară* [*Long Love for One Evening*]*,* 1963 — in which such a young woman, having just come out of hospital with a child unrecognised by her father in her arms — could find salvation in socialism and in the new order that had been in place for some years, Letitia Popa's 1979 film seems to tell us that the young woman must be saved before that moment, in order not to perpetuate the difficult life that such an option entails. This film's approach is also a positive one, even if this time Ina's character can be found more problematic than Ovidiu's, because she is older, more aware, but acts childishly, being concerned only with having fun. In both cases the ending is a positive, even happy one, in which the parents are not present — practically Ovidiu returns home, but the ending is more of a guess, as the parents no longer appear in the denouement, the focus falling on the importance of the role of the reform school and the state authorities who guided him towards recovery. In *Cine mă strigă?* [*Who's Calling Me?*] another step is taken on the road to "multilaterally developed socialist society" and the collective is involved in the process of recovery, of re-education of a young man and, we must remember, that always in the period 1948-1989 the Romanian cinema, having the Party as its sole producer, did not bring to the screens films that did not also have a deeply political message.

Bujor Nedelcovici started from a personal incident in creating the script for *Faleze de nisip* [*Sand Cliffs*]. Basically, it happened to him, like Dr. Hristea, that his clothes were stolen from the beach out of sight. In a 2018 article, he admits that he made an obsession of that incident in the late 1970s and that he decided to write the screenplay then, wanting to debunk the "obtuseness and laziness" of those times, as well as the arrogance of the

investigators who paid no attention to him (Nedelcovici 2018). According to the article signed by Adrian Epure in the daily *Adevărul*, the script and later the film benefited from the protection of Marin Theodorescu, director of „Casa de Filme 1", which produced *Faleze de nisip* [*Sand Cliffs*], and who tried to use his knowledge of the system to protect this film, which managed to run on screens for a few days in January 1983.

"In fact, the problem of the film was the problem of the character I played, a doctor who abused his position as a party member and manipulated the police...", the article says, quoting actor Victor Rebengiuc. In addition, his character, who was supposed to be positive, is an abuser, while that of the young man considered a thief seems to be not so negative. This confusing of the classic protagonist-antagonist system didn't sit well with the leader, who most likely preferred things to be uncluttered and the messages clear.

In one of the characterisations of Vasile in the film, by his workshop craftsman, he is said to be a withdrawn boy who "doesn't like the collective". *Faleze de nisip* [*Sand Cliffs*] brought to the screen the model of a young man whom society not only failed to help, but turned from a gentle, devoted and hardworking man into a criminal. The regime could not accept this.

Ironically, on closer inspection we detect that Vasile was indeed a model of a new man in the sense desired by the Party, but at the beginning of the film, before he had been crushed by society. From this point of view, the film shows exactly what Prof. Grigore Theodoru, president of the Romanian Society of Criminal Law and member of the Committee of the International Association of Criminal Law, predicted, even in the years when the script was written (late 1970s): that a young man left without the protection of his parents, of the law, a young man who is incarcerated will not easily recover his interrupted life and will have no other fate than to reoffend. This was precisely the scenario, so to speak, for which the Party had decided that young first offenders for non-serious offences should be given a light sentence without being sent to prison. Basically, if we were to take the irony to the end, Bujor Nedelcovici and Dan Pița proved that Ceausescu's regime was right in this respect. But ideologically, the two did not use the model of the new man "correctly", because it should have moved in a positive, not a negative direction.

As a general conclusion, what remains constant in these films is casting the blame against parents for the deviations of children and highlighting the role of beneficial supervisors played those characters who represent the authority of the state, as well as the importance of the involvement of the collective/society in the recovery of the delinquent.

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When Children Need Protection from Parents: Citizens' Views of the Bodnariu Case in Romania and Their Determinants

Daniela Angi*, Gabriel Bădescu*, Sorana Alexandra Constantinescu*, Viorela Ducu**, Áron Telegdi-Csetri***[1]

*Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, General Traian Moșoiu 71, 400132 Cluj-Napoca, Romania, angi@fspac.ro, badescu@fspac.ro, sorana.constantinescu@fspac.ro
**Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, 28-130 21 Decembrie 1989 Blvd, 400604 Cluj-Napoca, Romania, viorela.telegdi@ubbcluj.ro
***Babeș-Bolyai University, Centre for the Study of Transnational Families, Minerilor 85, 400409, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, aron.telegdi@fspac.ro

Abstract. The article examines the relationship between child protection policies and public attitudes in Romania through the lens of the Bodnariu case in Norway (also known as the Naustdal case). We use data collected through a representative survey of the Romanian adult population to explore citizens' attitudes toward this case. Our analysis reveals several compelling insights. Even five years later, more than half of the respondents vividly recall the Bodnariu case, and a significant majority of them express dissatisfaction with its handling. Notably, religiosity and views on the church-state relationship emerge as robust predictors of public perception of child protection services in Norway and the role of Romanian authorities. Gender, age, and education also exert significant influence. At the same time, those who remember the case tend to exhibit greater support for non-democratic alternatives, including a church-led regime.

Keywords: child protection; child protection systems; Bodnariu case; Norway; Romania; corporal punishment.

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[1]All authors have contributed equally to this article.

1. Introduction

Decisions made in the realm of child protection are never inconsequential for the parties concerned (Benbenishty et al. 2015), and can become an important reminder that, in circumstances where children are believed to be exposed to risk, the state can make its way into the private sphere of family, to exercise its protective prerogatives (Berrick et al. 2023). As such, there is always a chance that interventions resulting from such decisions will sit uneasily with how the affected families or wider community envisage the just way of action.

In this paper, we discuss an instance where such interventions have been strongly contested, both by the family in question and the public opinion. Specifically, we analyse the 2015-2016 case of a Romanian-Norwegian family from Naustdal, Norway, whose children were removed by the child protection services (Barnevernet), on the grounds of suspicions regarding parents' alleged mistreatment of the young ones. The chain of events started in October 2015, with a notification made to the local child protection services by a teacher from the municipality of Naustdal, which pointed to an alleged mistreatment of children in the Bodnariu family (Pantazi 2016). The mixed family (with a Norwegian mother and a Romanian-born father) had five children, with ages ranging - at the time of the occurrences – from 4 months to 9 years old. The parents have been accused of applying physical punishments to their children, while the suspicion of a potential religious indoctrination of the young ones was also part of the discussion (Pantazi 2016; Popescu 2016). During the following month, all of the five children were removed from their biological parents and placed to live with three different foster families (Pantazi 2016). It must be noted that, in December 2015, during a TV interview, the two parents in question admitted to have occasionally applied slight physical corrections to their children (Pantazi 2016). Notwithstanding, the severity of the authorities' intervention created a massive flow of indignation, as the decision to separate the children from their parents has been largely interpreted as abusive and exaggerated. In response to Barnevernet's decision, the family stressed the procedural inadequacies of the intervention and initiated a legal action, contesting the measures (Pantazi 2016; Popescu 2016). An unprecedented wave of solidarity with the family emerged internationally, particularly among religious groups affiliated to the Pentecostal faith, to which the Bodnariu family belongs (Hotnews 2016; Popescu 2016), covered extensively by the mass media and the online environment (Paulesc 2019; Vasile 2016). The controversy around the case went beyond demonstrations of empathy from the part of civic or religious groups. It also reached the political arena, where Romanian MPs were quick to take hold of the topic: ardent debates in the

Parliament (Soare and Tufis 2023), and an official trip to Norway in view of discussing the case with the relevant actors (Alexandrescu 2016; Ministerul Afacerilor Externe 2016). Moreover, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the representatives of the Romanian state in Norway had several meetings with the relevant Norwegian authorities, during which the controversial decision of Barnevernet has been repeatedly addressed (Ministerul Afacerilor Externe 2016). It is difficult to gauge the exact impact that the multitude of reactions to Barnevernet's decision, in the civic realm, mass media and at political/diplomatic level, had on the subsequent course of events. Notwithstanding, in June 2016, the Norwegian authorities agreed to return the children to their parents.

Despite the successful reunification of the family members, the Bodnariu case became somewhat synonymous with the idea that state institutions can at times intervene abruptly in the private sphere of individuals. Along these lines, we ask in this paper whether and how these events remained imprinted in the memory of the Romanian population, given the sensitivity of the issue and its extensive media coverage at the time of the events. The paper begins with a review of recent studies that examine public attitudes towards violence against children and people's views on the legitimacy of state interventions in circumstances where children are at risk in their families. The review section also covers studies about people's trust in child protection institutions and the likely factors associated with trust. The following part describes several key attributes of the child protection systems from Norway and Romania, thus shedding light on the possible sources of variation found in the literature between the attitudes that prevail among the Norwegian and Romanian populations. The next section introduces the survey data analysis and its results, followed by a discussion of the main findings and the key conclusions of the study.

2. A review of recent research on public attitudes towards violence against children and the institutions responsible for their protection

According to UNICEF (2023), by 2023, 65 countries have introduced specific legislation that makes corporal punishment of children illegal, regardless of the context where it might occur. Norway is among the countries that were quick to ban physical violence against children, having introduced specific legislation in 1987, thus being preceded only by Finland, in 1983 and Sweden, in 1979 (Burns et al. 2021; End Corporal Punishment n.d.).

In Romania, the corporal punishment of children is addressed by Law no. 272/2004 (the Law on the Protection and Promotion of Child's Rights), the

provisions of which explicitly forbid violence against children in all of its forms, within the family and generally in institutional contexts "that provide services to or organize activities with children" (Article 95, Parlamentul României, 2004). In addition, the above-referred to law provides that "the measures for disciplining the child can only be established in accordance with the child's dignity, physical punishments or those that are related to the child's physical and mental development or that affect the emotional state of the child are not allowed under any reason" (Article 33, Par. 2, Parlamentul României, 2004).

Apart from the introduction of legal regulations banning the corporal punishment of children, where inter-country variations in terms of timing can be traced, a relevant aspect regards the public's views on this matter, i.e. how regular people assess the acceptability of violence towards children.

This aspect too reveals significant variation, as shown, among others, by Hayes and O'Neal (2018). Using data collected by the World Values Survey, the authors find an impact of country-level attributes on individual-level views regarding child maltreatment, in that "more supportive attitudes toward violence at the national level lead to more supportive attitudes toward child maltreatment at the individual level" (Hayes and O'Neal 2018: 90). In the above study, the existence of specific legal provisions regarding child protection does not significantly impact individual-level views about child maltreatment, a finding interpreted by the authors as an indication of a reverse chain of influence, whereby attitudes towards child maltreatment are likely to promote legislative changes and not the other way around (Hayes and O'Neal 2018).

A possible relationship between people's willingness to report instances of corporal punishment on the one hand and the confidence in the institutions involved in child protection on the other hand is discussed by Burns et al. (2021) in their study on Austria, Estonia, Ireland, Norway and Spain. While finding that corporal punishment is rejected by large segments of the population in all five countries (with Norway standing out as the least tolerant towards such practices), the study also reveals several incongruences between rejecting corporal punishment and willingness to report it to child protection institutions. A partial explanation suggested by the authors is that people's circumspection concerning reporting instances of corporal punishment goes hand in hand with how they assess the child protection system and with the trust they have in its institutions.

Skivenes et al. (2024) look at how the public evaluates the appropriate state intervention in various cases where children are faced with specific

challenges within their family contexts, using data collected through an experimental survey vignette from Austria, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway and Spain. The study uses a typology of child protection systems (CPS) with three categories resulting from the different approaches taken by states on safeguarding children from being at risk within their families: "maltreatment protective systems", "child well-being protective systems", "child's rights protective systems" (Skivenes et al. 2024). The three types of CPS differ in relation to their key focal points, which refer to, respectively: children's safety and health; their safety, health, together with aspects of the family context that matter for children's well-being; all of the previously listed elements along with a strong concern for children having their rights properly observed. Norway is included in the third category. An important result shows that in each of the 8 countries, only a minority of respondents favour no form of intervention on the part of the state, thus supporting the idea that people are generally willing to accept that in situations of risk faced by children in their family context, authorities' intervention is needed (Skivenes et al. 2024).

Similarly, in an earlier analysis, Skivenes (2021) examined citizens' views on government responsibilities towards children in several countries, including Romania, finding a general agreement on the need for government intervention in cases of unsatisfactory parental care, although the type of parental problem significantly influenced opinions on intervention methods.

Returning to the study by Skivenes et al. (2024), the authors find an association between the public views on restrictions placed on parents on the one hand and the type of CPS in place on the other hand. State interventions in the direction of limiting parents' rights are endorsed to the highest extent by those living in countries with a CPS focused on protecting children's rights (Norway included), followed by the public from countries where the CPS is centred on fighting child maltreatment and by those from contexts where child well-being is at the core of the CPS (Skivenes et al. 2024).

Further studies in the field rely on a two-categories typology of CPS, as in the study by Berrick et al. (2023). Comparing the US (more specifically the state of California) and Norway, the authors find that Norwegians are more willing to endorse restrictions placed on parents, in circumstances where children are exposed to risk. The authors link this finding to the differences between the CPS in place, as the US is usually included in the category of "risk-oriented" approaches, whereas Norway, with its strong emphasis on children's rights, developed a system that highlights support offered to families (Berrick et al. 2023).

A further example is the analysis by Loen and Skivenes (2023), who build on the same distinction between "risk-oriented" (found in Czechia, Poland and Romania), and "family service-oriented" CPSs (developed by England, Finland and Norway). In the first type, the emphasis is placed on keeping children safe, the state is responsible for a limited number of aspects and there is a "relatively high threshold for interventions" (Loen and Skivenes 2023: 4). The second type professes a lower threshold for intervention, focusing on aiding families so that their situation can improve, while being a system where the state takes responsibility for comparatively more aspects (Loen and Skivenes 2023). Against this background, the authors find a relationship between the type of CPS in place and people's confidence in the institutions responsible for child protection, with higher levels in countries that developed a family-service oriented system. Moreover, the study reveals that higher trust is associated with stronger endorsement of interventions that limit parental freedom. In terms of individual attributes, employed people and those who have children seem to be more trustful of CPS, while age displays a more specific pattern of influence, in that "younger people believe the CPS is fairer and more respectful, and elders believe the CPS is less discriminatory" (Loen and Skivenes 2023: 15).

A meaningful relationship between the type of CPS and level of trust in its institutions is also found by Skivenes and Benbenishty (2022), whose research show that public trust is highest in countries with child-centric systems (Finland and Norway) and lowest in instances that have a risk-oriented system in place (England, Estonia, Ireland, US (California)). In between the two are the publics from Austria, Germany and Spain, where the CPS is focused on family service (Skivenes and Benbenishty 2022). The same study reveals a link between trust in CPS and several socio-demographic attributes, among which individuals' age and their educational capital: younger people are more trustful of the CPS, whereas people with low education trust the system less than those with average or high education (Skivenes and Benbenishty 2022). Similarly, higher education is associated with greater confidence in the child protection system in the study by Juhasz and Skivenes (2017). Along with being highly educated, high trust in CPS seems also to be predicted by being younger and having left-wing political convictions (Juhasz and Skivenes 2017).

We end this section with several observations about the Romanian context, where the issue of child protection and concern for children's rights is best understood in relation to the different approaches that characterized the country's recent past. Along these lines, Dumănescu (2014) analyses the extensive state intervention in family life during communist Romania, where

the state substituted parental roles to align with communist ideals. This dualism between traditional child-rearing practices and state-imposed guidelines has had a long-term impact on family dynamics and child upbringing. With regard to Romania's post-communist legislative framework and public policies addressing child care, Băluţă (2014) finds that these policies are influenced by a political ideology emphasizing familialism. This emphasis on traditional norms and values about gender roles continues to dominate cultural meanings and social practices, suggesting a complex interaction between historical legacies and current policy directions. Just as importantly, Ursa (2000) evaluates the impact of educational programs on children's rights awareness in Romania, finding significant improvements in knowledge, acceptance of rights, and social competence among children. This underscores the importance of educational interventions in promoting children's rights.

3. A note on the different paths taken by Norway and Romania regarding child protection

As described in the introduction, the Bodnariu case produced quite a commotion, making the event known well beyond Norway and Romania, with the help of substantial media coverage. As child protection became, at least for several months, a topic of interest not only for experts but also for ordinary people, the Bodnariu issue seemed to have also brought about an apparent clash between two different worldviews and institutional circumstances.

Norway is a country that usually receives favourable scores in relation to its child protection system in international rankings, yet the practices of its CPS have often been subject to public criticism in relation to a perceived exaggerated intrusiveness (Falch-Eriksen and Skivenes 2019). Critical responses towards the Norwegian CPS are not limited to negative portrayals in the mass media, being also voiced by various states, and international structures, notably the European Court of Human Rights and the CRC Committee (Luhamaa 2020). Recent instances of criticism from the European Court of Human Rights regard the provisions of Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights (on the right to respect for one's private and family life), as the complainants pointed to restrictions on contact between families and children removed through CPS decisions (Luhamaa 2020).

Although critical opinions on its CPS are not sparse, Norway did establish a solid structure of legal mechanisms that seek to safeguard the best interest of the child, within a system where, while ideally children are raised within their families, the state can intervene if circumstances require it (Helland 2020). According to Falch-Eriksen and Skivenes (2019), the legislative

framework in the Norwegian context went through a number of relevant changes that strengthened the existing concern for protecting the rights of children, in accordance with the principles set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Notable among these is the provision - introduced through amendments to the Constitution in 2014 - according to which "[c]hildren have the right to protection of their integrity" (Falch-Eriksen and Skivenes 2019: 110). This has been considered by the authors to stand for "a strong right when applied to child protection" (Falch-Eriksen and Skivenes 2019: 110).

Yet, despite the clear accomplishments in the realm of legal protection of children, the Norwegian CPS practice seems indeed troubled by several phenomena that raise concern among experts. Along these lines, according to Falch-Eriksen and Skivenes (2019), the following aspects are problematic: the comparatively more numerous CPS interventions in families with immigrant background and the associated perception of a potential discrimination towards non-native families; the lack of unitary professional guidance creates high variability of decision-making among case workers, which in turn produces situations where unequal cases are treated as if they were equal / equal cases are treated as if they were unequal; the professional training of caseworkers is not sufficiently tailored to prepare them for the actual practice of child protection, in which ideally they would be able to back their professional judgement with the relevant knowledge at all times; the existence of a comparative disadvantage in outcomes at the adult age in the case of individuals who received protection from the CPS during childhood; children's own views in the context of child protection decisions are not sufficiently taken into consideration, thus hindering their right to participate in a process that greatly concerns them and their future.

As far as Romania is concerned, its child protection system can be considered a paradox. On the one hand, it operates on a very modern legislative basis, following the CRC recommendations, as the existing legislation and procedures suggest the system is theoretically functional and possibly superior to other child protection systems (Johansen 2023). On the other hand, as explained in the following, it seems to be a system that fails to protect children in Romania, particularly those placed in its care.

Several decades ago, the images of orphanages in communist Romania, where children lived in unthinkable conditions (dirty, malnourished, without regular human relationships), intensely disseminated by the international press, led to the Romanian child protection system being labelled as inhumane (Neagu 2021).
The massive trend of international adoption that gained momentum after the 1989 revolution deepened the negative image of the Romanian CPS. The wave

of sympathy for Romania's orphaned children, coupled with weak or inconsistently implemented legislative measures led to many children being adopted internationally both from the system and directly from families outside the system. In some of the cases, the legality of adoptions seemed entirely absent: buying children, trafficking and even kidnapping them (with parents being told by hospital staff that their child had died) (Neagu 2021).

The ensuing scandal related to the practices mentioned above led to a legal ban on international adoption, the premises of which were set in 2001, through a moratorium (Deutsche Welle 2004), and taken further through the Law 273 on Adoption from 2004 (Neagu 2015). The restrictions are still in force today, with a few exceptions (e.g. one parent is married to a foreign citizen or at least one adoptive parent being a Romanian citizen).

Bearing in mind the developments outlined above, it becomes clear that Romania needed to modernize its child protection system as a precondition for joining the EU in 2007. Along these lines, the Law 272/2004 on Protection and Promotion of Child's Rights is a modern law that follows the principles of the CRC, to which Romania has adhered on paper since 1989 (Anghel et al. 2013; Roth et al. 2019a). It places the dignity, protection and even participation of children (Richter Nunes 2021) at its core, being developed under the monitoring and with the participation of international experts. As such, it supports the discourse according to which the Romanian child protection system is an example to follow, had the legislation in place been the only aspect taken into consideration.

A further relevant aspect regards the process of heavy deinstitutionalization that Romania started in 1997 (Deák 2020; Herczog 2021; Neagu 2021), partly a response to international pressure, and following a similar trend encountered in other Eastern European countries. Unfortunately, as Neagu (2021) reminds us, this process of deinstitutionalization was prompted by research on children who were institutionalized during the communist and post-communist eras. This body of research revealed the negative effects of living in care institutions on brain development, thereby using children for a purported development of science. At the same time, the results of the deinstitutionalization process and its replacement by in-home foster care are yet to be scrutinized.

Regrettably, although Romania has a proper child protection legislation in place, in practice the system has failed to truly protect children, particularly those in its care. Lack of trained staff, lack of money, lack of pragmatic procedures to implement the law are just a few of the reasons given for the inability to implement what the law provides (Szabó 2020). For that reason, the

need for real development and improvement remains beyond the success in the formal modernization of the system (Szabó 2020).

Beside the failure to effectively protect children outside the system, worrisome situations emerge among the children under the protection of the Romanian state, regardless of the form of protection: foster care, family-type homes or large residential homes. Many of these children, who are theoretically under the protection of the state are currently - as in the infamous past - subject to multiple forms of abuse: trafficking, exploitation, sexual and physical abuse (Alexandrescu 2019; Brătianu and Roşca 2005; Neagu 2021; Roth et al. 2019b; Rus et al. 2013). Abuse comes either from peers / other children within the same form of protection (Rus et al. 2018), as part of power relations between children or as power exertion delegated to them by adults (Neagu 2021); yet often, abuse is perpetrated by the very adults employed to protect them: employees of the child protection system (Rus et al. 2013) or foster carers (Neagu 2021).

In recent years in Romania, the press has been revealing such abuses with increasing frequency (Telegdi-Csetri et al. 2021). Many such occurrences are treated as isolated cases by those who should take relevant action, reducing the issue to the person of the abuser and ignoring the responsibility of those who should have prevented the abuse through monitoring, communication and generally through professional protection work. In the light of the above, the usually low public reaction is quite understandable, since most people lack expert knowledge of the Romanian child protection legislation, and instead associate the system with the scandals above referred to.

Last but not least, Bulboacă (2016), upon examining perceptions of violence experienced by children in institutional care, and the various forms of violence (including peer violence), abuse by caregivers, and discrimination, emphasizes the acute need for systemic changes in child protection services to ensure better protection and care for children. Moreover, a recent study (Popoviciu et al. 2013) that explores social workers' perspectives on parental engagement in child protection services in Romania highlights challenges such as the lack of evidence-based risk assessment tools and personal biases, particularly towards Roma parents. These challenges underline the need for more robust tools and training to support social workers in their roles.

Summing up the above discussion, it appears that, while both countries developed thorough legal provisions regarding the protection of children, albeit at different paces, and with varying emphases on the centrality of child's rights, in practice there are specific challenges that keep the implementation of legislation to a suboptimal level.

4. Analysis of survey data and main findings

Earlier in the paper, we pointed out that, starting from a problematic treatment of children during communism, the child protection system in Romania is likely to have maintained a tainted image in the eyes of ordinary citizens. This, in all probability, makes the Romanian public grow sensitive to and critical towards instances where children are removed from their families by state authorities, regardless of where this happens. The Bodnariu case involved such a state intervention and its developments prompted extensive mobilization, widely covered by the mass media and the online milieu.

Against this background, in this section, we examine the Romanian population's awareness of the Bodnariu case, its views on how the Norwegian institutions handled the case, and their assessment of Romanian authorities' response to it. Additionally, we explore the factors that contribute to people remembering the case, and those that explain the attitudes of the public around the conduct of Norwegian and Romanian authorities respectively.

The analysis is based on survey data collected in 2021 within the project Cosmopolitan Turn and Democratic Sentiments. The case of child protection services (CONSENT). The Romanian sample includes 2962 adult respondents.

The respondents were asked if they had heard about the Bodnariu case. The wording of the question was the following: *A few years ago, the media reported about the experience of a Romanian family with the child protection system in Norway. Have you heard of this case?* (Yes, No, Possibly/Not sure). 59.2% of the respondents said they did, and 3.8% that were not sure (Table 1.)

Table 1. Awareness of the Bodnariu case among the Romanian adults

	Frequency	%
Yes	893	59.2
No	558	37.0
Not sure	57	3.8
Total	1508	100.0

Note: part of the questions in the survey have been asked of only half of the sample, which is reflected in the total number of respondents.

In addition, the respondents were asked to assess how the authorities had handled the Bodnariu case by choosing among three alternatives:

(1) The Norwegian authorities acted correctly,
(2) The Norwegian authorities acted excessively,
(3) The Romanian authorities needed to be more involved.
The vast majority of the respondents blamed either Norwegian or Romanian authorities, with only 8.7% saying that the Norwegian authorities acted correctly.

Table 2. The assessment of how the Bodnariu case was handled

	Frequency	%
The Norwegian authorities acted correctly	78	8.7
The Norwegian authorities acted excessively	364	40.8
The Romanian authorities needed to be more involved	415	46.5
I do not know	36	4.0
Total	893	100.0

Finally, we assessed respondents' views regarding the compliance of Romanian families that migrate/move to another country with the host versus Romanian society regulations about child-rearing. Two-thirds of the respondents are of the opinion that the host society's laws should be obeyed, 20% believe that no authorities should interfere in family life, whereas 13% consider that Romanian laws should be prioritized (Table 3).

Table 3. Opinions regarding the compliance of Romanian migrant families with the host versus Romanian society regulations about child-rearing

	Frequency	%
Romanian laws	368	12.6
The host country's laws	1952	66.7
Authorities should not interfere with family life	606	20.7
Total	2926	100.0

What explains awareness of Bodnariu's case among Romanian adults? The multivariate analyses show that older respondents, more educated, with lower religiosity, and with lower trust in church tend to remember the case more often than others (Table 4).

Table 4. Determinants of remembering Bodnariu case in two binary logistic models

	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Gender (1-man, 0-woman)	0.22	0.17	.192	0.26	0.17	.129
Age (years)	0.04	0.00	.000	0.04	0.00	.000
Education (1-low, 3-high)	1.02	0.18	.000	1.00	0.18	.000
Income (1-low, 8-high)	-0.16	0.10	.098	-0.14	0.10	.165
Migration (1-yes, 0-no)	-0.15	0.18	.384	-0.18	0.18	.320
Having children (1-yes, 0-no)	0.07	0.21	.741	0.08	0.22	.702
Experience with CPS (1-yes, 0-no)	0.62	0.35	.079	0.60	0.36	.090
Importance of god (1-low, 10-high)	-0.13	0.04	.002	-0.07	0.05	.156
Religious law (1-low, 4-high support)				-0.47	0.05	.000

Note: Dependent variable: Remember Bodnariu case: 1 – yes, 0 – no

Surprisingly, lower religiosity and lower trust in church predict better remembering. A possible explanation is that religious people tend to pay less attention to events taking place beyond their local communities.

The analyses of what explains critical views on how Romanian or Norwegian authorities treated the Bodnariu case show that women, religious people, and those with higher support for a regime led by the church tend to be more critical of the authorities than others (Table 5).

Table 5. The determinants of critical views on how authorities reacted, in binary logistic models

	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Gender (1-man, 0-woman)	-0.67	0.30	.039	-0.62	0.30	.022
Age (years)	-0.22	0.15	.147	-0.20	0.16	.191
Education (1-low, 3-high)	0.42	0.31	.210	0.41	0.30	.228
Income (1-low, 8-high)	0.24	0.22	.285	0.23	0.22	.294
Having children (1-yes, 0-no)	0.70	0.43	.104	0.67	0.43	.119
Importance of god (1-low, 10-high)	-0.12	0.06	.040	-0.08	0.07	.272
Religious law (1-low, 4-high support)				0.45	0.21	.012

Note: Dependent variable: Romanian or Norwegian authorities are to blame, 1 – yes, 0 – no

When asked to evaluate the responsibility of the Norwegian and Romanian authorities in dealing with Bodnariu's case, older people and those with higher support for a political regime led by the church tend to be more critical of the Norwegian authorities (Table 6).

Table 6. The determinants of blaming more Norwegian than Romanian authorities on Bodnariu's case, in binary logistic models

	B	S.E.	Sig.	B	S.E.	Sig.
Gender (1-man, 0-woman)	0.01	0.23	.961	-0.03	0.23	.895
Age (years)	0.21	0.09	.024	0.19	0.09	.040
Education (1-low, 3-high)	0.26	0.22	.250	0.22	0.19	.420
Income (1-low, 8-high)	0.22	0.13	.085	0.20	0.13	.117
Having children (1-yes, 0-no)	-0.16	0.31	.609	-0.21	0.31	.510
Importance of god (1-low, 10-high)	0.00	0.05	.963	0.03	0.05	.517
Religious law (1-low, 4-high support)				0.27	0.12	.022

Note: Dependent variable: 1 - Norwegian authorities are to blame, 0 - Romanian authorities are to blame

5. Discussion and conclusions

While the sequence of events in the Bodnariu case concluded with the successful reunification of family members, this instance has come to symbolize the potential for abrupt state intervention in people's private lives. The extensive media coverage helped the Bodnariu case become known worldwide, generating strong reactions among various groups, most of which were critical of the actions of the Norwegian child protection institutions and highly supportive towards the family.

At the time of the events, notably in 2015 - the year when Barnevernet removed the five children from the family - child protection became a focal topic not only for experts, but also for the general public, highlighting an apparent clash between differing worldviews and institutional practices. The private feelings of vigilantism for families (and implicitly their children) fueled a collective - national, religious and pro-family - selfhood that was then performed co-agentically across borders, overwhelming any notion of child integrity and all potential perceptions of positive institutional duty and skill. The long-imprinted image of an out of hand abusive child protection system and the revolt against its (seemingly) abusive actions - when coming from a foreign professional and political body - seem to have been key in the public attitude in Romania.

To this end, in this paper we investigated whether and how these events have remained in the collective memory of the Romanian population, considering the sensitivity of the issue and the substantial media coverage of the topic.

As the aspects involved in the Bodnariu case brought up the thorny issue of disciplinary measures used by parents, we reviewed recent research that examines public attitudes toward violence against children and the perceived legitimacy of state interventions in circumstances where children are at risk within their families. Relatedly, we looked at relevant studies on trust in the institutions responsible for child protection and outlined several attributes of the child protection systems developed by Norway and Romania respectively.

The literature review indicates that a mix of historical legacies, socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, and the effectiveness of educational and policy interventions shapes parental attitudes and behaviours regarding children's rights in Romania. Programs and policy reforms that promote children's rights and improve family dynamics are essential for enhancing children's well-being in Romania. These efforts must address the specific challenges faced by marginalized groups and ensure the consistent

enforcement of children's rights to foster a more equitable and inclusive society. Moreover, research on Romania reveals that the impact of socio-economic factors is exceeded by the cultural models within families and communities when we look at the parental attitudes toward children's rights (Voicu et al. 2015), suggesting that training programs for parents that promote not only the understanding of children rights but also pro-democratic values could shift their attitudes to be more oriented towards children's interests (Voicu et al. 2015; Mag 2013).

Building on this background, we used survey data collected in 2021 to analyse the Romanian population's awareness of the Bodnariu case, their views on how Norwegian institutions handled it, and their assessment of the Romanian authorities' response. We also explored the likely factors that contribute to the public's memory of the case and the attitudes towards the actions of both Norwegian and Romanian authorities.

Our findings reveal that nearly two-thirds of Romanian adults remember the Bodnariu case, which occurred five years before the survey was conducted. Interestingly, lower religiosity and lower support for a church-led regime predict better recall of the event. This may be because religious individuals tend to focus more on local events. It also suggests that the case enjoyed widespread but short-term visibility among the Romanian public. Since the level of education is positively correlated with cognitive skills, including long-term memory, it is not surprising that highly educated respondents are more likely to remember Bodnariu's case: among those with a university education, the proportion of those who remember the case is almost double than among those with less than high school (80% vs. 43%).

Analyses of the critical views on the handling of the case by Romanian and Norwegian authorities show that women, religious individuals, and those who support a church-led regime are more critical of the authorities. When asked to assess the authorities' handling of the Bodnariu case, almost 90% of respondents blamed either the Norwegian or Romanian authorities. Notably, a higher proportion of respondents blamed Romanian authorities despite the case occurring in Norway, likely due to the low level of trust in Romanian institutions, including child protection services. Furthermore, those who support greater church influence in governance are more likely to blame Norwegian authorities, reflecting Norway's more secular society.

Overall, these results suggest that religiosity, particularly views on the church-state relationship, is linked to perceptions of child protection crises involving Romanian citizens. Although our cross-sectional data do not allow us to determine causal directions, they support the notion that support for

greater church involvement, low institutional trust, and awareness of child protection crises reinforce each other, creating fertile ground for populist political movements and actors.

Acknowledgements

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A Photovoice Analysis of Ukrainian Adolescents' Coping Strategies and Future Orientation in the Context of Forced Migration

Florina Pop, Alina Bărbuţă[1]

Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, 128-130 21 Decembrie 1989 Blvd, 400604 Cluj-Napoca, Romania
florina.pop@ubbcluj.ro, alina.barbuta@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract. The forced internal and external displacement to which children and young people are exposed during and as a result of war stands in stark opposition to their developmental requirements and entitlement to grow up in an environment that is physically and emotionally secure and stable. Adolescents' perceptions of the future are linked to the maintenance and modification of social structures and their surroundings, which are affected by forced migration. The feeling of uncertainty characteristic of the transition period of children and young people affected by the Ukrainian armed conflict can influence the temporal orientation towards the past and future, both of which are important for understanding their present reality and specific needs. We use a Photovoice approach to illustrate the changes that appeared in their everyday lives after the outbreak of the war. This study aims to explore how Ukrainian adolescents assert agency throughout their experience of forced migration. Engaging adolescents in Photovoice participatory research allows them to capture and describe images of what is meaningful to them as co-constructors of knowledge and meaning. Having 15 Ukrainian adolescents as co-researchers, we aimed to explore the present life circumstances, giving them voice and potential to illustrate their future priorities, orientations, aspirations, and expectations through photography. This participatory approach comes as a resource for the personal empowerment of adolescents, imagined futures implicitly builds on the assumption that the capacity to conceive and aspire to the future serves as a tool for individual self-empowerment. With future aspirations determined by interlocking structural forces, which are constantly revised in the context of forced displacement, the

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[1] Both authors have contributed equally to this article.

future orientation of adolescents starts from the resource system currently available to respond to their basic needs.

Keywords: participatory research; photovoice; war; children; adolescents; forced migration; displacement.

1. Introduction

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has caused one of the largest forced migrations in recent history, affecting millions and disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations, such as children and adolescents. Following the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine, records indicate that over 6.6 million Ukrainians have sought asylum across Europe, predominantly in countries close to Ukraine, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Women and children comprise over 80% of these refugees (UNICEF 2023). Since February 24, 2022, Romania has accommodated over 1.6 million Ukrainian refugees, with approximately 83,748 remaining within its borders and about 74,000 granted temporary protection. Recent trends show a reverse migration, with roughly 1,091,000 individuals returning to Ukraine. In Romania, 33% of Ukrainian refugees are under the age of 18.

Research focusing on refugee children and youth is relatively scarce, highlighting the critical need for careful consideration of ethical guidelines, particularly in balancing the autonomy and protection of young participants who have experienced forced migration. The escalation in forced migration underscores the necessity of integrating ethical considerations into research methodologies, particularly within a human rights framework (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). A methodology incorporating participants' cultural practices and perspectives can enrich the understanding of the forced migration experience (Green and Kloos 2009). This consideration is essential in conducting ethically responsible research.

This paper aims to explore the agency, coping strategies, and future orientations of Ukrainian adolescent refugees who have resettled in Cluj-Napoca, Romania amidst the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Utilizing the Photovoice methodology, the research addressed 15 adolescents, exploring their daily lives and the personal significance they attach to their experiences of forced migration. Adolescents demonstrated significant reliance on peer groups for emotional support and social integration, which are fundamental in adjusting to new environments. Additionally, engagement in recreational activities and the maintenance of routines emerged as vital coping mechanisms, providing both a sense of normalcy and a connection to cultural identities.

This study highlights the nuanced roles of peer support, hobbies, and structured routines in fostering resilience and emotional well-being among displaced adolescents. Through Photovoice, adolescents articulated their struggles and aspirations, offering insights into their complex adaptation journey. This participatory approach allows young participants to express and document their experiences through pictures, providing insights into their daily lives and adjustments to new realities. Photovoice facilitates a deeper understanding of these experiences and supports refugee empowerment by enabling individuals to narrate their own stories.

2. Agency in the context of forced migration

Over the past decade, migration issues have become increasingly significant in European policy and public debates (Eberl et al. 2018). However, a comprehensive perspective that addresses the intersection of youth, forced migration, and future-related aspirations remains underexplored (Doumas and Averay 2024). In environments characterized by substantial uncertainties and inequalities that impact personal independence and decision-making capabilities (Cairns 2014), their life paths are complex and non-linear, often deviating from a straightforward progression (Worth 2009; Dator 2022). Research indicates that well-being stems from the ability to control current and past life aspects, a strong sense of belonging, and a self-concept projected onto a future trajectory (Caprara et al. 2006). Extended periods of uncertainty and insecure futures can have long-term effects on adolescents' trust in institutions, understanding of democracy, level of civic engagement, and social and emotional well-being. The environment in which refugee youth settle plays a crucial role in their access to essential resources, such as money, shelter, and education, which are vital for their physical and psychological well-being and their ability to advocate for themselves (Correa-Velez et al. 2010). Images of the future may include both elements of aspirations and expectations, whether realistic or imaginary, and these images guide decision-making and actions (Polak 1973). Rubin and Kaivo-Oja (1999) emphasize that young people's future projections are closely linked to power and agency.

From a normative and politically endorsed perspective, mostly portraying displaced people as passive victims, it may appear that forced migration can hardly accommodate agency-related strategies such as decision-making capacity or aspirations. In general terms, agency may be defined as "the capacity for an agent to act based on choices, aspirations, and needs" (Safouane, Junemann and Gottsche 2020: 3). Concerning migration, the same authors argue that agency can be understood as the capacity to produce one's

subjectivity in a social context described by specific power relations. As opposed to the humanitarian and political discourse on refugees as victims "unable to author their own narratives" (Rajaram 2002: 247), we argue in favour of the investigation of the multiple forms of subjectivity production beyond the ascribed reduction of agency to resistance against oppression, or to political action and activism (Safouane, Junemann and Gottsche 2020). In the case of young refugees, it is equally important to acknowledge that agency can unfold in multiple forms and that subjectivity production can be depicted in various everyday strategies and interactions. In this vein, the everyday mechanisms refugees employ to survive and navigate challenging circumstances such as joining activities and making friends are nonetheless agency strategies that have the potential to improve their everyday lives (Ramachandran and Vathi 2022).

From a different viewpoint, focused on aspirations as a form of expressing agency and performing particular coping strategies, agency emerges from aspirations as the capacity to imagine alternative futures, but also to "act in the present" (Muller-Funk et al. 2023: 3818) as the capability to accomplish one's aspirations in a specific social structure (Appadurai 2004).

Research into coping behaviours has predominantly been guided by Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory of stress and coping (1984), which identifies two main strategies: problem-focused coping, which involves actions to alter the stressor, and emotion-focused coping, which includes efforts to manage or lessen emotional distress without directly addressing the stressor. While the precise factors influencing the choice of coping strategies remain somewhat elusive, it is suggested that various elements, such as an individual's personality, identity, beliefs, available coping resources, and the nature of the stressor itself, contribute to this decision (Folkman 2008). Traumatic experiences in the country of origin or during displacement play an important role in refugees' emotional health, conversely, the focus is on the difficulties of accurately portraying the social reality of youth within the context of forced migration (Minkkinen 2020).

Exploring agency, coping mechanisms, and future orientation among young refugees reveals a multifaceted interaction in which each element influences and reinforces others. Agency in this context refers not only to making decisions in the face of adversity but also encompasses the ability of these youths to project their identities into future possibilities, shaping their aspirations and actions accordingly. Their coping strategies, whether problem-focused or emotion-focused, are deeply intertwined with their sense of agency. These strategies enable them to manage the stress and uncertainty inherent in

their situations, thereby supporting their emotional well-being. Moreover, the future orientations of young refugees, as expressions of agency, are not merely dreams or desires but rather become important components of their coping mechanisms. This capacity to imagine and option to strive for a better future, as well as to hope for a safe future become essential to their resilience and adaptability.

Ultimately, understanding the complex interplay between agency, coping mechanisms, and future orientation in the lives of young refugees is vital for developing policies and interventions that effectively support their integration and well-being. It challenges the simplistic view of forced migrants as passive victims and highlights their active engagement in shaping their lives, demonstrating the importance of acknowledging and fostering their inherent capacities as agents of their own futures. A clearer understanding of the constraints and options faced by refugee adolescents could enable these groups, or others in liminal situations, to act more effectively based on their ability to "read the world" (Wenger et al. 2020).

3. The potential use of participatory methods with young migrants

The framework for studies focusing on the cultural analysis of coping mechanisms is particularly constrained when considering adolescents in the context of forced migration. Park points out that "the broader culture in which individuals are situated may exert effects on their meaning-making processes" (2010: 292), with the majority of coping studies at the individual level proceeding under the assumption that refugees navigate their identity across various dimensions and are exposed to diverse cultures throughout this process. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss the effects of a single culture and inquire how exposure to various cultures encountered along the migratory route shapes adolescents' coping behaviours. During the process of forced migration, individuals absorb and selectively internalize cultural resources from their adoptive societies while they discard, preserve, re-adopt, reinterpret, or recombine those from their origin societies (Berry 2003; Schwartz et al. 2010).

Youth have long been excluded from discussions concerning the issues that involve them (Clark 2005; Women's Refugee Commission 2022). This exclusion has increasingly been acknowledged in declarations such as the 2022 Youth Declaration from the Transforming Education Summit (UN 2022), which advocates for significant youth engagement in educational policy and decision-making processes. Participatory research methods represent a valuable means of ensuring that young people's voices inform the research that impacts them. These diverse methods are supported by the foundational principles of

democratic decision-making, inclusion and amplification of marginalized voices, and opportunities for reciprocal learning among participants.

The requirement of political systems to classify refugees and internally displaced persons to form policy directives influences research methodologies. Halliovich (2013) indicates that within this exploration of issues concerning refugees, the refugees themselves are often problematized, seen as foreign elements, or even threats to societal well-being. Consequently, they face hostility in their host countries, where they are either stigmatized, perceived as a monolithic entity, or viewed as powerless. Zetter (2018) characterizes forced migration as driven by persecution and associated risks, with multiple factors like socio-economic instability, armed conflicts, state fragility, violence, and violations of human rights contributing to this phenomenon. The complexity of forced migration necessitates an intersectional approach in social research and public policy, demanding a heightened sense of ethical responsibility. In forced migration settings, refugees often undergo fragmented experiences and inhabit liminal spaces in which their rights and citizen status remain uncertain (Collyer 2010; Kraly et al. 2023).

Researchers are challenged to uphold scientific integrity while navigating the moral dilemmas presented by the vulnerability, legal uncertainties, and loss of autonomy experienced by refugees. Turton (2006) emphasizes that reducing human suffering should be a primary goal in such research. Conversely, Hirsch and O'Hanlon (1995) warn against the pitfalls of scientism, where scientific neutrality is misused to perpetuate existing inequities or to serve political ends. Birman (2006) suggests that adopting participatory research methods can help align methodologies and ethical considerations with participants' cultural contexts and specific needs. At this juncture, it is essential to recognize that participatory research is identified as a methodology that bridges research with actionable outcomes (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995), involving collaborative efforts at every stage of the research process to foster change (Vaughn and Jacquez 2020). This approach prioritizes inclusion and the reciprocal development of knowledge non-hierarchically (Pain, 2004), and is especially beneficial in studies involving vulnerable populations. This method stresses collective engagement, enabling children and young adults to challenge not only the prevailing norms upheld by adults in society but also existing theories, power dynamics, societal views, and institutional practices (Prout and Christensen 2005; Lundy et al. 2011; Bishop 2014; Bradburry-Jones 2014). Echoing this notion, Aldridge (2012) suggests that empowerment, much like power, should not be seen as a straightforward

process but rather as a complex web of relationships that offers varying levels of empowerment.

Empowerment theories encompass both the processes and outcomes of empowerment, suggesting that various actions, activities, and structures might facilitate the attainment of power, resulting in a state of empowerment (Swift and Levin 1987). These processes and outcomes manifest differently across different contexts and populations, illustrating that empowerment cannot be universally defined or measured using a single standard (Zimmerman 1995). Empowerment is conceptualized as a framework that integrates individual capabilities and strengths, support from natural helping systems, and proactive behaviours with social policy and change (Rappaport 1984, 1990). Theories, research, and interventions within this framework strive to connect personal well-being with broader societal and political dynamics. Empowerment is the process through which individuals gain control over their own lives, participate democratically in their community's affairs (Rappaport 1987), and develop a critical awareness of their surroundings (Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, Checkoway 1992).

Research indicates that refugee integration is significantly enhanced by developing a sense of belonging through involvement in community organizations, which helps build cultural and social connections within the host community (Lee and Fiske 2006; Kawachi and Berkman 2001). A particular study highlighted the crucial role of social support from the host community in helping Cuban refugees in Texas cope with the stress of resettlement and integrate into their new environment (Barnes and Aguilar 2007). Furthermore, Işık-Ercan (2012) explored the perception among refugees that education serves as a pathway to social advancement.

Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) discuss the application of empowerment theory at the micro (community) and macro levels of social program planning and policymaking. He advocates for a nuanced understanding of how empowerment models function effectively across different populations and settings. It considers the broader socio-political and economic contexts that can oppress certain groups. From this perspective, empowerment is a multifaceted process involving participation and control over one's life within both local and broader societal frameworks (Wallerstein and Bernstein 1988).

Photovoice methodology aims to conduct research collaboratively, focusing on producing knowledge that not only meets community needs but also encourages the necessary social changes to address these needs. This approach prioritizes social change through collaborative action research.

Photovoice aims to include and empower individuals by allowing them to (1) document and reflect on their daily experiences through photography, (2) engage in critical discussions about these photographs, and (3) communicate with decision-makers to foster societal change. Wang (2006) describes the Photovoice process as a structured approach that begins with identifying a specific audience, assembling a participant group, and educating them about the Photovoice techniques while securing their informed consent. Subsequent steps involve clarifying the initial theme, guiding the photography process, and scheduling times and venues for group discussions. The final step involves organizing how the group's findings will be presented to policymakers or other key stakeholders.

4. Ethical considerations in participatory research

To address criticisms regarding ethical considerations, we follow Foucault's conceptualisation of power: ubiquitous, dynamic, and inherent in every individual (Foucault 1983). Practically, this means considering power as a series of strategic actions rather than a static resource like wealth or status, capable of being activated in suitable conditions (Gallagher 2008). Echoing this perspective, Aldridge (2012) suggests that empowerment, much like power, is a complex network of relationships rather than a straightforward progression, permitting varying levels of empowerment. Such views support the use of Photovoice in research involving children and young people, contributing to its popularity. Yet, it is crucial to address specific ethical considerations such as maintaining confidentiality and anonymity with visual materials and ensuring informed consent, all while balancing participant autonomy and protection (Shaw 2021).

The autonomy given to participants in controlling the outcome of the research must be critically evaluated. This involves assessing whether researchers provide the freedom for participants to explore using their chosen photographs, potentially deviating from initial guidelines or engaging creatively with the process (Abma et al. 2022).

Bradbury-Jones, Isham, and Taylor (2018) articulate the shift towards viewing children as active contributors within participatory research. Defined as a method linking research to actionable outcomes (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995), participatory research involves collaborative production at every stage and aims to promote social change (Vaughn and Jacquez 2020). This approach prioritizes inclusive and egalitarian knowledge creation (Pain 2004), making it particularly effective for engaging vulnerable groups. A fundamental aim is to empower children and young individuals to challenge not only prevailing

societal norms but also entrenched theories, power structures, and institutional practices (Lundy et al. 2011; Bradburry-Jones 2014). This reorientation towards participant-driven inquiry places a significant ethical focus on how participants navigate decisions about the visual content they find pertinent, fundamentally questioning who ultimately governs the research outcomes.

5. The research context

In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Romania has seen a significant influx of Ukrainian refugees due to ongoing attacks and worsening weather conditions in Ukraine. This situation has brought economic, security, and energy challenges to the forefront, necessitating comprehensive strategies for refugee integration and inclusion. Romania has responded with several legislative and administrative measures aimed at providing support and assistance to these refugees. Key actions include Government Emergency Ordinance No. 15/2022 and Government Decisions Nos. 367/2022, 337/2022, 336/2022, and 315/2022, which collectively establish mechanisms for temporary protection, financial support for host families, transportation gratuities, and accommodation provisions. Additionally, the government has facilitated educational integration for displaced students through Ministry of Education Order no. 3325/2022 and has enhanced cooperation with international bodies to aid refugees effectively. The National Plan of Measures (Government Emergency Ordinance no. 100/2022) further underscores Romania's commitment to ensuring the protection and inclusion of displaced Ukrainians within its borders (Porumbescu 2023).

In 2023, the International Organization for Migration launched a survey to assess the needs, intentions, and integration hurdles faced by Ukrainian refugees in Romania. The survey revealed that the principal challenges for these refugees are financial strain and language barriers, with a notable lack of information on health care and economic opportunities also reported. A study conducted between February and March 2023 by the Romanian Association for Health Promotion for UNICEF Romania indicated a decline in Romanian public support for refugees since the war began, with a quarter of the population expressing feelings of insecurity due to the refugees' presence. This research also found that the integration of Ukrainian refugees into Romanian society is perceived to involve learning the Romanian language, securing employment, participating in community activities, and enrolling children in local schools.

Romania's strategy for addressing the refugee crisis consists of two main phases: an initial emergency response and a subsequent phase focused on

longer-term protection and inclusion. The initial response, managed by the Department for Emergency Situations (DES), includes immediate aid at border crossings, such as humanitarian aid transports and the provision of shelter, food, and basic medical care. The second phase involves more sustained measures for protection and inclusion, enhancing cooperation with national services and social systems, and improving the dissemination of information about resources and needs. These efforts are part of a three-year National Plan of Measures aimed at facilitating the inclusion and protection of Ukrainian refugees in Romania.

6. Research objectives

Located near significant border crossings with Ukraine, Cluj-Napoca in Romania has become a crucial hub for Ukrainian refugees, likely due to its expansive urban infrastructure (UNHCR 2023). Since February 2022, over 3,000 refugees have registered for Temporary Protection in the city. The authors of this study have been actively involved as volunteers within various local organizations in Cluj-Napoca, providing emergency support to these refugees. One researcher, who shares cultural and linguistic similarities with the refugees, has extensively engaged with this community. It was noted that while substantial support exists for younger children through educational and recreational programs, adolescent refugees face limited opportunities. To address this, a group of Ukrainian adolescents formed an online forum, inviting one of the authors to lead discussions and aid in organizing face-to-face social events.

In partnership with the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, where one author is employed and the other a PhD student, and a local non-governmental organization, a recreational program specifically meant for these adolescents was established. The adolescents convened weekly to plan and conduct the various activities. Their active participation in online platforms, including photo sharing and discussions, set the foundation for a Photovoice project.

This research focuses on the experiences of Ukrainian adolescents who have relocated to Romania due to the conflict in Ukraine, aiming to delve into the nuances of their daily lives' agency strategies. Using the Photovoice methodology (Wang and Burris 1997; Strack et al. 2004; Green and Kloos 2009; Liebenberg 2018), this study seeks to capture and analyse the adolescents' perspectives and experiences, specifically highlighting what they consider significant in their current circumstances.

7. Methods
7.1. Participants
In our study, we involved a group of 15 Ukrainian adolescents (See Table 1), ranging from 11 to 17 years old, comprising 9 females and 7 males (See Table 1). Since February- March 2022, as volunteers, we have been in contact with the co-researcher group through weekly recreational activities. After four and a half months of these activities, we introduced the idea of Photovoice research. This decision was influenced by their regular online interactions, where they shared photos and discussions about their daily experiences. We proposed transitioning these discussions to a face-to-face setting. Initially, 20-25 adolescents were consistently involved in recreational activities, of whom 15 opted to join the research. The researchers' contribution was limited to the proposal and invitation to develop and build together the way to discuss their daily routine, allowing each adolescent the opportunity to communicate what they considered to be important for themselves.

Table1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

No.	Age	Gender	The city of origin	When they came to Romania	Whom they are accompanied by
1	12	F	Kyiv	Feb-2022	Mother, 2 sisters, and grandmother.
2	11	F	Dnipro	Mar-2022	Mother, brother, and aunt with her child.
3	12	F	Dnipro	Feb-2022	Mother, father, and older brother.
4	14	F	Kyiv	Mar-2022	Father and younger sister.
5	15	F	Odessa	Feb-2022	Mother and younger sister.
6	16	F	Odessa	Mar-2022	Mother, both grandparents (from both sides, paternal and maternal), aunt, and neighbor (who is the mother's best friend).
7	16	F	Mykolaiv	Apr-2022	Mother and grandmother.
8	13	F	Bucha	May-2022	Mother, father, brother, dog, and cat.
9	12	F	Kharkiv	Feb-2022	Mother, older sister, and cat.
10	14	M	Ivano-Frankivsk	Apr-2022	Aunt and 2 cousins.

11	13	M	Kherson	Feb-2022	Mother and the other 2 brothers.
12	13	M	Kharkiv	May-2022	Mother.
13	16	M	Odessa	May-2022	Mother, sisters, and godmother.
14	17	M	Kherson	Apr-2022	Mother.
15	15	M	Vinita	Apr-2022	Mother, grandparents, aunt, and younger cousin.

Source: Generated by the authors

7.2. Procedure

Noticing adolescents' adept use of technology and active participation in online dialogues, we introduced the Photovoice concept in October 2022. An initial meeting drew 15 adolescents who showed an interest in shaping the research direction. At this meeting, we explained the Photovoice methodology and encouraged their input in planning the research. The discussion centred on capturing their daily experiences and the aspects they found significant through photography. Participants were instructed to use their personal devices to capture unlimited photos, selecting six that they felt most effectively represented their daily lives for discussion in the planned group setting.

These selected images were to serve as focal points in discussions based on the SHOWED model (Wang and Burris 1997; Wang 1999), with certain adaptations to better suit our group's dynamics. Modifications included posing personalized questions about the photos and introducing various communication-enhancing techniques, such as titling the images or writing brief descriptions, to deepen the discussion and understanding of the visual content.

We scheduled two group discussions for November and December, aiming to finalize and decide on the dissemination of the results by mid-December 2022. The initial focus group session lasted 88 minutes, featuring the participation of 15 adolescents who shared and discussed 22 photographs. The follow-up session extended for 101 minutes with 10 adolescents present, during which 18 photographs were analysed and discussed. It is important to note that the absence of five participants in the second session is not detailed, as they are entitled to withdraw from the study at any point without explanation. Each session was recorded, and the audio was transcribed verbatim into Ukrainian and Romanian. Special attention was given to recording pauses, interruptions, and non-verbal cues to enhance the analysis of the group interactions.

7.3. Ethical considerations

Given the participatory nature of this study, the ethical dimensions of this research were considered throughout the planning, implementation, and data interpretation stages. Prior to participation, the adolescents were presented with information on the Photovoice method and were offered time for questions and discussions. Informed consent was diligently obtained from the participants and their tutors where necessary before their engagement in this study. The participants were provided comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. They were also informed of their right not to participate or withdraw from the study at any point without any explanation or consequence. As we were already in contact with the group from our recreational activities, we explained that they had no obligation to participate in the Photovoice study and could continue participating only in the recreational program if they wished.

The principle of utility and benefit is illustrated by the imperative to provide evidence-based policy recommendations that integrate children's perspectives. Another ethical principle that was applied was anonymity and confidentiality, and every effort was made to safeguard participants' privacy.

7.4. Data analysis

In our research employing the Photovoice method, we integrated the data collection and analysis phases more closely than in traditional research methods. Utilizing the SHOWED model, a semi-structured, action-oriented inquiry approach, we framed our group discussions around a series of probing questions: "What do you see here?", "What is happening in this scene?", "How does this relate to your life?", "Why is this situation significant?", and "What actions might be taken in response to this scenario?" (Wang and Burris 1997).

To accommodate the adolescents' personal experiences and emotions, our discussions were adaptively structured, incorporating personalized queries about the photographs and employing projective techniques, such as assigning titles or crafting brief descriptions to each photograph (McIntyre 2003). This initial analysis phase was conducted collaboratively with adolescents serving as co-researchers, focusing on the content and meaning of their photographs. During these sessions, each participant presented their photographs, sharing the personal meanings and responses elicited, guided by semi-structured questions and any additional elements they included. Each meeting concluded with a comprehensive analysis where all photographs were reviewed, their meanings interpreted, and themes were collaboratively identified and explored with the participants.

After this initial phase, we developed the codes and grouped them into themes in a participatory manner. Data from the group discussions were then analysed using MAXQDA, a tool that supports the efficient management and deeper analysis of data, facilitating the coding, categorization, and comparison of information from the focus groups (Strack et al. 2004).

The coding process in both phases allowed us to organize the codes hierarchically and systematically identify the themes and sub-themes. We followed a hybrid approach in our thematic analysis by combining inductive and deductive methodologies (Hennink et al. 2006; Hennink et al. 2011). The inductive approach (Patton 2002) facilitates the identification of patterns and themes directly from the data, whereas the deductive analysis aligns with the initial goals of the Photovoice process to explore specific research aims. This analysis ultimately revealed two overarching themes that reflect the everyday life perceptions and experiences of young migrants (See Table 2).

Throughout the thematic analysis process, we involved the adolescents in reviewing and refining the themes to ensure their perspectives were accurately represented, adhering to the principles of participatory research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Discussions were conducted within the research team, including the authors and co-researchers, in both face-to-face meetings and online communications until a consensus was reached on the findings.

Table 2. Main theme, subtheme, and specific elements of thematic analysis

Main theme	Subtheme	Specific elements
Specific coping mechanism	Leveraging social networks	Collective coping and peer support
		Positive influence in peer group settings
	Recreation and hobbies	Adapting to the Unknown
	Normalization through routine	Establishing daily practices to foster a sense of normalcy
	Adapting to change and resilience	Building resilience through flexibility and adaptation
	Emotional protection strategies	Leisure time
		Regulating the use of information and communication technology (ict)
		Maintaining connections with extended family

	Exploring personal and community identity	Understanding identity shifts in new environments
Future orientations, aspirations, and expectations in the context of forced migration	Integration and acceptance in the host society	Seeking acceptance and finding *one's place* within new cultural settings
	Educational and professional aspirations	Pursuing new educational and professional opportunities as a means of advancement
	Return to the country of origin	Contemplating the feasibility and desirability of returning to one's homeland
	Hopes for stability and security	Aspiring to a stable and secure future amid uncertainty

Source: Generated by the authors

8. Results

The research findings are presented in a narrative form, focusing initially on adolescents' specific coping and agency mechanisms. Subsequently, the discussion shifts to examining *future orientations in the context of forced migration.*

8.1. Specific coping mechanisms

As a primary coping mechanism, adolescents consider *the expansion of their social network* to be primarily important, stemming from the need for socialization and belonging to a peer group. The expansion of social networks includes two fundamental dimensions: *Collective Coping and Peer Support* and *Positive Influence in Group Settings*, both of which possess a procedural and phased character. Affiliation with a peer group stems not only from the need for social interaction but also from the intention to cultivate relationships grounded in solidarity and mutual support. Belonging to a peer group aids in the development of collective coping strategies shaped by the dynamics of the group setting.

The role of peer groups is highlighted by the importance of friendship in adapting to new environments. Adolescents illustrate this through their interactions: "*This is X, we went to the mall and played with guns... I chose this photograph because he is my best friend.*" (M, 15 years old). Collective coping, in which individuals support each other in managing stress, is an important aspect of refugee communities (Guribye et al. 2011). Studies indicate that adolescents

discuss the importance of friendships and group activities as methods of mutual support and reducing feelings of isolation (Betancourt et al. 2012). Interactions between adolescents and other examples of peer support demonstrate how relationships can serve as powerful coping mechanisms.

Finding a peer friend has allowed them to engage in age-adequate activities and adjust their coping strategies. Some adolescents shared photos of where they first met their friends because they considered this a key moment that had helped them overcome their difficulties. These shared experiences not only provide a "distraction" from their worries, but also reinforce a supportive network that is vital for their well-being. Unlike the often war-centric conversations with family members and within the Ukrainian community, interactions with friends offer a reprieve, allowing adolescents to experience moments of relief from constant reminders of conflict.

> *"Friends are very important to me; they help me deal with all kinds of thoughts that I have. Whether you want it or not, you think about what is happening in the country. Everybody around you talks only about this all day long."* (M, 15 years old).

Adolescents' friendships are not merely social connections but are essential components of their emotional well-being and adaptation strategies in the face of adversity and forced migration. The supportive role of peers is crucial in helping them navigate new realities, offering both escapism and emotional grounding. This dual role of friends as sources of diversion and confidants supports adolescents in balancing their emotional states. By engaging in typical teenage activities, they temporarily set aside the heavy burden of war while finding opportunities to express and regulate their emotions through shared concerns and experiences. These shared histories strengthen friendships and foster peer understanding and support.

The dynamics within a group can lead to changes in individual behaviour, either overtly or covertly, through mechanisms like majority or minority influence (Levine and Tindale 2015). Social influence within groups encompasses aspects such as negotiation, group creativity, polarization, and decision-making, highlighting how group dynamics can significantly shape individual behaviours and attitudes.

One of the co-researchers, in her reflection and dialogue about the photos, constantly mentioned her intention to maintain a positive attitude, even in the context of war: *"For example, I don't want to keep talking about the war; I chose funny pictures and want to stay more positive, even though I know that there is a war at home."* (F, 14 years old).

Adolescents experience a myriad of emotions that arise about their immediate social space, which can influence their perceptions of members within their microsystem. In the context of forced migration, peer groups can emerge as a buffer between perceptions and reactions to the new environment and the newly formed microsystem.

Adolescents highlight how the absence of friends can intensify their difficulties. At the same time, the presence of a supportive social network can help overcome negative thoughts and adapt to a new environment.

> "*I don't know if anything in my life has changed, but I've realized it's very hard if you don't have friends.*" (M, 17 years old)

> "*For me, it's very important, it helps me get over all sorts of thoughts because whether you like it or not you think about what's happening back in the country. Everyone around you talks about it all day.*"(F, 16 years old)

Peer support not only provides a sense of normalcy and belonging but can also be a catalyst for developing healthy coping strategies in the face of challenges. Friendship relationships among adolescents can serve as a buffer against social isolation. These connections also provide a safe space for expressing emotions and for open discussions about difficult experiences, thus reducing the inferiority feeling associated with refugee status.

8.2. Recreation and hobbies – adapting to the *unknown*

Adolescents mention participating in recreational activities as an important aspect of their everyday lives. They engage in a variety of recreational activities, such as hiking, hanging out in parks, and gaming, which are perceived as coping mechanisms and ways to establish social connections with peers, including the host community. A teenage girl highlighted a significant aspect of the discussion on the role of extracurricular activities in adapting to the new environment through a detailed description of pictures taken during a visit to a natural park. The image, capturing a sunset seen from a car, illustrates a common perspective in the group: nature as an essential resource for recreation and distress. Describing the scene in vivid detail, the teenager notes how the colours of the sunset and the landscape provide her with a state of peace and artistic inspiration: "*I really liked the colours and how the sunset was just beginning. I like how the light reflects off the guardrail on the roadside...*" (F, 14 years old). This account highlights how photography serves not just as a hobby but also as an emotional tool that helps adolescents process their feelings and share their experiences with others: "*I often go with a friend of mine to the forest near Mănăștur... This calms me down. It is my time to think, to decide.*" (F, 14 years old)

Among the discussions in focus groups, the crafting activities that adolescents engage in were also detailed. One teenager elaborately described how he and his mother are involved in creating artisanal objects. They collect natural materials from nearby forests to create decorative pieces, which they sell online and at charity fairs. The activity is not only a therapeutic refuge but also a means of contributing to the community by raising funds: "*My mom has an Instagram page and sells them there. Most of what she makes is sold at fairs organized for Ukrainians, charity fairs.*" (M, 15 years old). Community support emerges as a recurring theme throughout the discussion. Adolescents talk about their involvement in community activities, such as charity fairs, where they sell items to raise funds for those affected by the conflict in Ukraine.

Discussions around other pictures representing hobbies and the emotional significance behind them emphasized the role of visual expression in managing the new unknown and adapting to new environments. Adolescents find consolation and a sense of identity through their ability to capture and share significant moments.

> "*My life has become quieter since I moved here. Sadly, I don't see my family who stayed in Ukraine, but I'm glad I found a soccer club to go to. Doing more things seems to make you forget about the war.*" (M, 16 Years old)

Recreation and hobbies are important in helping displaced adolescents navigate the challenges of their new environments. These activities not only provide emotional relief and a sense of normalcy but also foster a sense of community and solidarity among displaced Ukrainian youth.

8.3. Normalization through routine

This theme is prominently explored through descriptions of how routines, either preserved or newly established, provide a sense of normalcy and stability for adolescents amidst significant changes in their lives. Discussions about online schooling show how daily routines bring about an element of stability. Maintaining regular activities, even in a modified format, helps to create a sense of order and predictability.

Resilience is the capacity to recover from adversity and is often studied in the context of refugees. Adolescents exhibit resilience by adapting to new cultural and social environments, maintaining stable relationships, and maintaining a positive outlook despite challenging circumstances (Southwick et al. 2014). Normalization through routine also plays a pivotal role in future planning. Establishing a routine can help individuals look beyond their immediate circumstances and plan their future. This could be as simple as setting educational goals, planning career paths, or organizing future activities.

> *"I usually wake up at 9:00 even though classes start at 8:30. Often the teachers don't join the online classes because they don't have mobile signal or electricity. I couldn't do this when I was at home because I had to be at school by eight thirty, but now even my mom doesn't wake me up because she knows that online school isn't serious."* (M, 15 years old)

The adolescents reveal that community-and family focused activities, such as going shopping for groceries or visiting a local park, are part of their routine. These activities are not only recreational but also serve to strengthen communal bonds and provide emotional support, illustrating the normalization of their lives through coethnic community integration (we refer to the integration in the Ukrainian community). The discussions highlight how routines are adapted to new environments, mentioning attending local schools and participating in local community centers for Ukrainian refugees. These routines help adolescents feel more grounded and integrated in their new surroundings.

> *"I wake up at 8 even if there are no classes. I like to wake up as I used to for school. I don't even need to set an alarm, I wake up naturally."* (F, 13 years old).

Several adolescents talk about their pets as part of their daily routines, providing emotional support and a sense of continuity from their lives before displacement.

> *"As I mentioned, we have two cats and a dog; the next photo is of my dog Sherry. Among the cats and the dog, I love him the most. Every morning I take him for a walk, and for me, this is sacred; I do nothing else before taking the dog out. We also sleep together. When I was in Ukraine, I did the same thing, every morning, afternoon, and evening I would take him out, and we do the same here. We try to maintain this habit; in the evening and afternoon, grandma comes with me too."* (F, 16 years old)

Discussions on how routines provide a coping mechanism in times of distress are relevant. One teenager mentioned that sticking to her morning routine helps maintain a sense of normalcy despite the chaos around her. Maintaining and forming new social connections is a routine on which many adolescents focus. They talk about the importance of having friends to spend time with regularly, which helps them deal with the emotional toll of displacement and creates a semblance of normal life. These insights illustrate how routines, whether around leisure, artistic expression, community involvement, or daily

chores, play an important role in helping adolescents adapt to new circumstances while providing a sense of stability and normalcy.

Routines are powerful tools to assert resilience. Normalization strategies within routines contribute to the processes of *adaptation and resilience.* Adolescents discuss engaging in social activities as a means of adapting to their new environment. For instance, one participant said that exploring the city and engaging in various activities almost daily was a way to integrate and feel less isolated.

> "*As I said, we go out almost every day to the city to play something; we look for different ways to spend our free time.*"(M, 15 years old)

Adolescents engage in various social activities, such as community (local Ukrainian community) crafts and excursions, which not only provide a sense of belonging but also reinforce their social support networks that are essential for resilience in times of change. Routines can facilitate smoother transitions for those adapting to new cultural or physical environments. By integrating local customs or norms into daily activities, adolescents can begin to feel more at home in their new settings. This adaptation process might include adopting local eating habits, participating in community activities, or learning and incorporating the local language into everyday use.

> "*I was very happy because when I arrived, I felt very lonely without friends in a foreign country where I don't know the language and don't know anything.*" (F, 12 years old)

Emotional resilience is evident in adolescents' coping with challenging circumstances. Discussions often revolve around overcoming daily challenges as part of building resilience. Adolescents use various ways in which they adapt to changes and exhibit resilience, from forming new social bonds to creating routines that help them manage their new realities.

conversation about selling things made by the mother of one participant on Instagram and at fairs shows the family's adaptability and resilience in the face of difficult situations: "*Mom has been doing this in Ukraine as well, but it was more like a hobby because she works, has worked, and continues to work as a teacher of Ukrainian language and literature.*" (M, 14 years old). This adaptation to new economic and social realities reflects an aspiration to maintain a sense of normality and stability through creative activities.

As strategies for emotional protection, teenagers refer to two aspects: *managing free time* and *regulating the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)*. Adolescents place a significant emphasis on structuring their leisure time, acknowledging its critical role in maintaining emotional balance. A large

share of the mechanisms for regulating and managing leisure time discussed herein relates to the coping strategies presented earlier in the results section of this article. These strategies are not merely coping mechanisms, but also represent how adolescents reconstruct a sense of control and normality.
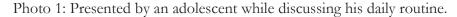
Adolescents discuss their feelings and emotions experienced in various contexts, such as playing Escape Room games or interacting with pets, emphasizing the importance of emotional support within the group: *"I heard the alert, I stopped searching. I wasn't scared"* (M, 17 years old); *"For me, my cat means... I'm not sure how to say… my best friend"* (F, 13 years old). These comments underscore the role of emotions in shaping expectations and navigating daily experiences.

Regulating access to technology represents another important dimension. Adolescents are aware of the potential negative impacts of information overload, particularly in the context of an ongoing conflict that affects their families and communities directly or indirectly: *"We use technology, but we try not to lose ourselves in it, to ensure it does not impact us negatively."* (F, 16 years old). This approach demonstrates an awareness of the need to balance connection and online presence with the overwhelming nature of war-related news. The use of ICT, mobile devices, and social networks by adolescents requires them to filter and control the information they receive, thus protecting themselves from the negative impact of news. Adolescents discuss the importance of carefully selecting the information they have access to and avoiding news that could exacerbate stress or anxiety. Adolescents discuss watching series and avoiding news about war as strategies to maintain their emotional balance. Focus group discussions have highlighted the challenge of avoiding ubiquitous content on social media platforms. Many adolescents emphasize the importance of periods in which they completely disconnect from digital devices. This may include time spent engaging in physical activities, face-to-face interactions, or hobbies that do not involve technology. Adolescents mention developing skills to filter and select online content, thereby avoiding overly graphic or violent news. ICT regulation is crucial for refugee adolescents, enabling them not only to stay safely connected but also to shield themselves from the potentially harmful effects of uncontrolled digital media consumption.

Co-researchers associate the alternative use of ICT with two needs: the need for entertainment and the maintenance of relationships with their extended family. For entertainment purposes, the majority of adolescents use their devices to engage in online gaming, either in real time or asynchronously. This activity serves as a form of leisure and provides a virtual space for

interaction and socialization, which is particularly valuable for maintaining a sense of normalcy and continuity in their disrupted lives. By participating in these gaming activities, adolescents associate this with an escape from the stresses of their daily realities, even if momentarily, and enjoy a sense of camaraderie with peers.

> "*I like playing online games, usually network games, and I am glad that there is internet here so I can continue playing. If there was no internet, I don't know what I would do all day, probably just stare at the ceiling.*" (M, 15 years old)

Photo 1: Presented by an adolescent while discussing his daily routine.

It can be inferred from the general context that young individuals utilize technology to stay connected with family and friends: "*He calls us when he has time and can talk*," says A. about his conversations with his brother.

The data reveals that adolescents not only use ICT for entertainment and personal enjoyment but also as a vital means of sustaining familial bonds that might otherwise be strained by geographical separation. Maintaining connections with extended family via ICT is a complex activity for adolescents. While it presents certain challenges, the benefits of sustaining these familial ties are profound and contribute significantly to young individuals' emotional well-being and cultural identity.

Adolescents extensively use various communication platforms, such as social media (Instagram, TikTok) and more direct messaging and video calling applications (Telegram, Viber, and WhatsApp). ICT allows for the continuation of familial relationships, despite physical barriers. Regular communication helps to keep family members involved in each other's lives,

fostering a sense of belonging and emotional support. Especially for adolescents facing the challenges of adapting to new environments, having a robust support system consisting of extended family members accessible via ICT can provide emotional grounding and a sense of security.

> "*I will return to Ukraine with my mother, younger brother, and older sister. We will meet up with our father and stay with other family members. We want to be together with them for the holidays. Even though it's risky, I'm anxious about what it will be like on the road, but we haven't seen our relatives since March and we want to go and be together.*" (F, 15 years old)

8.4. Orientations in the context of forced migration

Building on the model of the classifications of the future as a social fact proposed by Beckert & Suckert (2021), the dimensions identified in our research on future orientations can be categorized as follows: *Construction process of future orientations*; *Space of the future;* and *Stability of the future.*

It is not surprising, given that the co-researchers are adolescents, that a significant part of the orientations concerning the future are presented as a fundamental part of identity construction (Future-based identity).

Exploring personal and community identity is strongly related to the *integration and acceptance in the host society.* Attending a local school comes with benefits related to social inclusion, the broadening of social networks, and cultural exchange.

> "*Yes, but have you tried to make Romanian friends, not just Ukrainian ones? For example, I go to a Romanian language school every afternoon and have made two friends there. We get along; we play Minecraft together, do streaming.*" (M, 15 Years old)

They also speak about the challenges of integrating into the new community: "*Yes, but you need to know Romanian or English to make friends among them. I don't know.*" (F, 17 years old) This statement highlights the role of language in the integration process and in establishing new social relationships within the host society. According to UNHCR (2023), the education of refugee children in Cluj-Napoca has been problematic, with approximately 24% of the children from surveyed households not receiving any formal education, primarily due to language barriers. Participants comment on the challenges of focusing on education during wartime:

> "*Now, with the war, it's hard to concentrate on learning anything; it's been a year, and I don't know if I've learned anything new.*" (F, 13 Years old)

It is noteworthy that adolescents report having only limited interactions with the host community and do not feel like active members of the local community, despite frequently expressing a need for acceptance and inclusion. Referring to the *spatial and temporal perceptions of the future* - the future was associated with specific geographical locations. However, how space and temporalities are perceived by adolescents differ from their current contexts. In several cases, imagined future locations might be an undefined 'somewhere else' rather than a specific place. Yet, a recurring theme in the spatial-geographical integration of the future is the desire to return to the country of origin.

> "*However, I still want to go home, I want us to return home as soon as possible. I've told my mom several times that we should go back, but she doesn't want to. After all, this isn't your country here, the same language isn't spoken. That's it.*"
> (F, 16 years old)

Departing from Beckert and Suckert's (2021) distinction between linear (viewing life as progressing linearly) and circular (being stuck in a moment due to uncertainty) conceptualizations, adolescents exhibited a mixed approach in this regard. These categories are intertwined in narratives regarding future orientation. While some adolescents have long-term orientations and expectations, their ability to plan in detail is simultaneously limited by the uncertainties of war.

Photo 2. Presented by a teenager while discussing the migration route from the beginning of the war until arriving in Cluj.

8.5.Stability of the future

The potential for perceptions of the future to change over time (Stability of the Future) is identified by adolescents as a distinctive feature of how the conflict situation in their country of origin might evolve. Most align their future dreams and aspirations with the hope of stability and security. They discuss the long-term impact of war on their lives: "*It's war! Do you realize that people are dying there?!*" *(M, 15 years old)*

Adolescents share insights into their family's actions to support their Ukrainian relatives or the Ukrainian army to reaffirm their belongingness. The glorifying and hopeful talk about the close victory of the Ukrainian army shapes their discourse, and some overlap their pictures and significance with popular heroic characters.

> "*The next picture, also with X, and written large ZSU (Armed Forces of Ukraine). We are very grateful to the army for defending our country. I also have an older brother who is a soldier, I appreciate him more since the war started and he went to fight. Many his age have fled or hidden; he went.*" (M, 16 years old)

Adolescents recognize the potential for future perceptions to change over time, depending on the evolution of conflict. They align their future dreams with hopes for stability and security, discussing the war's long-term impact. Future orientations are seen as an integral part of their identity, with personal and Ukrainian community identity strongly linked to integration into the host community. Participants exhibit both linear and circular conceptualizations of time, reflecting aspirations for long-term stability while being constrained by the uncertainties of war.

9. Conclusion

In this participatory Photovoice study, we explored the current situation of Ukrainian adolescents who migrated to Romania. We employed a Photovoice approach (Wang and Burris 1997; Strack et al. 2004; Liebenberg 2018) to gain insight into adolescents' perceptions and experiences about what is meaningful to them in their everyday lives, in the current life context. Our research was developed in a participatory manner with 15 adolescents.

This research provides insights into the coping and agency mechanisms employed by adolescent refugees to manage their experiences of forced migration. The findings underscore the significant role of peer support in adolescent refugees' lives. Peer groups serve not only as social outlets, but also as critical support systems that facilitate emotional coping and adjustment to new environments. The shared experiences within these groups, whether through everyday activities or collective coping during stress, enhance their

resilience and provide a sense of normalcy. At the same time, friends provide a context for emotional regulation and adjustment of their emotional state when they safely allow for experiences, worries, and hopes to be shared and contained through age-specific communication. This is particularly relevant in cases where adolescents consider that sharing their emotions with their families would add to the already difficult state of the family, or that some topics, such as death, would create too much emotional fragility within their family.

Expanding social networks have been identified as a crucial coping mechanism. Adolescents rely on these networks for emotional support and to reduce feelings of isolation. Engagement in cultural and recreational activities is a vital component of adolescents' coping strategies. These activities not only offer distraction and relief from the stresses of displacement, but also aid in maintaining cultural connections and personal identities. The role of hobbies and recreation in fostering a sense of belonging and community among co-ethnicities is particularly emphasized.

Establishing and maintaining routines is crucial for creating a sense of stability and normalcy. Regular routines help adolescents manage uncertainty in their situations by providing structure and predictability. This aspect is particularly important for psychological well-being and integration into new social and educational settings. Despite the various coping mechanisms and support of peer groups, adolescents face significant challenges in adapting to new environments. Language barriers, educational disruptions, and cultural differences pose ongoing challenges.

The aspirations and future orientations of adolescent refugees are closely tied to their experiences of migration. Many express a desire to return to their home countries or to find stability and security. Their future planning is influenced by their current experiences and the coping strategies they have developed. Finally, we argue that a variety of agency strategies can be found in adolescents' narratives about how their lives unfold in the context of forced migration. Pursuing their hobbies, developing interactions with friends, or managing a daily routine while pragmatically accounting for the social constraints in which they are currently embedded are relevant means to produce subjectivity and improve their everyday lives.

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BOOK REVIEW

The book by French historian Catherine Horel offers an original approach to the history of urban spaces, conducting a comparative investigation of cities from various parts of the Habsburg Empire with the aim to analyze the manifestations of multiculturalism in the context of mobility intensified by industrial development, railway system expansion, educational opportunities, urbanization, and constant changes in the landscape.

The research is focused on twelve cities across Austro-Hungary: Brno and Bratislava in the west, Lviv (Lemberg) and Czernowitz (Cernăuți) in the north, Oradea, Arad, and Timișoara in the east, Szabadka (Subotica), Sarajevo, Zagreb, Fiume (Rijeka), and Trieste in the south. These cities are mid-sized, with populations ranging between 50,000 and 200,000. The author chose more cities from the Hungarian part of the empire because, on one hand, the military border and colonization favored multiculturalism, and on the other hand, there is less research dedicated to cities in Transleithania. The capitals (Vienna, Prague, Budapest) were excluded because they have already received considerable attention from numerous researchers. Additionally, another consideration was the necessity to represent all nationalities of the monarchy (Germans, Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, Ruthenians, Romanians, Serbs, Croats, Italians, Slovaks, Slovenes) and all the religious denominations (Jews, Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, Muslims, etc.).

The comparison of the cities was based on aspects regarding daily life: the spoken language, religion, associations, the school system, arts, political implication, urban development. The author took into consideration, in addition to the specific methodology of history, approaches from the perspectives of geography, anthropology, literature, and art history, conducting interdisciplinary research. The sources used were numerous and varied. Reports and other materials published by the cities themselves, city council debates, and publications from local associations show how the city chose to communicate and present itself.

The scientific works of local historians and scientists highlight how they perceived the city as a meeting point between diverse concepts and ideas. An important part of the research was the discourse analysis, from which the image of the cities emerged, with the main source for this being the local press.

The book is structured into eight chapters, supplemented by annexes that provide relevant statistics, a bibliography, and an index of names and key terms.

The first chapter provides an overview of the legislation from both the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the empire concerning municipalities and addresses the status of each of the 12 cities, some of them capitals of historical provinces (Brno, Lemberg), others of hereditary crown lands (Zagreb), or more recently conquered provinces (Cernăuți, Sarajevo). Each of the twelve cities holds its own historical, political, cultural, economic, and religious significance, but what distinguishes the cities of Cisleithania from those of Transleithania is primarily the population size, with cities in the Austrian part of the empire having a larger population. Also, Austria was conceived as a dynastic state, with provinces belonging to it, but in Hungary prevailed the idea of a centralized state. The author analyzes the evolution of each city from 1880 to 1914, with urbanization, industrialization, and intense migration from the countryside to the city shaping the urban space.

The second chapter, titled *Austro-Hungarian Tower of Babel: The City and Its Languages*, addresses one of the main elements of multiculturalism: linguistic diversity. While the linguistic landscape of the city (reflected in street names, shop signs, etc.) was a subject of controversy between nationalists and representatives of minority groups, linguistic loyalty was characterized more by fluidity, oscillating depending on age, gender, status, profession, etc. The soundscape of the cities was polyphonic, with interactions between various linguistic groups shaping dialects and influencing the aspects of spoken languages, beyond the school system.

A form of identification much less malleable than language was religious affiliation, with confessional diversity being the theme of the next chapter. Churches of different denominations and synagogues played a very important role in giving the urban landscape a multicultural aspect. Traditionally, churches promoted loyalty to the state and the emperor; however, religion has been given national implications, so the construction of as imposing and representative places of worship as possible in the most favorable parts of the cities has become a matter of national pride.

Religion was no longer a sufficient element for defining identity; language and culture tended to surpass it in importance. Chapter 4, aptly titled "*Schools: Places to Learn Multiculturalism or Factories of the Nation?*", addresses how political discourse transformed the education issue into a nationality problem. The city's elite held language hegemony and enforced it in schools, and every city wishing to present itself as a promoter of education strove to build new schools. This was a crucial aspect for minority groups too, who were eager to refute the inferiority label imposed by the nationalists from the majority group. The school issue evolved into a competition among various national groups for access to culture and the right to establish institutions promoting national consciousness. Despite the intense and widely expressed controversy, citizens were not as eager to embrace the educational cause as nationalists desired, accepting the promotion of cultural diversity in schools.

Chapter five analyzes cultural institutions in cities from the perspective of multiculturalism and national discourse. The constitutional era that began in 1867 favored the proliferation of cultural, economic, and sports associations, the construction of theaters, as well as the printing of periodicals. Although nationalists tried to give a national color to these projects, the new schools and theaters, regardless of the group that initiated them, were often perceived by citizens as expressions of modernity and motives for city patriotism. Newspapers belonging to various interest groups identified dangers everywhere, but they did not always succeed in mobilizing citizens as they would wish.

Between 1880-1914, the landscape of cities underwent radical changes. They expanded, suburbs were united with the city, new streets were built, old ones were asphalted. Additionally, the cities were connected to the railway network and equipped with train stations, wider boulevards were created, parks were established, imposing buildings were constructed, and monuments were erected. The sixth chapter focuses on the comparative approach of these changes, discussing them both as expressions of the zeitgeist (modernization, sanitary progress, etc.) and of local ambitions and political objectives, as they were implemented by various actors such as the state, municipality, ethnic and confessional groups. Undoubtedly, there are similarities in the shaping of urban space, stemming from the use of the same architects for representative buildings, through the imitation of a common model (usually the capital), by imposing political visions (mainly those of the dominant nation), but there are also buildings that symbolized the presence of certain national groups.

The political landscape, analyzed in the next chapter, completes the image of the cities and shows the increasingly strong manifestation of national conflicts, while local authorities sought to encourage dynastic and provincial patriotism to temper nationalist manifestations.

The last chapter deals with the mechanisms of integrating the new city dwellers and promoting city patriotism, aiming to unite all citizens, regardless of language and confession. Loyalty towards the city, the province, as well as towards the dynasty, were forms of identification that transcended national identity and were promoted by the urban elite. In the case of the cities of Cernăuți and Sarajevo, central authorities made efforts to build "Habsburg cities" and implement the imperial model through institutions and monuments, in a blatant colonizing approach.

In conclusion, "the world of the Habsburg cities was a dynamic space where many models coexisted and created vitality, emulation, and conflict". Multiculturalism manifested in various forms (languages spoken, religions, cultural associations, schools, art, periodicals, etc.) in a continuously changing urban landscape, where national conflicts coexisted with a sense of city, regional, and dynastic patriotism.

From reading the book emerges the image of a multiethnic empire that was neither a "graveyard for nationalities," nor an ideal space for the expression of multiculturalism. The author proposes a balanced approach, well-documented and presented in an engaging style, making the work an original and highly valuable contribution to the history of urban space in Central and South-Eastern Europe.

Reviewed by: Nicoleta Hegedűs
Babeș-Bolyai University, Centre for Population Studies &
the Romanian Academy, George Barițiu Institute of History,
Cluj-Napoca, Romania,
nicoleta.hegedus@ubbcluj.ro

Information for authors

Centre for Population Studies