

## Comics for Pioneers Representations of Modernization and Class Identities in Socialist Romania

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The *Cliff of the Eagles* (detail)

### Introduction

COMICS ARE a particular genre of books for children and adults. In their educational narratives, one can study the social and cultural construction of society. There are few studies on the relationship between official propaganda materials and entertainment in the mass media dedicated to children and youth in socialist Romania (1948–1989), in the process of institutionalizing the spatial features of the country and of social classes through a normative discourse,<sup>1</sup> and my research is intended to fill in this gap. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to show how representations of development and space, of social classes

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and political identities in Romanian society are constructed through comics in *Cutezătorii* (The Daring Ones) youth magazine.<sup>2</sup>

Why did I choose a magazine that appeared at the end of the 1960s? I had to take into account the strategic control exercised by the Romanian Communist Party, the last two decades of communism being recognized for their highly aggressive propaganda. In the 1970s and 1980s, Romanian education was already controlled by state propaganda,<sup>3</sup> guiding the youth towards socialism.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the silencing role of the official mass media during Ceaușescu's Romania was fulfilled by highlighting the difference between the wonderful socialist society and the awful capitalist one.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1950s, the highly centralized Romanian society was controlled mainly by force, in the 1960s by some economic incentives, in the 1970s by symbolic-ideological means, and in the 1980s by coercion.<sup>6</sup> This symbolic-ideological control started in 1967, Katherine Verdery argues, when the Commission on Ideology within the Central Committee was established, and was reinforced a few years later, with Ceaușescu's speeches of 6 and 9 July 1971, the so-called "July Theses." Ceaușescu was determined to prove that not material incentives, but the people's consciousness about the creation of the New Man was the motivation for any endeavor, for the construction of socialism. However, this required the intensification of the awareness-raising campaign.<sup>7</sup>

*Cutezătorii* youth magazine appeared in late 1967 and reflected, in its contents and implicitly in the featured comics, the following ideas: progress, the relevance of science, work ethic, productivity, progress,<sup>8</sup> thus transforming those comics into motivational stories. And for motivation to appear, three important factors have to be observed: autonomy or freedom of action, mastery or the feeling of being good at what one does, and the purpose or moral finality for what one does.<sup>9</sup> Comics strived to make these factors visible for the young readers.

Firstly, I shall provide a short introduction to previous studies considering this type of visual imagery—comics. Secondly, I shall present the methodology. Thirdly, I shall briefly introduce the history of comics at the international level and in Romania, which will enable a better understanding of comics as part of the ideological education promoted by the National Organization of Pioneers in Romania. Finally, *Ghidul Pionierului* (The pioneer's guide)<sup>10</sup> and the case study of comics in *Cutezătorii* are interrelated by way of the approached topics, and they provide material for the results and discussion part. This study ends with a short conclusion.

## The State of the Art

COMICS ARE part of the process and the discourse for creating awareness and the imagined communities necessary to the functioning of societies.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, research has focused on the nexus between political ideologies and mass culture in comics, not only for entertainment purposes, but also as a medium for disseminating political ideas.<sup>12</sup> The power of comics in modeling culture and producing values has been underlined by valuable contributions to the study of representations in comics.<sup>13</sup>

Comics, as a new form of expression, conveyed political messages in a manner that was highly poignant with the young. Comics are discussed as a means *to explore memory, history, identity, and politics at the personal and political level*.<sup>14</sup> Images in comics, along other types of visual imagery, have been studied in the framework of propaganda.<sup>15</sup>

A preferred subject of the research on comics is that of *war propaganda*. For instance, in France, *youth education and war* have been connected in comics through *the topic of sports*, proving that the comic strip is a powerful cultural vector.<sup>16</sup> Comics, *as political visual art*, a vehicle for propaganda *and having a role in constructing institutional values in times of war*, using the sports analogy, are researched in their attempt to dis-engage the public with war and conflict.<sup>17</sup> There are studies on the comics about the images of war, where the readership consisted of soldiers, civilians in general, and the youth.<sup>18</sup> The Spanish Civil War image has been analyzed as created by comics during that period. Defined as an essential political element contributing even to children's indoctrination, Fernández García<sup>19</sup> demonstrates that comics had the aim to instill fear towards the societal models perceived as being wrong.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, Italian fascist propaganda appealed to the young through youth magazines, promoting a certain educational framework and values.<sup>21</sup> Starting with the 1950s, East German historical-political comics were an instrument for socialist propaganda. Representing the past, comics followed the prescriptions of the Communist Party about history and the concept of socialist picture story of the 1960s: "Using a realistic style, such stories tried to convey a strong sense of authenticity but they remained unable to develop complex characters or stories."<sup>22</sup> Easily understood messages, designed for the Chinese masses, in the form of works of art (i.e. comics on posters), during Mao's period, have been analyzed as a popular means of propagating the Party's political aims.<sup>23</sup> Comics, as visual illustrations with a message, where "the visual becomes graphic narrative means," have also been discussed in connection with Japanese cultural ideology propaganda.<sup>24</sup> This is the general background—of comics as representations sponsored by propaganda—against which I carried out my research.

## Methodology

**M**Y STUDY focuses on the juxtaposition of the visual and textual discourses of comics and on their communicative function. The discourse of the comics in *Cutezători* youth magazine is part of the official discourse, and thus part of a hegemonic discursive position.

## Research Material. Data Collection

**T**HE RESEARCH material consists of two edited sources representing the official discourse: *Ghidul Pionierului* and a selection of comics from *Cutezători* magazine. Out of all the comics in this magazine, I selected 21, which are all the comics about the development or modernization of Romania, but not focused exclusively on pioneers' lives and deeds.<sup>25</sup> I selected some for a detailed presentation, but the discussions and conclusions of the paper are based on all 21 (see table 1). Acknowledging the impossibility of presenting all of the 21 entirely, I also selected several plates from some of the other stories.

TABLE 1. RESEARCH MATERIAL: COMICS ABOUT SOCIALIST PROGRESS IN *CUTEZĂTORII*

Year	Title of comics and authors
1967	<i>Secretul amforei</i> (The secret of the amphora) (14 pp.), s. Ion Hobana, d. Pompiliu Dumitrescu
1971	<i>Transfăgărășanul</i> (9 pp.), s. Adrian Mierlușcă, d. T. Bogoi
1973	<i>Descoperirea inginerului Al.</i> (Engineer Al.'s discovery) (10 pp.), s. P. Ghelmez, d. Pompiliu <i>La bradul singuratic</i> (At the lonely fir tree) (13 pp.), s. Ludovic Bokor and Val Dumitrescu, d. Viorica Mihăiescu <i>Urmărirea</i> (The chase) (9 pp.), s. Tudor Negoită, d. Albin Stănescu. Continued in 1974
1974	<i>Brigadier la 14 ani</i> (Brigadier at 14 years old) (11 pp.), s. Nicolae Țic, d. Vintilă Mihăiescu <i>Drumul apei</i> (The way of the water) (12 pp.), s. Ilie Tănăsache, d. Viorica Mihăiescu. Continued in 1975
1975	<i>Transfăgărășanul</i> (12 pp.), s. Adrian Mierlușcă, d. Teodor Bogoi
1977	<i>Cuibul Vulturilor</i> (The eagles' nest) (12 pp.), s. Dragomir Horomnea, d. Ion Mihăiescu
1979	<i>Urișa putere</i> (The great power) (13 pp.), s. Ilie Tănăsache, d. Puiu Manu
1982	<i>Busola de Aur</i> (The golden compass) (9 pp.), s. C. Diaconu, d. Elena and Ion Mihăiescu
1983	<i>Brigadierii</i> (The brigadiers) (2 pp.), s. Mihail Caramfil, d. Ion Mincu
1984	<i>Brigada îndrăzneților</i> (The brigade of the daring ones) (11 pp.), s. Ilie Tănăsache, d. Valentin Tănase

Year	Title of comics and authors
1985	<i>Întrecerea</i> (The contest) (11 pp.), s. Petre Luscalov, d. Ștefan Damo
1986	<i>Torentul</i> (The torrent) (13 pp.), s. Petre Luscalov, d. Puiu Manu
1987	<i>Secretul tabloului</i> (The secret of the painting) (6 pp.), s. S. Alexandru, d. Puiu Manu <i>Raliul</i> (The rally) (8 pp.), s. D. Lazăr, d. Puiu Manu and Anca Nazarie <i>Jurnal de bord</i> (The logbook) (10 pp.), s. Mircea Novac, d. Puiu Manu
1988	<i>Întrecerea</i> (The contest) (5 pp.), s. Sever Noran, d. Ștefan Damo
1989	<i>Stînca Vulturilor</i> (The cliff of the eagles) (9 pp.), s. C. Diaconu, d. Puiu Manu <i>Brigadierii: Chemarea muncii</i> (The brigadiers: The call of work) (8 pp., left unfinished because of the Romanian revolution), s. Ion Comarnic, d. Sorin Anghel

s: script; d: drawings

SOURCE: Dodo Niță, *Istoria benzii desenate românești* (Craiova: SFVA, 1992), 10–14, selected and completed by Oana-Ramona Ilovan.

## Methods. Data Analysis and Interpretation

**T**WO METHODS have been employed for data analysis and interpretation, and these are discourse and visual analysis. These methods draw on research from linguistics and visual discourse analysis.<sup>26</sup> The analysis and interpretation consider the topics approached by the comics, and the messages resulting from their vocabulary and imagery.

The results and discussion consist of the following parts: a first part dedicated to the history of comics at the international level and in Romania, considering propaganda and censorship, a second one on comics and the ideological education promoted by the National Organization of Pioneers, a third part on the presentation of a selection of comics about work and socialist progress in *Cutezătorii* youth magazine, and a last part on the characters featured in comics, with their class and political identities.

## A History of Comics at the International Level and in Romania: Propaganda and Censorship

**C**OMICS APPEARED for the first time in 1827, in Switzerland. The comic strip is defined as a story in images.<sup>27</sup> Their creator, Rodolphe Töpffer, argued for the necessity of combining image and text:

*Drawings without text would have only an obscure meaning, the text without drawings would mean nothing. The assembly drawings-text forms a kind of novel, a book which, addressing directly to our sight expresses itself through representation, not through the story.*<sup>28</sup>

Comics became widely available in Europe and America at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Romania was part of this process, hosting popular heroes' stories, either in black and white or in color.<sup>29</sup> *Amicul copiilor* (The Children's Friend) is the first children's magazine, published between 1891 and 1895 by a writer (B. P. Hasdeu). It featured no comics. The first magazine to publish comics in Romania was *Revista Copiilor și a Tinerimei* (The Magazine of Children and the Youth), edited between 1913 and 1925, under the title "humorous pages," with foreign (probably American) translated comics.<sup>30</sup> Before World War I and in the interwar period, widely-appreciated adventure comics featuring the character Haplea were published.<sup>31</sup> *Universul Copiilor* (The Children's Universe) was edited between 1925 and 1948. After 1944, the political regime changed in Romania and, after 1948, the magazine no longer appeared; however, its pro-Soviet version was published for several issues.<sup>32</sup>

Between 1938 and 1947, *Curentul pentru Copii și Tineret* (The Current for Children and Youth) was edited, replacing the children's magazines forbidden by the royal censorship.<sup>33</sup> Between 1944 and 1948, *Covorul Fermecat* (The Magic Carpet) was the last magazine for children to be published. Then the mass media was nationalized, ending the Golden Age of comics in Romania.<sup>34</sup>

Comics, like the entire education policy, were placed under the authority of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, after a meeting which took place on 18 October 1977<sup>35</sup> and was chaired by Ceaușescu himself. The meeting transcript reveals how important the children's magazines were for Party propaganda:<sup>36</sup>

*Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu: In fact, comrades, none of these magazines can be accepted as presented here. You have to consult those who know about magazines, analyze seriously the challenges of printed media for children. Is this the answer to the principles established at the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Party, by the Congress of Political Education and Socialist Culture, concerning the awareness raising and the training for work and life, fostering the socialist consciousness, awareness and implementing the principles and norms of socialist ethics and equity, developing the love and devotion of the young generation for the homeland, for Party and for the people?! If those who present these journals consider that these principles and requirements are observed, then we can discuss the matter. The way these magazines are presented now, they are not adequate, and they do not meet these requirements.*<sup>37</sup>

Concerning the mass media for preschoolers, primary grades pupils and pioneers, one sees that the aim was to shape the children's socialist consciousness of work and life:

*The program of measures for enforcing the decisions of the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Party and of the Congress on Political Education and Socialist Culture in the field of ideological, political and cultural-educative work requires from the printed media for preschoolers, primary school pupils and for pioneers more efforts concerning their contribution to preparing the children for work and life, to shaping their socialist consciousness, to learning and practicing the principles and norms of socialist ethics and equity, to the development of the young generation's love and devotion to the homeland, Party and people.*<sup>38</sup>

This meant the introduction of more political and ideological material and exemplifying the thesis “education through work, education for work.”<sup>39</sup> Although history was fascinating for the young readers<sup>40</sup> and an escape from the realities of daily life,<sup>41</sup> one sees that this was not the only reason. The authors of the history of comics in Romania acknowledge that for the dissemination of historical and other types of comics, in children and youth magazines, propaganda was a key motivator.<sup>42</sup>

Among the myths constructed by comics in this context are the hero and the juvenile patriot.<sup>43</sup> A myth is that of Romanians' everlasting fight for independence, freedom, for justice, for peace, now under the wise leadership of the communists.<sup>44</sup> Following a period of ideological thaw from 1965 to 1971<sup>45</sup> and one of severe ideological constraints (after the “July Theses” of 1971), the already poor living conditions worsened in 1980s Romania and propaganda was more insistent on certain topics because of this.<sup>46</sup> This is considered the period of paroxystic propaganda in Romania.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, comic books censorship was an issue during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when anti-communist propaganda affected publishing decisions worldwide.<sup>48</sup> Censorship also affected the publication of comics in Romania. First, it was the censorship of the royal dictatorship (this affected all the media on the left of the political spectrum).<sup>49</sup> Then, considered a typical capitalist product, comics were forbidden by communist regimes during their early years. However, in the mid-1950s, comics were allowed again in Romania during Khrushchev's ‘relaxation,’ and were then featured in propaganda magazines. Thus, in 1967, the weekly magazine *Cravata Roșie* (The Red Scarf) changed its name to *Cutezătorii* (The Daring Ones) and published 2–3 comics pages per issue. *Cutezătorii* was part of the official printed media, besides *Luminița* (Little Spark) and *Șoimii Patriei* (The Falcons of the Country), impregnated with ideological commu-

nist propaganda.<sup>50</sup> It ended up publishing only one page of comics per issue, pervaded by ideology, and in exchange the number of pure propaganda pages increased year after year.<sup>51</sup>

The first national comics contest was organized by *Cutezători* in 1970, and 1972 saw the publication of ten albums of the first comic book collection. In fact, in the seventies, 50 albums were published in Romania, while in the 1980s there was a genuine science fiction comics boom.<sup>52</sup>

Irrespective of their type, comics and propaganda intermingled during the socialist period. After 1950 adventure comics (detective, exotic and spy stories) had politically related topics, the good being represented by professors, engineers, inventors, researchers, and by brave pioneers, transformed into occasional detectives, and evil being represented by despicable spies, serving competing and foreign economic interests.<sup>53</sup>

However, despite the success of comics, some artists who drew them had an unhappy fate: “disappointed by the communist regime, they chose the radical solution of suicide,”<sup>54</sup> while others left the country because of the stress inflicted by the Securitate.<sup>55</sup> In addition, censorship was extremely present, as one artist, awarded by *Cutezători* magazine, confessed: “The idea of my story (condemning the war) and its science fiction flavor were eliminated by censoring the last plate where I dared present a narrow-minded militiaman.”<sup>56</sup>

## Comics and the Ideological Education Promoted by the National Organization of Pioneers

**I**N THIS part, I discuss representations of development and the construction of class identities in relation to the promoted human features as resulting from the analysis of *The Pioneer’s Guide* and of the comics about work and socialist progress in *Cutezători*.

### *The Pioneer’s Guide*

**C**OMMUNISTS ARE defined by their work and life in general. From a young age, children and especially pioneers (8 to 14 years old pupils), had their gratitude and normative love towards the Romanian Communist Party and Nicolae Ceaușescu measured through their work achievements:

*The Pioneer’s Ethical Code expresses the ardent wish of the bearers of the red scarves with the tricolor of being worthy communist scions living and working in a revolu-*



*tionary, communist manner, determined to express through dignified work deeds, through their entire activity, attitude and behavior, their gratitude and burning devotion to the Party, to the General Secretary of the Party, to Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu.*<sup>57</sup>

In what concerned the mass media and propaganda activity, pioneers were to assess and improve visual propaganda in their schools and become all involved in their own political-ideological education.<sup>58</sup> In addition, fieldtrips providing information about “the socialist present” and “the working people’s achievements” were encouraged.<sup>59</sup> They were encouraged to learn new information and fortify their will and character. Industry was presented as a creation of socialist Romania, with new industrial centers developed after 1965, in what was called with “great patriotic pride ‘The Nicolae Ceaușescu Era.’”<sup>60</sup>

## Youth Magazines.

### The Case Study of *Cutezătorii*

**C**OMICS, A special genre of graphics,<sup>61</sup> had both a propaganda and entertainment function, due to the recourse to visual imagery.<sup>62</sup> *Cutezătorii* magazine, the “expression organ” of the National Council of the Pioneers’ Organization, published its first issue on 28 September 1967 and introduced the contents and aims of this new friend to the Romanian students:

*In our midst, dear pioneers and pupils, a new friend arrives today: **Cutezătorii** magazine. In the pages of the magazine, you will be welcomed by the frenzy of these historical days, when our people, wisely led by the Romanian Communist Party, creates a more beautiful and richer country, master of its destiny. As in a living mirror, in these pages, we shall evoke faces and moments from our people’s past of glorious struggle, and its great contemporary achievements; you will look towards the luminous future for which, learning with ardor, having a dignified attitude and behavior, in school and society, you prepare yourselves.*<sup>63</sup>

The President of the National Council of the Pioneers’ Organization editing the magazine was an associate professor who addressed the young readers: “Each of you, a trusty son of Socialist Romania.”<sup>64</sup> It is pointed out that the magazine was supervised by the Communist Party: “Born of the permanent care of our Party for growing and educating tomorrow’s generation of our homeland.”<sup>65</sup>

A big contest was featured from the beginning, titled “Comorile Patriei” (The country’s treasures), a search for the great spiritual and material treasures of our

people.<sup>66</sup> The same topics were to be approached by the featured comics. A quarter of the comics are dedicated to pioneers' deeds and to work and progress in the socialist Romanian society, another quarter goes to science-fiction and half are historical comics, with images of daring figures from Romania's 2,000 years of history. The historical topics even accounted for more than 50% of content in some years of the 1980s<sup>67</sup> (just like in 1977 or in other years with numerous celebrations).<sup>68</sup> Similarly to the content of *The Pioneer's Guide*, the focus is on the glorious/beautiful homeland, with its rich land and industrious people.<sup>69</sup>

The editors printed what a student had to say about the new magazine, using the metaphor of the journey for personal fulfillment and the development of society: "Each of you dreams to be as useful as possible to your homeland in your field of work, to boldly open new productive paths, in science and the arts."<sup>70</sup>

A practice in this magazine was to interrupt the comics to introduce propaganda texts and images. Interrupting the last comics to be published, *Chemarea muncii* (The call of work), in three consecutive issues,<sup>71</sup> we find the "Ctitorii ale Epocii Nicolae Ceaușescu" (Constructions of the Nicolae Ceaușescu Era): Bucharest, the Danube-Black Sea Canal and the House of the People. Also, the first cover of the magazine was usually "deeply and painfully marked by political intrusion."<sup>72</sup>

## Presentation of a Selection of Comics about Work and Socialist Progress in *Cutezătorii*

**I**N THIS part, I present a selection of the analyzed comics, in order to achieve the aim of my research.

### *DESCOPERIREA INGINERULUI AL. (ENGINEER AL.'S DISCOVERY), NOS. 2–12, 1973*

THE IMAGE of the Dacia is the logo of the story, near the title. It is represented in many of the panels. Dacia 1300 is "the national car" and the first one left the factory on 23 August 1969.<sup>73</sup>

The story begins with a discussion at the Center for Hydrotechnical Constructions. The main character is a chemist and builder, an engineer presented as "one of the best constructors of hydropower plants in the country" (plate 1, no. 2, 1973).

The dam appears in the 3<sup>rd</sup> plate, as well as one image with the building site and one with a group of workers near the Dacia car; foremen, workers appear; the engineer and the workers try to solve together a problem with cement resistance. In the 4<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 5, 1973), a man with a gun takes aim at the engineer, in the lab of the building site. In the 5<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 6, 1973), we find out that the enemy is a former colleague of the engineer, expelled in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of his

university studies for failing his exams and for hooliganism. He explains that a foreigner (a person from abroad) needs the formula of the cement. Engineer Al. is saved and helped by the workers (a feminization of intellectuality, which is protected by the masculine group of workers).

In the 6<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 7, 1973), there is one image of the building site, among others, and we are told that the chemical formula was stolen. The red Dacia car was also stolen, while in the 8<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 9, 1973), there are images with the Dacia car and wild nature, as well as with the workers looking for the thief. In the 9<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 10, 1973), we find out that the name of the thief is Mr. Jo (a foreign name). In the 10<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 11, 1973), we learn that the thief was caught, and the engineer explains to the thief (his former university colleague) that to be a human means to be honest. The comics ends with images of the building site and we are told by engineer Al. about his discovery: “The best binder is the man’s heart! If our hearts had not beaten at the same rhythm, we wouldn’t have succeeded!” (no. 12, 1973). The last image of the final plate shows a group of workers saying goodbye to the engineer who is leaving the building site in his red Dacia car.

#### **URMĂRIREA (THE CHASE), NOS. 50, 1973–6, 1974**

IN THE 1<sup>st</sup> plate (no. 50, 1973), a blue Dacia car, like a story character, appears as a logo in all the plates of this comics, just before the title and images of the characters. From the beginning we find out that a family is leaving the country, allegedly for a trip, but the little girl next door knows that they have sold all their furniture and sleep in their garage. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> plate (no. 51, 1973), the action takes place partly in a garage with a red car, and a pack of cigarettes (Snagov—a Romanian brand) is passed from one character to another. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> plate (no. 52, 1973), a boy and a girl find out that a microfilm is hidden in the cigarette package and gold in the seat of the neighbors’ car. In the 4<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 1, 1974), we find out that the neighbors have passports and want to leave the country. The Securitate is notified by the boy. In the 5<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 2, 1974), in the Securitate offices, the boy is shown talking to an officer. In the 6<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 3, 1974), a fight takes place between two negative characters of two of the parties: the couple who wants to leave Romania, with gold and the microfilm, and two men who want to take the microfilm from them. The two men follow the couple. In the 7<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 4, 1974), the two pursuers are in a Ford. They lie that they are from the Securitate and ask for the cigarette pack where the microfilm should have been. They hit the man and leave. In the 8<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 5, 1974), the real Securitate officers come, and the boy reminds them of the hidden gold. In the 9<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 6, 1974), the two men are caught, as well as the couple. The couple is described as “individuals who wanted to smuggle a microfilm out of the country.”

**BRIGADIER LA 14 ANI (BRIGADIER AT 14 YEARS OLD), NOS. 8, 1974–18, 1974**

IN ISSUE NO. 7, 1974, on the last page, we find information about what will follow in the next issue: “friendship and abnegation, love for work and the country”—“In the next stories in images—full of adventure and unpredictable”—script written especially for the *Cutezătorii* magazine.

From the presentation of the comics, we find out the story: “Many years ago, on one of the building sites of our homeland, where the brigadiers’ songs accompanied the hard work, I met a boy whose story I think is worth being known by you, too” (1<sup>st</sup> plate, no. 8, 1974).

On this building site of the homeland, during the students’ summer holiday, in an atmosphere of hard work and songs, labor is seen as a contest. However, two people want to steal building materials. At the same time, a 14-year-old boy, who insists on working on the site, is allowed by the foreman to help in the kitchen, where only women work, and he is assigned to wash dishes. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> plate (no. 9, 1974), we are told again that the boy is too young to work on the building site (he is being told that quite often) and he decides to spy on the cook who seems to be stealing food to sell it to people outside the building site.

The main character chooses to share a crucial secret with his dog after trying to confide in a female character, who, being rather frivolous, thinks that the secret might be a love message to her and jokes about it. The male character is not joking. So, he gives up sharing the secret that could save his life. His dog is the better option under these circumstances, and he is right to do this: the dog will save his life. From a dangerous situation, the boy is saved by his dog, his fellow workers and a little bear cub. He tells on the bad cook. In the next plates, the story develops and the boy and his dog help expose the thieving cook and the gang he is part of. In the 8<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 15, 1974), we see the militia chief congratulating the boy for having helped them catch those bandits.

Moreover, in the mountains, walking through the rain, in a valley, the boy is asked to act as a guide and scout the route for the new railway. In the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> plates (nos. 16, 17, 1974) the injured foreman is healed by a doctor and a nurse and, in the 11<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 18, 1974), the boy leaves for school as the holiday is over and he makes plans to return the following summer.

**DRUMUL APEI (THE WAY OF THE WATER), NOS. 35, 1974–46, 1974**

IN THE 1<sup>st</sup> plate (no. 35, 1974), the subject is presented as an expedition on a river, undertaken by a naturalist and several children, and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> plate (no. 36, 1974) the reader finds out that it is a *Cutezătorii* expedition. Friendship is praised, with the pioneers helping each other. New characters are introduced: “workers from the installation of the water pipe” (2<sup>nd</sup> plate, no. 36, 1974), who are keen to protect the forest from fire and any damage during the work: “it is



FIG. 1. *The Way of the Water* (left), *The Torrent* (right).  
SOURCE: *Cutezătorii*, plate 10, no. 44, 1974 ; plate 1, no. 16, 1986.

also ours.” Another character is the forest ranger. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> plate no. (no. 37, 1974), an engineer appears.

People on the building site want to protect nature (they avoid cutting down trees) when installing the water pipe. Two pioneers help in guiding the workers to install the pipe. In the 5<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 39, 1974), we find out that the water is needed for the textile factories which are being built. Those building the factories are “35 days ahead of schedule.” That is why, in the mountains, in the woods, everybody speeds up the work on the water pipe, to have the water ready when the factories are completed: “And the factories cannot function without water. What will be the answer of those who bring the water? A determined YES. But how?” (6<sup>th</sup> plate, no. 40, 1974).

Workers propose to work in shifts to get the work done faster. Everybody helps, including the two pioneers, although one has an injured leg. From the abstract of the 7<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 41, 1974), we learn more about how decisions are taken on the building site: “a real production meeting: the workers from the water pipe think about a solution to shorten by 15 days the deadline for completion. They find the proper solutions.”

In the 8<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 42, 1974), we see that workers find a bomb from the Second World War, while the 9<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 43, 1974) presents the natural land-

scape and construction machinery. The readers find out that the fascists were the ones who dropped the bomb there.

In the abstract of the 10<sup>th</sup> plate, the situation is presented: “Not far away, the city, with the new textile factories, waits for the water...” (no. 44, 1974). A blue Dacia (used as the logo of this comics) arrives with the manager of the new textile factory (fig. 1 left and also in other comics—fig. 1 right). He is worried that the deadline will not be met and that they, at the factory, “got ahead for nothing.” In the 11<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 45, 1974), we see that the military (sappers) come to deal with the bomb. The others think that they have a risky job. They answer that the risks are small if one knows the job. Finally, in the 12<sup>th</sup> plate (no. 46, 1974), we are told that the water is flowing 25 days earlier. The respective *Cutezătorii* expedition is called “The Way of the Water.”

### **CUIBUL VULTURILOR (THE EAGLES’ NEST)** (NOS. 49, 1977–9, 1978)

THE STORY is based on a pioneers’ expedition, and one of the pioneers knows the workers in the area, as his father works as a miner: “Here is the conveyor belt transporting the limestone. My father has told me that it is a formidable achievement. Not only due to its length, but especially due to the courage of the people who took it up there, to the quarry...” (no. 49, 1977).

An accident interrupted the production of cement and they try to fix things. The miners take part in risky repair jobs that endanger their lives. They find a Dacian sword in a cave. Workers are themselves eagles in the lime quarry (see fig. 2).

In the images we see the worker’s worried wife and son. He risks his life, working at night, under difficult meteorological conditions, to repair the machinery so that the cement factory does not cease production.

Fortunately, despite an accident and his family wondering the whole night about what happened to him, the miner is found healthy and, moreover, the work is successfully finished.



FIG. 2. *The Eagles’ Nest*  
SOURCE: *Cutezătorii*, plate 8, no. 5, 1978.

**BRIGADIERII (THE BRIGADIERS) (NOS. 33–34, 1983)**

At the beginning of this two plate-comic story, the reader is informed about the context:

*Finally, one of my old wishes has been realized; I, the young communist student Dobrescu Petre, in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, am a brigadier at the Canal. I will also bring my contribution, according to my powers, to this grandiose construction which is called “the 4<sup>th</sup> arm of the Danube.” I will write in this notebook everything important here.*

Thus, the main character is an 11<sup>th</sup> grade student, working at the canal, on the building site (fig. 3 left), looking for something heroic to do. Another character is a foreman and there are also other students present. The youths are encouraged. They realize that work skills must be acquired (effort management) and that Physics and Maths are very important for measurements. Students confess that they feel they are truly coming of age there, while realizing that “What we do here lasts forever.” Other construction projects are evoked (i.e. the Bumbesti-Livezeni railway). One evening, this brigade of young constructors sing about workers and their machinery. This is featured in other comics, too (fig. 3 right).



FIG 3. *The Brigadiers* (left), *The Brigade of the Daring Ones* (right).  
SOURCE: *Cutezătorii*, plate 2, nos. 33–34, 1983; plate 5, no. 51, 1984.

At the end of his journal, the student uses the body metaphor for the construction: “We return home with the feeling that we have fully come of age through a work that will remain in the body of one of the biggest constructions of our socialist homeland. I am proud of what we are capable of, Petrișor Dobrescu.”

**RALIUL (THE RALLY) (NOS. 27, 1987–34, 1987)**

*Two Romanian teams, in ARO-10 cars, participate in a great trans-Saharan rally. The route is more than 12,000 km in length. Starting from Europe and then driving across Africa, the Romanian competitors represent the factory in Cîmpulung-Muscel. They cope like real men with the rigors of the rally, using their professional skills and the qualities of the ARO cars. (Plate 1, nos. 27–30, 1987)*

The comic strip underlines the qualities of the ARO car and of the Romanian team, who are ready to help the other teams when they have technical problems, even at the price of being disqualified because they were late: “Master, he who does not risk will never win, but, most of all, do not forget what an ARO car can do!” (6<sup>th</sup> plate, nos. 31–34, 1987); “the excellent Romanian tires, produced by ‘Danubiana.’” Other participants to the Rally argue that “the Romanians have an engine with a sensational torque and unparalleled tires” (7<sup>th</sup> plate, nos. 31–34, 1987).

The Romanians win the first two places of the rally lap. In the end, the Romanians come in second place, after France, and in the third place is the other Romanian team, who demonstrated fair play, helping another team who had an accident. The Romanians had no technical problems, while teams from other countries did. They are brought back to Romania on the ship *Siret*.

**STÂNCA VULTURILOR (THE CLIFF OF THE EAGLES) (NOS. 12, 1989–21, 1989)**

THE STORY features pioneers and workers on a building site, as well as the presence of Dacians and Romans, through their artifacts, during a *Cutezăătorii* expedition (see fig. 4).

In the 1<sup>st</sup> plate (no. 12, 1989), the introductory text states:

*About the Cliff of the Eagles—an immense and lofty granite peak in the Orăștie Mountains—several legends circulate in the area, each of them suggesting that this would be the place where the Dacians hid their treasures. Convinced that the respective legends hide a grain of truth, Doru Irimie, the historian in “Sargetius” team from a school in a Transylvanian town, proposes to his colleagues that in the next expedition they should minutely search the respective peak and its surroundings.*



In the 2<sup>nd</sup> plate, we see that the main character is an electronics student building a device. In the 5<sup>th</sup> plate, we learn that a hydropower plant is about to be completed in that place, where the Dacians were, and that possibly the water of the dam lake will cover archaeological pieces (metal artifacts). The pioneers ask the builders of that plant for help. In the 6<sup>th</sup> plate, they discover a treasure—a smithy. Other characters participating are an engineer on the building site and the students' teacher.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> plate, characters talk about discoveries in the field of national history and about the future place where the respective artifacts will be placed, so that nothing is lost because of the construction of the dam:



FIG. 4. *The Cliff of the Eagles*.  
SOURCE: *Cutezătorii*, plate 9, no. 21, 1989.

*The respective point is fifty meters above the dam. Water will never rise that high. It is the most appropriate place. And we also have the possibility to set all objects exactly as we found them here. All objects have been taken out. Let's search the cave with the device, too. Who knows, maybe there is something more hidden there. Here there is nothing left to discover.*

## Characters Represented in Comics. Class and Political Identities

WHICH ARE the classes contributing to the official discourse on the development and modernization of Romania and how are they represented? In *Engineer Al.'s Discovery*, we see how problems are solved on the construction site of a dam. The positive characters are the workers, the engineer, and the silent but omnipresent Dacia car. The Other is represented by the evil and dishonest pseudointellectual who tries to steal a chemical formula. In *The Chase*, the characters are two children, the Securitate, a Romanian



Fig. 5. *The Great Power*.

SOURCE: *Cutezătorii*, plate 9, no. 3, 1980.

couple who want to flee the country, with hidden gold and secret information. Children are taught, though the comics, how to interact with neighbors and the state authorities, and how work can be done efficiently in state institutions. In *Brigadier at 14 Years Old*, the action is set on a building site, with brigadiers and a student spending his summer holiday working for the country. The militia comes to investigate a felony: stealing food from the state. The comics show us a model of spending the summer holiday for a boy that age, who, in the end, as a reward for his help in catching the food thieves, helps to set the route for a new railway. The cooperation between the youths and state authorities (i.e. Militia, Securitate, the industrial and construction sectors) is a recurrent topic.

*The Way of the Water* presents a *Cutezătorii* expedition on a river, with pioneers, a scientist, workers, a forest ranger (the forest ranger is a character that appears often in comics), an engineer, a factory manager, and an army unit. The theme underlined is that of working harder to get the work done earlier (e.g. installing a water pipe). A silent character in most of the comics, due to its repeated visual representation, is the construction machinery (see fig. 5). The same is true for the Dacia car, the image of the Dacia 1300 being iconic for Romania's modernized car industry.

The workers' personal sacrifice to save goods or peers' lives is a frequent topic (e.g. in *The Eagles' Nest* or in *Transfăgărășanul*), as work is a battle, it requires sacrifice, and sometimes it is even done by the army or with its help. The achievements in the constructions sector, the victorious results of all the toil and struggle, are discussed by workers and pioneers together. In *The Eagles' Nest*, the characters are pioneers in an expedition, parents, workers, the manager of a cement factory, and engineers. These types of characters are prevalent in work-related comics. The miner who is ready to sacrifice his life to solve work problems is also featured in this story. His approach to work makes him a model of "revolutionary behavior."

In *The Brigadiers*, high school students show that work has to be learned in the company of skilled workers. Learning in school is also relevant for successful work on the building site (a topic also found in *The Call of Work*). Moreover, the intellectuals join the working class on certain occasions (like in the *Brigade of the Daring Ones*, when one of the workers is sent to university and then comes back to work alongside his former colleagues).

In *The Rally*, the performance of the ARO-10 car is praised as two Romanian teams become winners of a rally, due to the superior products of the Romanian car industry. The comics practically advertise the Romanian car industry. In *The Cliff of the Eagles*, a hydropower plant is built while saving ancient artifacts. Pioneers and workers cooperate, alongside an engineer and the students' teacher.

The relationship between picture postcards, comics, the working people's memory and development is revealed. In the last plate of *The Call of Work* (see fig. 6), we learn that the picture postcards collected by one worker are not of tourist destinations, but proof of all the construction sites where he worked, where he helped build the new society. Architecture is a tool for implementing the planned investments.<sup>74</sup> This hypothesis of the ideological messages associated with picture postcards produced and circulated throughout Romania has already been confirmed.<sup>75</sup>

The forced introduction of socialist realism in arts and culture is transparent in comics, which help in creating the New Man, in compliance with the will of the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party.<sup>76</sup> The working class derives its rights (political, economic, social) from its work and from the visible, material products of this labor. Two of the classes are defined: the workers and the intellectuals. Peasants are not present, except for the series dedicated to real events from pioneers' lives.<sup>77</sup> The workers are defined from an economic point of view and implicitly geographically: workers are urban and peasants (absent) are rural (the part of Romania that is lagging behind, in comparison with the city).

Two types of workers are represented: the progressive ones and those still lagging behind. But the second type has just a meteoric appearance in *Engineer Al.'s Discovery*, helping an evil intellectual (or another worker like the bad cook, a thief, in the comics *Brigadier at 14 Years Old*). The first type is thoroughly and overwhelmingly portrayed in the comics, and, according to Morar-Vulcu, these types could be described in the following way: "*conscious and progressive, who had virtues such as temperance, decency in language, clothing and behavior and lagging behind, who had the opposite behavior (womanizers [sic!], drunkards, indecent people, hooligans), more instinctual.*"<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the first group is highly homogenous, it has a monolithic presence, a natural one, its unity being reflected in its respectable features, actions and interests, politically relevant and ideologically sound;<sup>79</sup> this is how the comics present this class.



FIG. 6. *The Call of Work*.  
SOURCE: *Cutezători*, plate 8, no. 50, 1989.

The stories of their working deeds are inserted as individual narratives within that of the group, and thus each worker becomes metonymical for the entire class, one which is conscious of its contribution to society and proud of it. Therefore, these comics underline the ideological dimension of the working class.

The discourse about the working class and workers focuses on the economy (mainly industry), cities and constructions, that is, the places where this class is active, which confers it a central position in the Romanian society and economy, and thus also in the political discourse. If workers are urban and the peasants are attached to the countryside (not present in the discourse about modernization), the intellectual class is not territorial, as intellectuals help where they are

needed. Physical work is the main way of constructing socialism, and therefore in the comics all those practicing it are validated ideologically: workers, workers-intellectuals, pioneers. These are the politically legitimized economic classes.<sup>80</sup>

Metaphors about work in the socialist society are also to be found in the comics. For instance, that of the struggle (and the related military metaphors). In *Transfăgărășanul*, work as an assault is the main activity performed by the workers. Young workers and pioneers also find their path in life through work for their country (i.e. the path metaphor) (e.g. in *The Call of Work*, *The Way of the Water*, *The Brigadiers*, *Brigadier at 14 Years Old*, etc.).

The intellectuals are necessary to the humane construction of socialism,<sup>81</sup> while the material construction is in the workers' hands. However, this humane construction contributes to the construction of the new modernized urban society. The intellectual class is approved of or accepted only due to its usefulness. Together with the workers, it is the other social class participating in the modernization of urban Romania. Still, not all intellectuals are to be trusted (e.g. the former university student in *Engineer Al.'s Discovery*, turned industrial spy and criminal, lacking honesty and being therefore less than human, as the story concludes).

The identity of the youths is very well described in these comics, as they are considered an important actor, besides the workers and intellectuals, having the qualities of both abovementioned classes. The Other are the foreigners, the fascists, the thieves, those who want to flee the country, etc.

## Conclusions

**T**HE PREFERENCE for a contemporary social and economic backdrop reflects the concerns of the Romanian Communist Party. The propaganda machine of the Party shaped the representations of social classes, of modernization, of territorial identity and of the Romanian political culture, also through comics in *Cutezătorii* magazine, and thus enabled the construction of youth identities. These comics feature visual representations of technology and modernization, engendering an idealized image of Romanian society, within the discourse of a seemingly internally embraced national unity and socialist life.

The topics pertaining to socialist production and working sites have transparent ideological messages, rendered more appealing by the involvement of pioneers in the script, and providing expected behavioral patterns. The discursive strategy of power, either visual or as a written text, consists of setting the building site or socialist Romania as the backdrop of stories and of continuously showcasing the characters' key features, such as: love for work, love for the country, heroism, and honest service in the construction of the modernized socialist society. The worker plays the role of a metonymy in the material construction of socialism.

Comics present the sublime nature of work and the relationship with the Other (different in terms of class, profession, age, or place). The harsh living and working conditions on the building site, as experienced by these hard-working people, although represented as such in these comics, are downplayed by the final and overall message of the comics: it is all worth the sacrifice.

□

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## Abstract

Comics for Pioneers: Representations of Modernization and Class Identities in Socialist Romania

Only few studies approach the relationship between official propaganda materials and edutainment in the mass media dedicated to children and youth in socialist Romania. My research is meant to fill this gap. Therefore, the aim is to show how representations of development and space, of class and political identities are constructed in Romanian society through comics in *Cutezătorii* (The Daring Ones) youth magazine. Textual and visual discourse analyses were employed to show how the propaganda machine of the Romanian Communist Party shaped these representations of territorial identity and the Romanian political culture, while enabling the construction of youth identities. The discursive strategy of power consisted of placing stories at building sites, and of continuously narrating the characters' key features, such as love for work, love for the country, heroism, and honesty, all towards the construction of the modernized socialist Romania.

## Keywords

social classes, ideology, communism, youth, official discourse, territorial identity