

New Europe College Yearbook  
2022-2023  
Volume 1

Editor: Andreea Eșanu

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# New Europe College Yearbook 2022-2023 Volume 1

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## FOREWORD FROM THE EDITOR

The *New Europe College Yearbook* is an annual academic publication of the New Europe College – Institute for Advanced Study, committed to publishing original research undertaken by the fellows of the institute as part of their fellowship programme at NEC. The format of the publication is somewhat unconventional, because it brings together a wide variety of academic fields, styles and methods. In a sense, it is heterogeneous; in a different sense, it is liberal.

One cannot deny that knowledge is infinite, as Jorge Louis Borges once suggested in his famous *Library of Babel*. There is complexity, redundancy, intricacy, unlimited variety in the ways humanity produces and stores knowledge, and a publication could, just like a library does, mirror that complexity, redundancy, intricacy and variety – without reduction and insulation by field, style or method. The difference and the upshot would be that an ongoing academic publication is more dynamic and up to date than a library. It keeps up with the rhythm of knowledge production, not only with its form.

In spite of the variety of contributions, academic excellence prevails. All the contributions submitted to the *New Europe College Yearbook* by the institute's fellows are reviewed by experts in the academic or the scientific fields to which each contribution belongs. The reviewers are selected from among NEC's academic staff, the Editorial Advisory Board, NEC's alumni and collaborators who have agreed to participate in the review process. The reviewers assess a contribution considering its scientific quality, as well as its relevance and impact. In this sense, each contribution is vetted by a research community to which it is relevant and useful.

Nevertheless, each contribution also reaches a wider academic audience. Although the *New Europe College Yearbook* is not an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary publication, it fosters communication and openness among fields and disciplines, through its heterogeneous

wide format, which is in line with the diverse format of the fellowship programmes themselves.

In this sense, the *Yearbook* is also a reflection of the community of researchers that is New Europe College.

Andreea Eșanu





## **MOHAMED BAYA**

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# BURNING WITNESSES IN LIMBO: MOROCCAN DIASPORIC LITERATURE

Mohamed Baya

## Abstract

This article proposes a comparative reading of two works by Moroccan writers that explore migration and expands upon Ato Quayson and Yoon Sun Lee's research on diasporic cultural production. Ruth Knafo Setton's *The Road to Fez* (2001) and Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) raise questions of genre. Knafo Setton employs elements of the Gothic while Lalami utilizes travel writing to delve into Moroccan migrant and diasporic experiences. A contrapuntal examination of their texts from a genre-oriented perspective highlights the interplay between the author, text, and reader, shedding light on Moroccan literature in English and the distinct characteristics of diasporic writing and reading.

**Keywords:** Comparative reading, Moroccan literature, Diaspora, Migration, Genre

*Like a black autumn, night drops  
and the sea claims the salt and fire it promised me  
and my narration ripped in the fracture of skies ...*

— Zahra Mansouri, "The Secrecy of Mirrors"

## Introduction

How do authors use their literary works to engage with broader debates related to migration and diaspora? When Moroccan authors write in English, how do they engage with and contribute to broader literary traditions and movements? To what extent do Ruth Knafo Setton and Laila Lalami employ genre-driven mixing and reader engagement in their English texts, and how does this contribute to the exploration of innovative literary approaches? These questions invite an exploration of the ways in which literature intersects with migration and diaspora. This study examines how Moroccan authors engage with migration and diaspora in their literary

works, particularly when writing in English. It specifically focuses on Knafo Setton and Lalami, exploring their use of genre embedding and reader engagement. Through a comparative reading of two of their texts, this research aims to understand their artistic contributions to broader literary traditions and movements. Salim Jay, in a seminal anthology of Moroccan diasporic literature, emphasizes the multifaceted nature of the works produced by Moroccans living abroad. He describes them as “nervous,” “dreamy,” and “ferociously ironic” (Jay, 2010, p. 15, my trans.), highlighting their complexity and diversity. Jay’s anthology also underscores the historical context of Moroccan migration, situating contemporary experiences within a broader framework. The emergence of Moroccan writers expressing themselves in multiple European languages has diversified the country’s literary landscape and increased global accessibility to Moroccan literature. As Jay explains, “[t]he situation has evolved considerably in recent years with the appearance of authors who are very gifted in various European languages” (ibid., p. 16). However, there is a gap in the scholarship regarding a comparative analysis of seminal English texts written by Moroccan women. Portraying a young woman from a Moroccan-Jewish family, Knafo Setton’s first novel *The Road to Fez*, published in 2001, tells of Brit, who was born in Morocco but moved to Pennsylvania with her parents as a child. She returns to her ancestral homeland to visit her late mother’s family and fulfil her mother’s dying request: to make a pilgrimage to Fez and visit the tomb of a revered 19th-century Jewish woman named Suleika. During her visit, Brit falls in love with her uncle Gaby, a womanizing widower. Four years after Knafo Setton, Laila Lalami, in her collection of short stories *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, follows a group of young Moroccan immigrants who set out on a lifeboat to cross the Strait of Gibraltar in search of a better life in Spain. However, the passengers are left to fend for themselves after the boat capsizes near the shore. The text focuses on the lives of four of these passengers, exploring their motivations for undertaking the dangerous journey and their struggles before and after the incident.

### **1. *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* as Diasporic texts**

In support of the claim that “[t]he key aspects of the diasporic imaginary highlighted in sociological and theoretical accounts can also be found in

the novels of diaspora,” Yoon Sun Lee indicates that “[m]ost important is the dialectic of host nation and homeland, the recursive mutual structuring of memory and discovery, the myth of the homeland and the experience of the host nation” (Lee, 2015, p. 134). Lee is of the view that “the diasporic novel is more deeply marked by the recursive shaping of here and there, former selves and future selves” (Ibid., p. 134). If the diasporic novel “is driven by the discovery in the host nation of deeply embedded, highly consequential forms of difference, whether racial, gendered, or socioeconomic,” what ensues from this realization is “far from the reassertion of fixed relations, identities, or locations” (Ibid., p. 134). Along similar lines, Ato Quayson offers a particularly insightful perspective on the diasporic imaginary, contending that “[w]ithin the diasporic imaginary, the question of identity – Who am I? – is necessarily entangled with that of place – What is this place, and how does it affect who I am?” (Quayson, 2013, p. 148). In view of this, the key features of the diasporic imaginary are the interconnectedness of identity and place, and the dialectical relationship between the individual’s sense of self and the multiple places of co-ethnic identification. Lee also argues that the diasporic novel “questions the hierarchy of center and periphery, uncouples movement from space in an area of accelerating travel, and articulates a striking ambivalence toward identity, property, and even material embodiment” (Lee, 2015, p. 134). In contrast, Quayson explores the diasporic imaginary, suggesting that, “[t]he desire for a lost or even unknown landscape generates both constraints and possibilities for the imaginary” (Quayson, 2013, p. 149). Yet, arguing that “[t]he diasporic imaginary rests on space: space traversed, experienced, and registered as distance. As such, it constitutes a particularly rich and complex dimension of this genre,” Lee adds that

“[u]ncoupled from actual place, space is often oddly impervious to experience or knowledge. It is marked by internal divisions, invisible barriers as well as impossible contiguities. Labyrinths, a frequent figure in these novels, are as intensive as they are extensive, a matter of a private inability either to escape or to enter a place” (Lee, 2015, p. 135).

Considering this, my stand is that the coupling of Knafo Setton’s and Lalami’s focus on the representation of diasporic subjects as they navigate and negotiate diverse and often conflicting spaces advances the idea of *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*’s diasporic

configuration. Quayson further underscores that “[s]ubjectivity is no longer tied exclusively to the immediacy of present location but rather extends to encompass all the other places of co-ethnic identification” (Quayson, 2013, pp. 146-147). Parallel to this standpoint, Lee’s assertion that “diasporic novels reflect serial displacement, entrapment, and dissolution” (Lee, 2015, p. 135) is of particular interest for the discussion on the literature of the Moroccan diaspora. Lee highlights the significance of state power and invisible barriers in relegating individuals and collectives to nonplaces, which are depicted in diasporic novels as selectively porous spaces for some and impenetrable for others, often marked by racial and class-based divisions, and adds that

“[i]n many diasporic novels, movement figures a permanent state or relation rather than an event. Rather than simply going from one point to another, expressing intention or desire, bringing about change, or mapping out the lineaments of a world, such movements simply prolong a condition of dislocation and can even collapse a Cartesian sense of place” (Ibid., p. 139).

Lee finds that “space has less to do with external coordinates than with the intensive experience of movement, relocation, recollection” (Ibid., p. 139) in diasporic novels. With this in mind, I put forth the argument that Knafo Setton and Lalami, while both exploring the characteristics of the Moroccan diaspora, adopt different approaches in their texts, resulting in nuanced and varied insights. In Lee’s view,

“[w]hat is striking is the absence of a part-whole dialectic (...) Rather than thinking of themselves as a part of something complete or absolute, characters find themselves more often than not confronting a possible double, a mirror figure whose performance seems to hold a clue to selfhood or belonging” (Ibid., p. 140).

While Lee considers that material existence in diasporic novels is complex and takes many forms, my contention is that it is the configuration of their relationship to space and the body that renders possible the positioning of Knafo Setton’s and Lalami’s texts on a spectrum that includes a range of texts that can be identified as part of the diasporic genre. Quayson underscores that “the domain of literature must be given privilege for the manner by which it binds affect to questions of ontology in both the content and form of narration” (Quayson, 2013, p. 148). Additionally, he

posits that “the struggle between integrity and discontinuity, attachment and disaffiliation may provide us handy windows for understanding the variegated world in which we live and how to live in it” (Ibid., p. 154). In contrast, Lee reaches the conclusion that

“[t]he diasporic novel is capacious in its imagination and equally generous in its disavowals. The ideal of place, narratives of accomplished movement, collective forms of shared essence, and the material burdens and gains of history are disavowed but never completely denied or forgotten”

and that

“[d]iasporic novels seem to represent a mature dialectical engagement with the formal horizons of the novel as a genre. They remind us of a longer history of novel writing about coerced and wilful travel of subjects to all corners of the globe” (Lee, 2015, p. 149).

In light of these perspectives, I advance the idea that the variations on the diasporic novel developed in *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* can be recognized as valid contributions to the comprehension of the ongoing dialogue between diasporic writers and readers beyond the boundaries of the Moroccan diaspora.

*The Road to Fez* explores the dialectic between the host nation and homeland, focusing on Brit’s journey as her family moves from El Kajda in Morocco to the United States. A photograph inscribed with “Gabriel Afriat and Brites Suleika Lek, 1957” serves as a tangible reminder of their connection to El Kajda (Knafo Setton, 2001, p. 42). Brit’s return to Morocco later in the novel represents her renewed engagement with her homeland and the exploration of her sense of self within the context of the United States. The contrasting dynamics between Morocco and Horsens in Pennsylvania highlight the tension and interplay between belonging and the search for home. On the other hand, Gaby’s introspective musings pose questions about cultural integration: “What were these people, a few generations down the line, what are they? Jews or Arabs, or a mixture of both: Arabs with Jewish memory? What are we but Arab Jews?” (Ibid., p. 143). The recollection of Brit’s departure from El Kajda evokes nostalgia and emphasizes the significance of the family’s journey. On this particular episode, Gaby reminisces: “Do you remember when you left El Kajda? ... And just as they were about to leave, you disappeared ...

Then I had an idea. I came back here, got down on my knees, and guess who I found under my bed?" (Ibid., p. 79). In fact, Gaby's visit to Horsens in 1965 enriches the narrative, offering temporal context and insights into Brit's perspective. Moreover, the inclusion of diverse Moroccan cities expands the scope of the narrative, providing glimpses into the cultural and regional nuances of the country. The text also explores the yearning for a place of true belonging through the characters' desires to leave El Kajda for Paris or Lucerne. Justine states, "At age twelve all the kids are shipped off to Paris or Lucerne. You're fools to stay" (Ibid., p. 99). This prompts reflection on the complexities surrounding the conditions of migration in Morocco during the 1960s. Brit's father move to Israel adds complexity to the interplay between the host nation and homeland. Her worldview is disrupted as she questions his motivations: "Has the world turned completely upside down? ... I don't think I understand anyone or anything" (Ibid., pp. 165-166). The text explores the connection between memory and discovery, particularly in relation to historical temporality and the formation of diasporic narratives. Brit's connection with her grandfather, Papa Naphtali, and the retelling of Brites Henriques' fate during the Inquisition emphasize the influence of historical events on individual and collective narratives. Papa Naphtali reveals the significance of Brit's name and the tragic circumstances of her ancestor's death: "Ah Brita, did you know I named you?... Brites Henriques was one of your ancestors ... She died in the Inquisition" (Ibid., p. 113). The exploration of memory also extends to the physical environment, as various Moroccan cities' spatial elements become catalysts for recollections. The locked gate of the Jewish quarter symbolizes both protection and isolation: "the mellah gate, locked every night until recently ... closed in a world with no way out" (Ibid., pp. 4-5). Yet, the act of making a home transcends geographical boundaries: "Israel, Paris, New York, what does it matter? ... Every home is borrowed anyway" (Ibid., p. 89). The oppressive space of the *mellah* in Azemmour shapes the characters' memories and perception: "Salt wind blows Gaby, Luc and me inside the old Kasbah to the mellah ... The air is dingy, sour with the smell of piss, shit, garbage piled on the street ... I grip my throat and lean against an abandoned fruit stall, flies drinking from bursting purple-black figs" (Ibid., p. 131). This confined and decaying environment leaves an indelible impression on Brit's senses. From religious festivals to family celebrations, the text highlights the connection between Brit's relatives and the homeland: "The discussion is still going strong from dinner: to leave Morocco, or to stay. Jews are not permitted to take their



money out of the country. Papa Naphtali cannot leave at his age and start anew, but he wants to plant the dream of Israel for the rest of the family ... 'A prayer for Israel ... Next year in Jerusalem!'" (Ibid., pp. 96-97). The myth of the homeland reflects the collective longing, while acknowledging the realities that shape individual and collective journeys. Brit's introspection sparks thought-provoking questions: "Maybe Dad was wrong to take me away from this – my grandfather, my family ... Is that freedom?" (Ibid., p. 112). Her reflection delves into the profound implications of migration and the quest for belonging. The use of camouflage reflects the family's efforts to shield themselves: "We speak in slivers and fragments ... I thought we were rootless. I forgot we'd ever had a home" (Ibid., pp. 12-13). Brit's father's playful act of spinning the globe and assuming new personas emphasizes the lengths they go to fit societal norms: "*No more Jews from Morocco. From now on, we're Christians from Paris. A good choice*"<sup>1</sup> (Ibid., p. 38). On Yom Kippur, their hopes for a welcoming experience at the synagogue are shattered: "Isn't Yom Kippur the Day of Forgiveness? ... How can you give a Jew a ticket to pray? On this day of all days, does it make any sense?" (Ibid., p. 87). Knafo Setton portrays the challenges of assimilation and acceptance faced by Brit's family. While being appreciative of her father's determination, Brit is also critical of the incongruous welcome at a Christian Sunday school: "The courage it took for him to wrench himself from the only world he'd ever known ... Welcome this little lost lamb to the fold! You have a friend in Jesus, Brit! ... you're a Jew! Well, we all have our problems!" (Ibid., pp. 101-102). Their attempts at reconciling their heritage with the host nation meet hostility: "You're better off going back to the jungle in Africa. There's no place for you here" (Ibid., p. 102). Similarly, Gaby's experiences in Morocco and France highlight the complexities of acceptance: "In Paris, I never felt at home with the European Jews ... all of us with our black African hearts and feet" (Ibid., p. 143).

On the other hand, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* explores the stories of individuals who leave their homeland, Morocco, and venture to Spain in search of a better life. Faten, an illegal immigrant in Spain, faces new challenges and eventually becomes a sex worker in Madrid. Halima, trapped in an abusive marriage, seeks a divorce but finds herself unable to escape her predicament: "Now that Maati had lost his job she knew he'd turn to her for beer money ... Where was the man she'd married?" (Lalami, 2005, p. 67). Aziz, equipped with a diploma, and his friend Lahcen, lacking a university education, both face limited job opportunities

in Morocco. Aziz's decision to migrate clandestinely to Spain strains his relationship with Lahcen, who questions the risks involved: "How can you tell me to calm down? You could drown!" (Ibid., p. 79). Murad, a book-loving tourist guide, contemplates the value of his English degree compared to his successful siblings and decides to risk a perilous journey to Spain. He reflects on the distance that separates the two countries: "FOURTEEN KILOMETERS ... Some days he told himself that the distance was nothing, a brief inconvenience ... Other days ... he wondered how fourteen kilometers could separate not just two countries but two universes" (Ibid., p. 1). Memory and discovery play crucial roles in the lives of Faten, Halima, Aziz, and Murad. Faten, troubled by her expulsion from university, seeks solace through medication, acknowledging the need to avoid excessive thinking: "The main thing to survive this life here was to not think too much" (Ibid., p. 145). Halima contemplates the choices her brothers made to leave for Europe and wonders about the possibilities she might have had: "Would she have an apartment, a washing machine, maybe even a car? Would she have Maati?" (Ibid., p. 76). Her reflections reveal the intricate nature of memory and the alternate paths that can be imagined. Aziz attempts to preserve his sensory memories before leaving home, recognizing their importance in helping him cope: "He knew that in the months that would follow, he would need each one to help him survive" (Ibid., p. 98). His story explores the disparities between memory and reality upon his return, particularly in relation to the changes in his surroundings and the evolving religious landscape. Upon visiting his sister-in-law Samira, his astonishment is evident: "Aziz was shocked to see her hair fully covered in one of those Islamic scarves that had seemed to multiply since he left" (Ibid., p. 168). The absence of women and the prevalence of male unemployment in the downtown Café Saâda reveal societal changes and complex dynamics: "Something struck him as odd ... there were no women at all" (Ibid., p. 173). This observation prompts Aziz to reflect on the interplay between memory and discovery and their influence on his community. For Murad, memory, discovery, and storytelling are intertwined, shaping his journey of self-exploration and emotional connection: "Childhood images of ogres and jinns flickered in his mind's eye ... finally one story slowly unravelled for him, the tale of Aisha Qandisha" (Ibid., p. 183). Murad's contemplation of the past and future leads him to question the sacrifices made and the relationship between memory and the imagined future: "He wondered if one always had to sacrifice the past for the future" (Ibid., p. 186). Faten challenges

the idealized myth of the homeland through her memories of religious festivals: "The Eid holiday was coming up ... there was not much to be nostalgic about ... She pushed the memories out of her mind" (Ibid., p. 145). Faten's deliberate avoidance of these memories highlights the dissonance between her longing for meaningful celebrations and the disillusioning truth. Halima's conversation with her employer Hanan, a translator "specialized in immigration documents" (Ibid., p. 74) reveals the limitations of legal systems and challenges the perception that the local institutions hold the key to resolution: "Isn't there some way to get a visa?" (Ibid., p. 77). Her realization that a legal solution to her situation does not exist leads her to consider an alternative, illegal path. Aziz's long-awaited homecoming exposes the stark contrast between his idealized vision of the homeland and the challenging circumstances he encounters: "The apartment was darker than he remembered. The paint on the walls was flaking" (Ibid., p. 159). His experience leaves him disillusioned and uncertain, challenging his previously idealized vision. As he reads through a novel set in Tangier, Murad is unsatisfied with the literary depictions of his hometown, thereby reflecting the dissonance between idealized depictions and accurate portrayals. He seeks a deeper understanding that aligns with his personal experiences, including the nostalgia and connection evoked by his father's storytelling: "The deep baritone of his father's voice echoed in his ears, strong and reassuring" (Ibid., p. 183). With regards to the experience of the host nation, Faten's journey is marred by challenges and trauma, as she survives a perilous sea crossing and endures sexual abuse by a Spanish guard: "The guard had taken her to one of the private exam rooms, away from everyone else. He lifted her skirt and thrust into her with savage abandon" (Ibid., p. 147). Her experience in Spain primarily revolves around navigating sex work. Halima's expedition with her children is abruptly halted when she is detained and deported back to Morocco. Her ten-year-old son Farid's bravery during the boat capsizing elevates him to a revered figure, seen as both a hero and a saint: "Halima didn't know how to swim. Yet Farid pulled her to safety somehow ... They had *all* survived" (Ibid., pp. 117-118). However, owing to the improbability of the rescue, some regard Halima as a "Crazy woman" (Ibid., p. 117). Aziz's experiences in Spain reveal the obstacles faced by immigrants. He recounts his previous failed border crossing attempt: "He had left the country on an inflatable boat ... He had been caught right on the beach ... and sent back to Morocco" (Ibid., p. 154). Aziz's encounters with the Spanish authorities,

his search for work, and his deliberate omissions when discussing Spain with his family shed light on the challenges of integration: "Aziz talked about Madrid ... mentioned his neighbor ... and his boss at the restaurant. But he didn't talk about ... constant identity checks that the police had performed these last two years" (Ibid., pp. 161-162). Murad's perilous journey ends in his capture by Spanish law enforcement that shatters his chance of escape: "A light shines on him... long enough to see the dog, a German shepherd, and the infinitely more menacing form holding the leash" (Ibid., p. 14). The oppressive environment of the holding station emphasizes his sense of helplessness: "The guard takes him to a moldy cell ... Seagulls flutter from the side of the building ... and for a moment he envies them their freedom" (Ibid., p. 17). Ultimately, Murad finds solace in becoming a storyteller, realizing the importance of preserving his own narrative: "There was no use reading stories like this anymore; he needed to write his own ... he was already lost in the story he would start writing tonight" (Ibid., p. 195). While *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* differ in the way they approach the dialectic of host nation and homeland, the recursive mutual structuring of memory and discovery, the myth of the homeland and the experience of the host nation, I would put forward that both texts defy strict categorization within a single literary genre.

## **2. Gothic Echoes and Revival of Travelogue in Moroccan Diasporic Literature**

The Gothic genre has evolved to encompass a wide range of elements. David Punter identifies claustrophobia, grotesque characterizations, and the lack of escape as Gothic features in literature (Punter, 2015, p. 1). Punter also suggests a relation between the ghost story and the older Gothic (Ibid., p. 2), whereas Wester and Aldana Reyes highlight the Gothic's inclusion of horror, science fiction, and speculative fiction (Wester and Aldana Reyes, 2019, pp. 1-2). They note its revival during technological progress, akin to its birth in the eighteenth century (Ibid., p. 7). In their view, Gothic tropes intersect with racial and ethnic discourses, critiquing Western-centric perspectives (Ibid., p. 10). In this regard, my view is that Knafo Setton's text utilizes Gothic elements such as mystery, supernatural imagery, and oppressive settings to create an unsettling narrative. In *The Road to Fez*, mystery and uncertainty are

interwoven into the narrative: “As we say a word, its meaning shifts: no becomes yes, and yes is usually no” (Knafo Setton, 2001, p. 12). Haunting and supernatural imagery also contribute to the disquieting atmosphere: “I pretended to know nothing of *djnoun*, martyred Jews, ghosts and spirits” (Ibid., p. 127). Suffocating and oppressive settings add tension: “I saw how easy it would be for a man, for anyone, to enter the tiny room, no larger than a closet” (Ibid., p. 14). A certain psychological tension also arises from fear and suspicions: “Is this what the converso existence is like?” (Ibid., p. 13). In addition, Brit’s identification with a ferocious force hints at repressed desires: “The Beast waits for the moment to attack” (Ibid., p. 32), and primal desires and an underlying sense of immediate danger evoke Gothic horror: “My teeth are sharpening ... To slash and kill” (Ibid., p. 31). This prompts me to argue that postcolonial Gothic, a critical mode used by authors to criticize colonial violence and discourse, holds relevance for the study of Knafo’s text as it is set against the background of the decade immediately following Moroccan independence. *The Road to Fez* not only challenges and appropriates the language of the colonizers to express the experiences of the colonized, resisting the influence of the empire (Ilott, 2019, p. 19), but it also complicates the language question by resorting to the use of English instead of French. And if the subgenre “border Gothic” responds to the changing sociopolitical landscape (Ibid., p. 23), settlers and indigenous writers use the Gothic to recount untold stories of colonial life and the conflict between imperial power and former colonies (Rudd, 2019, p. 72). Building upon this, I contend that Setton’s text invites exploration of the uncanny, aligning with Ruth Gilbert’s perspective on the disruptive nature of the Wandering Jew, *dybbuk*, and golem, that challenge the “border between self and other” (Gilbert, 2012, p. 4). These figures contribute a distinctive and thought-provoking element to the narrative, creating a world of ambiguity and intrigue. In her 2010 review of *The Road to Fez*, Agnieszka Legutko explores the theme of possession, highlighting the presence of *djnoun* and the dynamics between the characters. Legutko quotes Setton, who writes, “*Djnoun* hover everywhere, grasp secrets, and use them against us” (Knafo Setton, 2001, p. 20), emphasizing their pervasive nature. The review also discusses Gaby’s ability to deal with these entities, demonstrated when he neutralizes the power of Mrs. Kopf, a trouble-making neighbor referred to as a *djinn*. Interestingly, Legutko suggests that Gaby’s relationship with his wife, Estrella, can be interpreted as a revolutionary type of “possession,” challenging patriarchal norms of arranged marriages

and domestic violence. It is noted that even though the word “possession” is never mentioned in the novel, “it features a man possessed by a woman, who herself acts as if she were possessed” (Legutko, 2010, p. 21). According to Legutko, Estrella is depicted as tormented and traumatized, displaying signs of possession, as indicated by her plea to Gaby: “Punish me! ... Show me you love me! Prove you’re a man! ... Beat me! I’m so bad!” (Knafo Setton, 2001, pp. 54-55). Estrella’s aggressive actions, including screaming, scratching, beating, cursing, and demanding to be beaten (Ibid., p. 49), evoke behaviours associated with possession. To my surprise, Legutko does not delve into Estrella’s masochistic tendencies.<sup>2</sup> Gaby speculates about Estrella’s past, acknowledging that “something had happened to her and was instantly hushed. By the time she came to me, it was already too buried and inert. There was no way for me to reach her” (Ibid., p.65). In the same vein, Mama Leticia, Gaby’s mother, has “centuries of demons dancing behind” her eyes (Ibid., p. 3) and recognizes Estrella’s inner turmoil, stating that she “needs some powerful healing” (Ibid., p. 66). The novel takes a tragic turn when Estrella sets herself on fire, witnessed by Gaby, who attempts to rescue her unsuccessfully. This tragic event deeply affects Gaby, as Legutko remarks, “Estrella’s suicidal death possesses Gaby’s soul forever” (Legutko, 2010, p. 22). Legutko commends Knafo Setton’s portrayal of possession, considering it the most contemporary and innovative construction of spirit possession in post-second wave of Jewish women’s fiction. The narrative simultaneously critiques the patriarchal order by juxtaposing Estrella, a victim embodying a subversive projection of male violence, with Gaby, a man who refuses to participate in the oppression of women. Taking this into consideration, my standpoint is that *The Road to Fez* offers a distinct viewpoint on possession while challenging societal norms. Through the relationship between Brit and her uncle Gaby, Knafo Setton explores the complexities of desire and blurred boundaries, while also challenging cultural standards. Tatjana Hörnle’s article “Consensual Adult Incest. A Sex Offense?” sheds light on the dynamics of a such relationship, highlighting the complexities of consent and power imbalances and argues that power imbalances and dominance can undermine true consent, reflecting the potential challenges in Brit and Gaby’s relationship (Hörnle, 2014, p. 87). The validity of consent is further discussed and Hörnle raises the issue of public interests overriding consent, connecting to the concerns expressed by Brit and Gaby’s family (Ibid., p. 92). Additionally, the divergent legal approaches to adult incest across different countries further complicates the relationship

between Brit and Gaby (Ibid., p. 93). Elizabeth Barnes' insights on incest and the literary imagination parallel Knafo Setton's text. The cultural and contextual factors influencing Brit and Gaby's attraction align with Barnes' argument that the incest taboo is relative to time and culture (Barnes, 2002, p. 1). Knafo Setton captures the power dynamics and political control in incestuous relationships as Brit states, "THERE IS CONFUSION IN OUR DARK DANCE" (Knafo Setton, 2005, p. 190), reflecting the interconnectedness of desire, control, and dominance (Barnes, 2002, p. 3). Furthermore, Brit's use of a love potion to manipulate her uncle's emotions addresses the societal taboo surrounding incestuous relationships (Knafo Setton, 2005, p. 82-83). In this regard, it is my contention that Ruth Perry's elaboration on incest and the Gothic novel aligns with the themes of forbidden desires and taboo relationships in *The Road to Fez*. Perry states that Gothic novels often explore such relationships to create a sense of suspense and transgression arguing that "[t]he sexuality is terrifyingly omnipresent" (Perry, 1998, p. 272). Brit and Gaby defy conventional boundaries, and the sensual imagery conveys the intensity of their desire, aligning with the Gothic tradition. In addition, Jenny DiPlacidi's analysis of uncles and nieces in Gothic fiction provides valuable insights into the portrayal of incestuous relationships. Setton challenges the portrayal of the uncle as "representative of patriarchal dangers" and "a physical, sexual, and financial threat to the heroine" (DiPlacidi, 2018, p. 140). Instead, in my assessment Brit's desire for her uncle Gaby is depicted as a "natural desire" and "an extension" of familial love, defying the taboo associated with incest (Ibid., p. 146).

Daniel Newman's elaboration on travel writing is particularly relevant for the study of *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* as Lalami delves into the multifaceted nature of travel and journeys, echoing the intertwining themes of piety, education, and personal growth associated with travel in Islamic tradition. In light of Lalami's affiliation with Morocco, further interpretive hypotheses can be considered, particularly when examining the "Qur'anic term for travel or journey, *rihla*, which early on also came to denote a travelogue" (Newman, 2019, p. 143). *Rihla* refers to the tradition of travel undertaken by learned individuals in the Western part of dar al-Islam, particularly associated with the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. This travel resulted in *rihla* literature, written records serving as guides for future pilgrims. In Morocco, from the sixteenth century onwards, *rihla* literature flourished, encompassing *rihla* within Morocco, *rihla*

*hijaziyya* (travel to the Hijaz), and *rihla sifariyya*, involving embassies and missions (El Moudden, 1990, pp. 143-145). With regard to the *rihla*'s various subgenres Lalami's text does not appear to fully share the features of the quest for instruction (*talab al-'ilm*), the pilgrimage (*rihla hijaziyya*), the official embassies (*rihla sifariyya*), or the tourist travelogue (*rihla siyahiyya*) (Newman 2008, p. 85). Yet, I posit that Lalami's collection can be correlated with *rihla* literature given its in-depth exploration of the transformative aspects of journeys to a "(semi-) mythical Europe of progress" (Ibid., p. 86). As Newman observes, "In the Qu'ran, travel often appears as a duty, whether in respect of the pilgrimage or, simply, to 'see how God originated creation' (Qur. 29:20)" (Newman, 2019, p. 143). This religious aspect of travel is reflected in Lalami's text as the characters are faced with the decision of whether the risk of their journey is worth taking. Murad ponders, "trying to decide whether the risk was worth it" (Lalami, 2005, p. 1), aligning with the concept of travel as a duty and a means to seek knowledge. Lalami also explores the aspirations and dreams associated with travel, which Newman notes as vital in "conquering knowledge" (Newman, 2019, p. 143). Characters imagine a better future beyond the journey, envisioning "the job, the car, the house" (Lalami, 2005, p. 1) which resonates with the idea of travel as a quest for personal and collective improvement. Although there are no direct references to Newman's exploration of travel as a means of collecting physical relics in the text, in my interpretation *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* captures the complexities and challenges of travel, emphasizing the transformative nature of the characters' journeys. Additionally, Lalami's portrayal of the characters' encounter with the Spanish coast guard during illegal immigration attempts highlights the complexities inherent in such travels. As Lalami writes, "when the Spanish coast guard caught her and the other illegal immigrants" (Ibid., p. 135), the narrative underscores the unlawfulness and dangerousness of the journey. Lalami explores the transformative nature of journeys which aligns with Newman's observation that travel was integral to the scholar's formal training and personal growth (Newman, 2019, p. 143). Murad is a long-term unemployed graduate student; Faten is caught cheating during an exam and excluded from university and Aziz is described as "unable to get into a university ... was given a degree in automation – which basically meant he could work as a repairman" (Lalami, 2005, pp. 82-83). And if they all seek better life in Spain, the dreamlike dimension of Aziz's returning journey is marked by a mixture of emotions and uncertainties: "FOR FIVE YEARS Aziz had



imagined the scene of his homecoming. In his carefully rehearsed fantasies, he would come home on a sunny day ... But as the date of his return to Morocco approached, Aziz found that he had to alter the details of his daydreams" (Ibid., pp. 152-153). Hakim Abderrezak draws a parallel between historical and modern migrations, stating that "[j]ust like the followers of Prophet Muhammad who emigrated in secret in order to escape persecution back in Mecca, harragas leave in secret" (Abderrezak, 2016, p. 70). He further explains that modern-day migrants resort to secret ways of leaving due to the severe consequences they face if caught, including deportation, trial, imprisonment, and police brutality in their home countries (Ibid., p. 71). Abderrezak emphasizes the secrecy of harragas' projects, as families often try to prevent them from leaving the beach. He argues that the term "clandestine migration" or "secret emigration" (*hijra sirriya*) is a more fitting descriptor than "illegal migration" (Ibid., p. 71). My assertion is that this choice of words highlights the dire living conditions and plight faced by Moroccan migrants who must hide, rather than stigmatizing them for seeking a better life. In the first chapter, "The Trip," the treacherous nature of the journey is introduced, depicting the dark waves, foul odor of the boat, and a sense of curse. The need for secrecy is clear as Rahal, the boat's captain, emphatically urges everyone to disembark (Lalami, 2005, p. 10). Faten's story, presented in the chapters "The Fanatic" and "The Odalisque," unveils a journey filled with constant fear of authorities and the risk of deportation, trial, imprisonment, and brutality (Ibid., p. 135). Faten's clandestine migration reveals the hidden nature of her escape from Morocco due to her religious and political affiliations. Halima's story unfolds in the chapters "Bus Rides" and "The Saint," portraying her life in the Zenata slum and her crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar with her three young children. Her husband Maati is unaware of her departure (Ibid., p. 118). A pivotal moment in her narrative is the miraculous rescue from drowning, which holds significant meaning in her journey. Aziz's journey is documented in the chapters "Acceptance" and "Homecoming," encompassing his dreams, departure, and eventual return home after five years abroad. While his parents are not aware of his plans (Ibid., p. 97), the family reunion and exploration of his transformed neighbourhood shed light on the complexities of his journey and diasporic return. The chapters "Better Luck Tomorrow" and "The Storyteller," revolve around Murad. He becomes a bookseller in Tangier and reflects on his failed attempt to cross to Spain and the gradual loss of his connection to his past and storytelling traditions as he overhears two

women conversing in English in his shop. I advance the argument that through the weaving of these chapters with Abderrezak's perspective, further layers of interpretation emerge, revealing the multifaceted nature of clandestine migration. Abderrezak's exploration of *hrig*, or "burning," provides valuable insight into the phenomenon of clandestine migration and the desire to cross the sea. For Abderrezak, *hrig* encompasses the burning desire to leave, the burning of kilometers to reach the final destination, and the symbolic act of burning identification papers to complicate repatriation efforts. He states, "Hrig covers the clandestine migrant's (1) burning desire to leave, (2) burning of kilometers to the final destination, and (3) burning identification papers in hope to make repatriation more difficult for authorities" (Abderrezak, 2016, pp. 7-9). Abderrezak also highlights the need to differentiate between leavism and the actual act of clandestine migration. Leavism refers to the insatiable desire to cross the sea, which precedes the act of migration. He explains, "I call leavism the insatiable desire to cross the sea, which precedes an actual instance of clandestine migration" (Ibid., p. 9). This prompts me to assert that Lalami's characters embody this leavism, constantly yearning for a better life beyond their current condition. Furthermore, the burning of identification papers aligns with the characters' attempts to erase their identities and complicate repatriation efforts. Although Lalami does not explicitly mention the burning of documents, the characters' illegal immigration attempts and encounters with the Spanish coast guard emphasize the risks and challenges they face. Regarding Faten's arrest, Lalami writes, "the Spanish coast guard caught her and the other illegal immigrants" (Lalami, 2005, p. 135), highlighting the collective dimension of the obstacles they encounter and the sense of urgency they experience during their journeys. The beachscape in Lalami's novel represents a liminal space where the characters navigate their hopes, fears, and uncertainties in coherence with Abderrezak's assertion that "[i]n illiterature, the liminal space of the beachscape often replaces airports and seaports as expected exits in this new age of increasingly select emigration to Europe" (Abderrezak, 2016, pp. 67). Consistent with this argument, the sea, symbolizing both the physical obstacle and the figurative act of burning the road, serves as a defining element in Lalami's text.

### 3. Interpretive Perspectives

In terms of interpretive hypotheses, it could be argued that the central characters in Knafo Setton and Lalami's texts offer testimonies of their experiences, which are characterized by fragmented memories. According to Soshana Felman, testimonies consist of "bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference" (Felman, 1992, p. 5). In keeping with this line of thought, Strejilevich highlights that "[s]ome testimonial writers—in the belief that fictionalization diminishes the impact of horror—insist that their accounts are genuine reflections of reality. The desire for verisimilitude imposes itself in para-textual devices where the testimonial quality of the material is enhanced" (Strejilevich, 2006, p. 709). Considering this, more than in Lalami's text the para-textual devices in *The Road to Fez* support the idea that the narrative presented is not merely fictional construct but rather grounded in the reality of lived experiences. For Marassa,

"it is easy to observe a peculiar *usus scribendi* operating on a graphic architecture that privileges a marked alternation and a varied use of avant-texts and epigraphs – in which the narrating subject becomes plural, a section of other lives and stories. These paratextual elements give prominence, in *The Road to Fez*, to a structure that visually and semantically reinforces a temporal expression that oscillates" (Marassa, 2012, p. 98, my trans.).

This enhances the testimonial quality of Knafo Setton's work, providing readers with a heightened sense of authenticity. However, Strejilevich cautions that "testimony should stress just truthfulness, not objectivity" (Strejilevich, 2006, p. 709). Following this line of thought, I maintain that the emphasis on truthfulness in Knafo Setton and Lalami's texts surpasses the pursuit of an objective account. Grounded in realism, the texts acknowledge the subjective nature of memory and individual perspectives, prioritizing the portrayal of emotional and personal journeys over a single, definitive truth. This nuanced approach explores the complexities of migrant and diasporan experiences, recognizing the diverse perspectives and subjective interpretations of the characters' paths. On another note, Strejilevich's assertion that "a literary approach to testimony allows for a distancing in relation to the intimate memories ... the witness/writer

searches for understanding” (Ibid., p. 710) aligns with the approach taken by Knafo Setton and Lalami, as seen through the numerous episodes that depict characters engaging in reflection, introspection, and a quest for deeper understanding and meaning. Both texts exemplify the transformative potential of testimony in literature by elevating marginalized voices and providing intimate access to their thoughts and emotions.

Another recurring motif that intertwines *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* is the representation of fire, offering readers insight into the texts’ perspectives on violence, death, and hope. *The Road to Fez* delves into the depiction of fire imagery by including several religious celebrations in which candles are lit and prayers are offered (Knafo Setton, 2001, p. 220). Yet, Isso, Suleika’s “broke and mad” (Ibid., p. 134) older brother is depicted retelling his sister a tale in which “people were burning a mountain of books” (Ibid., p. 214). Moreover, Brit’s grandfather Papa Naphtali draws a parallel between their ancestor Brites Henriques and Suleika when he describes the fate of their family during the Inquisition: “The torturers begin and continue until the whole family is burned alive. Everyone, except Brites ... But they don’t burn her like the others. They bring her before the court ... and demand more names, a confession, words to erase the smell of fire and burned flesh” (Ibid., p. 114). The recurring fire imagery in the narrative points at the family’s tragic history of persecution. Besides, the scene in which Gaby attempts to rescue his wife Estrella from the flames is particularly telling: “In the kitchen. I ran and stopped in the doorway. She stood naked by the sink, pouring a can of kerosene over herself. “Estrella!” I screamed. She struck a match, and flames engulfed her. In an instant, she seemed to explode” (Ibid., p. 71). Considering this, Alfonso and Chandra’s explanation of self-immolation as a prevalent practice in ancient cultures, where fire holds significant “iconographic and mythological prominence with transformational qualities” (Alfonso and Chandra, 2021, p. 7) underscores Estrella’s self-immolation as a potent message for societal recognition and a call for transformative action. Extending beyond the historical context of the Inquisition and Estrella’s suicide, the motif of fire also embodies Gaby’s intense longing for Brit and his feelings of jealousy: “THANK GOD FOR THE LIMITS OF PERCEPTION. That she can’t see the pounding of my heart. The fire inside that threatens to burn me alive” (Knafo Setton, 2001, p. 185). Multifaceted and evocative, the fire imagery permeates the text’s emotional landscape, adding a layer of interpretation to the narrative.

Similarly, fire imagery is interwoven into Lalami's text, and Abderrezak's analysis further explores the significance of burning as a figurative act:

"Ben Jelloun's title *Partir*, which means 'to leave' and has been published in English under the title *Leaving Tangier*, is the closest French equivalent of the Moroccan Arabic *hrig*, although *brûler* (to burn) translates more accurately the common practice of burning identification documents before undertaking the sea crossing, in order to render repatriation challenging for European authorities" (Abderrezak, 2016, pp. 67-68).

Specifically referring to *hrig*, Abderrezak explains that "[t]his word also conveys the figurative act of 'burning the road' (in this case, the sea), and of illegally 'burning up' kilometers in one fell swoop ... it dates back to 711CE ... the arrival of Berber general Tariq Ibn Ziyad in present-day Spain and his decision to burn his ships" (Ibid., p. 68). Pursuing this line of argumentation, Lalami's satirical portrayal of migrants "without guns or armor, without a charismatic leader" (Lalami, 2005, p. 3) contrasts the romanticized historical ship burnings with contemporary migration. For Abderrezak, "*harragas* (burners) ... is the neologism used ... to refer to individuals who emigrate clandestinely in search of more promising opportunities" (Abderrezak, 2015, p. 68). However, it is worth mentioning that Lalami's characters do not engage in the explicit act of burning their identification documents before embarking on their journey. Nonetheless, the act of discarding IDs illustrates the determination of the burners as they embark on a risky journey: "TARIFA IS ABOUT 250 meters away now. It'll only take another few minutes. The Guinean woman throws a piece of paper overboard. Murad figures it's her ID. She'll probably pretend she's from Sierra Leone so she can get political asylum" (Lalami, 2005, p. 9).

It is particularly telling that Abderrezak indicates that "fictional accounts help their readers better understand *hrig*. Like *harragas* waiting to cross the strait, more of these narratives are on their way" (Abderrezak, 2016, p. 88). This assertion invites consideration of the notion of waithood<sup>3</sup> in relation to Setton and Lalami's texts. For Inhorn and Smith-Hefner, "In the twenty-first century, waithood is a growing global phenomenon, with young people waiting to marry and have children, and, in the process, extending their period of young adulthood" (Inhorn and Smith-Hefner, 2021, p.391). They argue that "two broad forms of waithood, both of which pivot around the notion of intentionality ... might best be described as unintentional waithood and intentional waithood" (Ibid., p. 391). My

reading of the texts leads me to believe that the central characters in both texts experience unintentional waitness as they find themselves waiting to marry without actively choosing to prolong their young adulthood. In *The Road to Fez*, eighteen-year-old Brit grapples with uncertainty about her future and questions her relationship with Gaby, reflecting a sense of anticipation or delay in her personal life. Gaby's connection with Brit also exemplifies waitness as they engage in a romantic affair and embark on travels to different cities, expressing a longing for adventure and a departure from societal expectations. They are in a state of transition, postponing settling down to pursue meaningful experiences. Brit seeks solace by visiting a cemetery and relying on external forces, but she desires empowerment and purpose beyond waiting. Through her encounters, she undergoes personal growth and self-discovery, exemplified by her spiritual explorations and the pursuit of Suleika's legacy. In Lalami's text, Faten, Halima, Aziz, and Murad are presented with situations where they are awaiting enhanced prospects for their lives. Before attempting to cross borders, Halima is depicted as waiting for papers in view of a divorce from her husband, and the opportunity to migrate. Aziz is unemployed and Murad, a graduate student who works as a tourist guide, is desperately waiting for better employment opportunities. Halima, Aziz, and Murad find themselves caught in a state of stuckness<sup>4</sup>, where they are unable to move forward. After successfully crossing the border, Faten becomes stuck in a life of prostitution, waiting for legal papers. Aziz oscillates between Spain and Morocco, where his wife waits for him. Following his deportation back to Morocco, Murad is portrayed as a shopkeeper and a storyteller, and appears as living in a state of serene stasis, reflecting a sense of stillness and stability that he has found after risking his life on an inflatable boat. Furthermore, the concept of liminality provides additional interpretive hypotheses when analysing both texts, as seen through Brit's visit to Morocco and the crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar by the four central characters, events that align with Ashcroft et al.'s depiction of liminality as an "interstitial or in-between space, a threshold area" (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p. 145). On limbo situations Capps and Carlin write:

"during much of our life on this earth we experience some aspects of our lives as intermediate or indeterminate, so in this sense limbo is a sort of chronic condition from which we are never completely free. We wait in lines, we wait for a letter or e-mail, we wait for the light to turn green, we wait for a response after we have told a joke. On the other hand, there are

times in our lives when our sense of being in limbo is especially acute due to certain circumstances” (Capps and Carlin, 2010, p. 3).

This more intense form of limbo is broken down into five different classifications, which include youth, relationships, work, illness, and immigration, as instances of acute Limbo-experiences. Arguably, as her acute limbo situation involves “experiences of dislocation” (Ibid., p. 4) Brit is stuck and unable to fully embrace adulthood until she reaches Suleika’s tomb. Similarly, Lalami’s text invites the reader to accompany Faten, Halima, Aziz and Murad during their limbo experience. With respect to this, Abunasser explains that,

“Barzakh literally translates to ‘veil’ or ‘barrier’. In Islamic eschatology, it generally refers to the liminal space between the physical and spiritual worlds. Similar to the concept of limbo, barzakh is where the soul must wait between death and resurrection. While here, the soul can neither go back to the physical realm nor forward to the afterlife. Prominent Sufi philosopher Ibn al-Arabi (1165–1240) compares barzakh to ‘the time the embryo spends in its mother’s womb’” (Abunasser, 2016, p. 196).

Hence, one can argue that throughout the narrative, Faten, Halima, Aziz and Murad are trapped in a state of limbo to the extent that their lives have become suspended in an indeterminate state. Equally significant is that Lalami leads the reader into exploring the characters’ degrees and types of distress, the duration of their limbo situations, as well as the benefits and liabilities of living in limbo (Capps and Carlin, 2010, pp. 6-7). Elaborating further on this viewpoint, Capps and Carlin argue that,

“hope plays a very important role in sustaining us when we are in acute limbo situations ... it helps if we have a conscious awareness of what hope is, what the experience of hope involves, what may threaten hope, and what may help to sustain hope. This very awareness can play a critical role in our ability to respond to the love of God when we are in a dark place and beginning to lose our usual spirit of hopefulness – if indeed we have a spirit of hopefulness” (Ibid., pp. 7-8).

This insight sheds light on the intertwining of hope and limbo imagery, leading the reader to explore the struggles faced by the burners and the influence that hope exerts.

A further layer of interpretation can be uncovered by examining how both texts relate to genre-specific classifications. According to Alastair Fowler,

“Far from inhibiting the author, genres are a positive support ... The writer is invited to match experience and form in a specific yet undetermined way. Accepting the invitation does not solve his problems of expression ... But it gives him access to formal ideas as to how a variety of constituents might suitably be combined. Genre also offers a challenge by provoking a free spirit to transcend the limitations of previous examples” (Fowler, 1982, p. 31).

Considering this perspective, my assertion is that *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* can be read as texts that combine constituents of diasporic novels with elements from other genres. Specifically, Knafo Setton’s novel incorporates elements of the Gothic genre, while Lalami’s collection of short stories draws on the Rihla genre, and through the integration of these diverse constituents, the texts establish a distinct literary landscape. Explaining that an embedded genre is “a genre that is included within the framework of another genre”, Sune Auken puts forwards a distinction between “three kinds of embedding, ‘recontextualized embedding (from Bakhtin)’, ‘contextualized embedding’ (from Orlikowski & Yates), and ‘element genre’ (from Swales and Martin)” (Auken, 2021, p. 163). Auken further argues that,

“interpreting a complex genre necessitates a coherent understanding of the many simpler genres that constitute it. Thus, there is a dialectic relationship between the two levels. The embedded genres are transformed by their new generic context, but features are carried over from the original genre specifically to influence this new context. Thus, a genre will be defined by the genres it embeds, and will in turn define those genres” (Ibid., p. 166).

Whether by identifying Gothic features or Rihla elements in Knafo Setton’s and Lalami’s respective texts, these interpretive hypotheses illustrate the embedded nature of genres. Within a larger framework, these genres carry distinctive characteristics and meaning, shaping the new context and influencing the overall interpretation. Expanding on this, it is my assertion that further interpretive hypotheses can be formulated to explore the dialectic relationship between *The Road to Fez*



and pilgrimage literature, on one hand, and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*' affiliation with katabasis, on the other. *The Road to Fez* resonates with pilgrimage narratives' "curiosity – the interest of travellers in strange things, magnificent sights, other men's customs and beliefs" (Howard, 1980, p. 53), and the "religious purpose of the journey" (Davidson and Gitlitz, 2008, p. 17). On the other hand, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* exhibits resonances with "tale[s] of the journey to the subterranean world of the dead led by an extraordinary character while alive who has a determined purpose and is keen on returning" (Bernabé, 2015, p. 17), or "a Journey of the Dead made by a living person in the flesh who returns to our world to tell the tale" (Fletcher, 2019, p. 2). This additional layer of meaning, which offers valuable insight into Moroccan literature in English, invites analysis of the diptych formed by Brit and Gaby's storyline and the quadriptych formed by Faten, Halima, Aziz, and Murad, as they relate to road narratives whose formulaic patterns "emphasize protest, the search for a national identity, self-discovery, and experimentation or parody" (Brigham, 2013, p. 20). Both texts provide insights into the question of literary genre in relation to diasporic writing. Echoing this viewpoint, Zuzanna Olszewska asserts that,

"the forms and themes of diasporic writing have varied more widely than is often acknowledged, according to the socio-political conditions in which they arose, the nature of the relationship between the host and diasporic communities, the cultural traditions on which they draw or seek to innovate, and the individual creative ambition of the author in question" (Olszewska, 2019, p. 91).

In accordance with this line of argumentation, Setton Knafo and Lalami exemplify the literary variety of diasporic writing. Moreover, building upon the exiles' "plurality of vision" and "awareness of simultaneous dimensions" proposed by Edward Said, a "contrapuntal" reading of *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* not only challenges classificatory generalizations but also emphasizes the unique and innovative features of each diasporic text (Said, 2000, p. 186). Another relevant perspective is presented by Sune Auken who argues that "there is always individuality at work in genre use. Therefore, the relationship between the embedded and the embedding genre is bound to be as complex and variable, as the actual users make it" (Auken, 2021, p. 169). In light of this, Knafo Setton and Lalami manipulate genres, challenge conventions, and explore new

possibilities in their texts, while also sparking thoughts on the question of reader engagement. This interplay between author, reader, and genre fosters categorial instability, enabling innovative literary approaches and reflecting the fluid nature of literary expression.

## Conclusion

The reader discovers patterns of similarity in Knafo Setton and Lalami's texts due to their shared focus on the complex dynamics of diaspora. However, the distinct approaches to diasporic novels in *The Road to Fez* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* offer distinct insights into the Moroccan diaspora. Both texts explore the diasporic experience through a dialectic of the host nation and homeland, yet, in *The Road to Fez*, Brit's journey from El Kajda in Morocco to the United States highlights the tension between Morocco and Horsens, Pennsylvania. Similarly, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* follows four Moroccans venturing to Spain, challenging the prevailing myth of the homeland. Memory and discovery play a recursive mutual structuring role in both texts which also portray the experiences of the host nations and highlight the struggles of assimilation, adjustment, and the harsh realities faced by Moroccans in their new environments. Comparing Knafo Setton and Lalami's literary works allows for an exploration of several parallels and contrasts, particularly in relation to questions of genre. Interestingly, Knafo Setton blends elements of the Gothic, possession and incest narrative, while Lalami employs travel writing, secret emigration, leavism and *hrig* to delve into diasporic experiences. The defamiliarizing juxtaposition of Knafo Setton and Lalami's texts opens up a range of interpretive hypotheses and provides insight into the singularity of their literary contributions within the broader discourse on migration and diaspora. Both texts present distinct and individual literary articulations that incorporate elements of testimonies, waitthood, and fire imagery, while also combining elements of diasporic novels with other genres such as pilgrimage narrative and katabasis. A contrapuntal examination of Knafo Setton and Lalami's texts from a genre-oriented perspective raises questions about the interplay between the author, text, and reader. This approach sheds light on Moroccan literature in English and the distinct characteristics of diasporic writing and reading.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Original spelling, capitalization, punctuation and use of italics are retained.
- <sup>2</sup> On the semantic instability of “female masochism” cf. Rita Felski’s “Redescriptions of Female Masochism” (2005).
- <sup>3</sup> Diane Singerman coined the term “waithood” to describe the prevalent trend of educated young people in Egypt and other economically disadvantaged countries in the region delaying marriage (Singerman, 2007, p. 6). Singerman emphasizes that following the turbulent Arab uprisings in 2011, involuntary waithood has become increasingly common throughout the Middle East, particularly among youth residing in resource-poor societies like Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia.
- <sup>4</sup> I have retained the term “stuckedness” as coined by Ghassan Hage to convey “a sense of existential immobility” (Hage, 2009, p. 98). In my view, this term holds particular relevance as “stuckedness is by definition a situation where a person suffers from both the absence of choices or alternatives to the situation they are in and an inability to grab such alternatives even if they present themselves” (Ibid., p. 100). Besides, the term “stuckness” as a “politically charged term [that] emerged through reflections on how infrastructure failures can generate a feeling of being stranded” also resonates with the experiences of Halima, Aziz and Murad indicating “a specific form of waiting that emphasises a limit to future-oriented actions” (Straughan et al., 2020, p. 639).

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# DISABILITY DISCOURSES IN ROMANIA BEFORE 1916

Maria Bucur

## Abstract

This paper examines discourses about disability in Romania between the late nineteenth century and the beginning of World War I, with a focus on the military, philanthropic institutions, and medical institutions. Teasing out contradictions and divergencies among different historical actors with decision making power over disabled persons, the paper shows how the vocabulary for disability and thus public understanding of various forms of disability engendered a confusing set of assumptions about the relationship between these individuals and the able-bodied in society.

**Keywords:** disability; philanthropy; blind; deaf; medicine.

The frameworks through which discourses, laws, and policies about disability developed in modern Romania cannot be separated from their language. What experts, advocates, policy makers, and persons with disabilities themselves considered to be their specific conditions developed through a vocabulary that was understood differently by various participants. Ultimately, this vocabulary produced both confusion and further marginalization for persons with disability. Policy makers, government officials, medical experts, and advocates also operated with divergent understandings of these concepts. My contribution seeks to render visible some of these various significations and to open a path for further exploration of the discourses about disability in the second half of the nineteenth century Romania and until its entry into World War I.

## Historiography

Historians of Romania in the nineteenth century have paid little attention to disability and able-bodiedness as categories of historical significance or lived experience. One can point towards several areas where the work of historians has overlapped with this issue, but not towards sustained attention to how disability was understood and experienced in the Romanian lands. There is the work of historians dealing with medicine and examining the social frameworks that framed medical practice and understandings among a mostly rural and illiterate population. The works of Constantin Bărbulescu, Călin Cotoi, and Octavian Buda stand as excellent examples of critical examination of these entanglements.<sup>1</sup> There is, more recently, the emergent theme of quarantine and medical practice around epidemics, which is beginning to analyze the ways in which doctors, policy makers, and the military came to understand the need to isolate those deemed a public danger due to their medical conditions.<sup>2</sup> While disability itself is not the focus, the ways in which the state is mobilized through medicalized discourses about safety connects with the work historians of disability have done in other places. The work done by historians such as Cosmin Koszor-Codrea is bringing clarity to our understanding of what specific scientific discourses impacted the development of natural sciences—as research, teaching, and item of popular interest—in nineteenth century, with specific attention drawn to the racialized assumptions about biology, implicitly inclusive of questions of able-bodiedness and thus, disability.<sup>3</sup> Ligia Livadă-Cadeschi has published extensively on the topic of philanthropy, pity, and social assistance in the Romanian lands during the nineteenth century, and her contribution is important for grasping core elements about the way state and other institutions understood the poor as a social category.<sup>4</sup>

There is a small body of historiography dedicated to specific aspects of disability before World War I in Romania that helped me enormously with especially institutional aspects of the story. While these works are not in conversation with a larger historiography—on medicine, education, disability in other places—they are very valuable in terms of the basic narrative they provide and, at times, their bibliographic resources. Gheorghe Moldovan's *Educarea surdomușilor în România. De la primele preocupări până la sfârșitul celui de al doilea război mondial* is a remarkable synthesis in terms of its thorough research on the institutional development of educational institutions for the deaf in Transylvania,

Bukovina, the Banat, and the Romanian Principalities.<sup>5</sup> The author's overall argument is that the Romanian state, from its creation and into the interwar period, failed to engage with the needs, private initiatives, and demands of the deaf community and their allies in developing policies and directing resources towards the education of the deaf. His analysis aims to provide a clear and evidence-based narrative. The author is not interested in providing a critical reading from the perspective of the twenty-first century, but rather a close description of activities and specific methods that the teaching staff and curriculum developers articulated as best practices for empowering deaf children to become fully functional in their communities.

Another important contribution in focusing on the education for the blind is Nicolae Ionescu's *Azilul de orbi 'Regina Elisabeta' Vatra Luminoasă și rolul său instructiv-educativ. Monografie*.<sup>6</sup> Ionescu writes as a participant in the activities of Vatra Luminoasă, initially as a student and eventually as a teacher there. His book is more of a compilation of various shorter narratives that focus at times on the institution's history and at times on prominent people associated with it, primarily teachers. With a brief bibliography at the end, the book is less of a historical synthesis and more of a memoir. Its value rests both in providing a detailed first-person account from inside the blind community about that institution, as well as in highlighting major moments and persons that shaped the evolution of educational policy and practice for the blind community.

The historiography focusing on how disability came to be defined, how institutions shaped public policy (and *vice versa*), as well as how persons with disabilities experienced this environment in the nineteenth century has focused primarily on North America and Western Europe. Their findings have a great deal of relevance for the types of questions they ask regarding institutional development, the relationship between medicine and public policy relevant for the disabled, as well as the overall epistemic shift in our understanding of historical agency they propose.<sup>7</sup> But these cases are also quite different in many aspects from the Romanian lands, and thus present important limitations. And as with many other areas of historical research, to refer to them as forerunners and implicitly to Romania as a place "catching up" is to rearticulate a trope that reinforces other problematic epistemologies—about knowledge making and the West, about Europeaness as defined by Western case studies, and thus implicitly about backwardness. As such, I refer to these historiographic

case studies not as a framework to compare my study to, but as points of comparison at specific moments in my analysis.

## **The Military: Recruitment and Able-Bodiedness**

The first institution of the Romanian state to develop a public and policy related concept of able-bodiedness was the army. As the Romanian state came into being after 1859, several iterations of a law and rules for military recruitment introduced the notion of “validity” into public discourse. The 1864 law on the organization of the army and recruitment includes a section (III), article 33, that speaks directly about physical disability as an exception to the obligation to serve in the military among male citizens: “those whose physical weakness renders them ill-suited to serve, according to the rules of the army.”<sup>8</sup> Physical weakness becomes a mark of masculine weakness, though potential recruits may have seen such weakness as a relief rather than diminishment of their sense of masculinity. Regardless, from the point of view of normativizing male citizenship via military service, physical disability becomes a category of exclusion from participating in a broad type of public activity.<sup>9</sup>

Implicit in this exclusion is the inability to claim membership in the community of adult men who had served the military, together with an evolving set of attendant obligations and eventually rights that the state correlated with such service: the right to own property; access to specific jobs; pensions; the right to vote; and the veteran rights that expand significantly after 1918.<sup>10</sup> For those whose familial economic and social status provided access to economic autonomy/power, education, and other civic and political rights, serving in the military was less of a significant opportunity (or barrier to opportunity, for those deemed unsuited). At the same time, for those who were excused from military service, a tax of 6 lei and additional percentage of the family’s income of up to 2000 lei was to be paid annually for seven years. The money was to be used for the pension funds for officers in the military. In essence, disabled persons were to pay for the “privilege” of not serving in the military and helped support retired officers, some of them able-bodied.<sup>11</sup>

A reference to the specific regulations to be enforced by the medical personnel is not provided in the law at that time; they were, implicitly, an evolving set of conditions, as the medical and military authorities were to decide. In 1864, the Romanian medical establishment was

nascent. Few doctors existed in Romania. A school that provided basic medical training had been established in 1857 in Bucharest, and the first Faculty for Medicine was established in 1869. In short, the existence and qualifications of a medical personnel who were tasked with examining potential recruits followed, rather than predated the 1864 law. I will return to these important regulations shortly, as detailed in a 1913 regulation.

In the development of these legislative measures, military and medical authorities worked together closely: Carol Davila, who established the first Romanian institution of medical training as an autonomous school, was appointed to that position as a member of the military. At that time, many elements of public health policy, from control against epidemics to quarantines, were in the hands of the military. Military and civilian doctors worked together in a number of hospitals in Bucharest, and the army sometimes reserved beds inside the civilian hospitals. The Sanitary Service of the Army had a long and multilayered relationship with the civilian medical institutions, as demonstrated amply in the archival resources of the Ministry of War.<sup>12</sup> Military doctors occasionally requested funds from the Ministry to travel abroad for specialization, with the intention of serving better in their professional capacity, not just as officers in the army.

The military framework underscored here in defining physical ability speaks to both the epistemic limitations and also institutional foundations for further public policies regarding disability after 1918. It is not the only epistemic framework, and I will return to this shortly, but it is a dominant public framework, with legal comprehensive authority and direct consequences for half of the country's population. If we consider the fact that every young cis-male was a potential recruit, and every potential recruit had to be examined to determine whether he was physically able to fulfill his military obligations, this means that the army was the one institution that evaluated 50% of the population of Romanian starting in 1864, with the ability to note and enforce a basic notion of "normal" in terms of physical/health qualities for each of those individuals. In addition, such evaluations were the likely first and possibly only interaction between these potential recruits and the medical profession, especially among those living in the countryside. Such interactions offered the opportunity to become familiarized to some extent with the notion of the "normal" in terms of physical ability and to assume an individuated attitude towards that norm. And for those who did not fit that norm, this interaction offered the possibility for further investigation into the meaning, individuated

impact, as well as possible actions to address such “insufficiencies,” or “infirmities,” as the 1864 law defined them.

By 1913, the Ministry of War had compiled a comprehensive list of infirmities and “debilities” that would allow for the recruit to be excused from military service. The long list (133 articles, each with several conditions listed) deserves its own separate analysis and includes everything from diabetes and lupus to deformations of the mouth and hermaphroditism.<sup>13</sup> The criteria expressed at the beginning focuses on two basic issues: 1. Could the recruit function in all the areas required by the military on his own, without needing assistance from his mates? And 2. Would the appearance or medical conditions of the recruit disturb the rest of the company in such a way as to prevent the normal operation of the unit?<sup>14</sup> The answer to these two sets of possible problems would be provided through a medical examination by a military doctor appointed as part of the recruitment commission and then would be subject to a vote by the whole commission. Only unanimous votes would carry. Any dissent would have to be brought to the attention of the Ministry of War and then verified further by a commission of revision.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the exams were clearly prescribed as public, on the one hand, and minimal in terms of what the doctor was empowered to examine closely, on the other hand. How military doctors would have been trained to recognize all the conditions present in these regulations will be discussed further below.

Some forms of disability seem more obvious and easier to detect. A blind recruit would be excused summarily. Someone unable to walk would also be excused. But medical conditions and disabilities that were not clearly visible, for instance diabetes or “hysteria,” had to be documented beforehand and brought to the attention of the commission to be verified. A certificate from a doctor was required to inform the commission, but the diagnosis had to be verified by the military doctor. In 1913, the number of people who had ever visited a doctor, especially young men in the countryside, the vast majority of the recruits, was a tiny proportion of the total population. It is fair to assume that some conditions were undetected at that point and could not be verified on the spot. In short, the comprehensive list existed on paper, but there is little likelihood that doctors verified all the possible conditions listed there, especially those not detectable by sight.

The specific reference to making sure all recruits did not disturb the normative understandings of everyone else in the unit is a striking aspect of the regulations. One can imagine a variety of issues that may arise, which

would be relevant for understanding how “disability” was defined under these circumstances. Under that provision, literally anything that did not fit with social expectations could be deemed such a “disability.” One of the strangest conditions for being excused from service seems to be based on such irregularities: “excessive” baldness. Though present among many men over the age of 50, for those who were around 18 baldness would have been highly unusual. Baldness does not interfere with discharging military obligations, such as firing a gun. So, it must have been the kind of response it invoked, rather than any specific medical concern regarding the recruit, that added baldness to the conditions for exclusion.<sup>16</sup> So what sort of “disability” is baldness? The reference to several other items points to a possible explanation. I already mentioned “hermaphroditism” as a reason for being excused; other so-called irregularities of sexual organs were mentioned, such as the absence of a testicle or enlarged testicles. Sexuality itself was under the microscope in these examinations and a certain type of normal masculinity emphasized by these exceptions. None of these sexual organ specificities cause a person not to be able to hold a gun, fire a canon, or ride a horse. They are simply individual particularities that become visible when a group of men lived and bathed naked in common spaces. These exceptions must relate to the second cause for exemption, making those around them uncomfortable or “disgusted,” as the Romanian original pointedly indicates. Disgust at the appearance of a particularity among male sexual organs can only be related to a normative understanding of masculinity, as related to familial upbringing, education, social expectations, and personal experience. It is unlikely most, if any recruits had seen the sexual presentation of a hermaphrodite. Doctors today estimate that fewer than .06% of children are born with visible intersex presentation. There is no evidence to suggest Romania in 1913 would have had a different ratio. To make that a specific condition for exclusion seems like an excessive type of particularity, in terms of its likelihood of occurrence. It strikes me as more likely a way of framing a specific type of masculine norm and excluding all other types of masculine presentation.

After the medical examination and definition of specific causes for exclusion, the doctor proposed particular items, but the commission had to agree to it unanimously. We don’t know what extent such unanimity was reached through thorough discussion or whether the rest of the commission deferred to the doctor. But the institutional norm suggests that medical expertise was considered not sufficient in itself. Individuals

who likely had no training whatsoever in medical examinations (one of the members of the commission was the prefect, for instance) had the responsibility to vet the medical exam. At the very least, this implies that the military expected all these officials to become familiar with the medical vocabulary about disability in the law. For instance, since the regulations stated as fact that deafness was not a reason for exclusion from military service, but “deaf-muteness”<sup>17</sup> was, the prefects serving on these commissions learned that these were two different conditions and that one was significantly more severe than the other, counting as a formal disability.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, norms of masculinity as discussed above would be reinforced through this process of learning by the non-medical personnel.

Finally, there is the issue of how self-inflicted disabilities were treated. The regulations stated clearly that missing two fingers meant exclusion from service.<sup>19</sup> But the same paragraph explained that any kind of self-mutilation, for instance two missing fingers, would not excuse someone from service. In the formulation of the difference between the two conditions, one might also wonder whether a man who had severed two fingers playing as a child ten years prior would have been treated differently from someone who had done so more recently, six months prior to being called up.

One can understand the desire to dissuade potential recruits from self-mutilation as a way to avoid military service. Yet the rationale for excluding one category of men and not another is something not clearly explained and deserves further attention, as it helps us understand the moral underpinnings of the definition of disability at that time. If functionally, missing two fingers meant that a soldier could not perform his soldierly duties fully, what justified the inclusion of another soldier without two fingers? Was it a type of punishment for the one who had self-mutilated? A way to make him stand out as a coward and potentially be bullied by others in the company? Was that a way to unify the unit and not provoke problems of morale? There is an underlying idea here, I believe, about “worthy” disabilities. For those who had such a disability without having provoked it themselves, a sense of pity and overall understanding was likely present among the commission members. Normatively, these unfortunate individuals suffered enough and did not need to perform their soldierly duty. For those who had provoked the disability presumably to avoid the draft, a moral angle of dishonesty and cowardness was imputed. These were not “deserving” disabled men.



A partial examination of the medical certificates for disability provided in the 1890s by the Buzău recruitment center suggests that the most frequent reason for dismissal was tuberculosis. It is followed by other conditions, such as epilepsy and syphilis. Some soldiers were also dismissed from the army after incurring these conditions, suggesting the vetting was not quite as thorough as the army had hoped. And some soldiers were rendered disabled by specific service they did: some went deaf serving in the artillery and were dismissed due to this condition, though they don't seem to have earned any benefits or disability pensions.

A curious disability appears along these other conditions: "stupiditas."<sup>20</sup> The latinized version of stupidity gives the diagnosis an extra layer of medical authority, though it was based on a summary exam: "I tried to talk with the fellow and could not make myself understood." It should be added that the medical regulations did not include this condition as a reason for dismissal from the army. Thus, disability could be summarily affirmed by the recruiting doctor, presented as scientifically sound via Latin, and then pass as legitimate reason. One has to wonder, how thorough were these medical evaluations?

After 1864, the army provided a detailed articulation of what it meant to be invalid as a potential recruit, placing half of Romania's population in front of a commission tasked with evaluating, and in fact judging each man against a long list of potential disabilities. This list represented the most comprehensive framework for exclusion (or relief, depending on how each individual understood serving in the army) on the basis of disability in pre-1916 Romania; yet it also contained the possibility for confusion and self-contradiction. And it blended medical conditions with physical and moral categories of presumed disability that focused as much on the socio-cultural norms of masculinity at that time as on actual functionality of the individual soldier in the army.

### **Medical Institutions: Eforia Spitalelor**

Another institution that defined physical health and respectively disability in the nineteenth century was *Eforia Spitalelor* (The Hospitals' Ward, henceforth Eforia), along with other non-governmental organizations that operated as asylums for people with disability. I will highlight important discursive and policy related aspects of these organizations in relation to their care for persons with disability before World War I, as well as their role

in training doctors, inclusive of those who served on the army recruitment commissions. Established in 1832 as part of the Organic Statutes, Eforia became the largest network of hospitals and other healthcare institutions before World War I, essentially a public-private partnership. From the beginning, this institution aimed to combine public health with social assistance measures, in essence connecting able-bodiedness and disability to both medical definitions of health and disability, as well as to social, economic, and cultural definitions of acceptable or “normal” behavior. Access to these institutions was understood to be free and limited to those without the means to care for themselves. The private endowments that generated the resources (land, buildings, human resources, food, etc.) necessary to run these establishments explicitly interlinked illness, chronic or permanent physical disability, and poverty in their concept of philanthropy.

This discursive connection between care and pity at the heart of this establishment was framed by the Christian faith of the donors, a trend common across European countries at that time.<sup>21</sup> We can see the important role played by religion in the eighteenth-century illustration at the beginning of the first comprehensive historical monograph dedicated to the history of this institution, published in 1932. This image is identified as part of “The Book of The Brotherhood” from Colțea Monastery (1706), “representing a hospital scene.”<sup>22</sup> Various physical ailments are visible, inclusive of a bandaged leg and a crutch, an image of limited physical mobility. Christ is present in the center of the room as a guiding spirit. We are to understand that care for the sick and disabled was best entrusted to those with both knowledge of medicine and followers of Christian morality. If at the beginning of the eighteenth century this was a common perspective all over Europe, by 1932, when the book was published, in Western Europe and North America, the central role of religious authorities in caring for the ill and disabled had been greatly challenged by secular institutions, especially medical ones.<sup>23</sup> Religious denominations still funded and housed hospitals, but the role of the clergy and other non-medical personnel had been relegated to the level of supporting staff. This prominent representation of religious authority in the Romanian case suggests a more accommodating relationship with religious institutions and ideas about health and caregiving into the twentieth century. One might even describe the view of the Church in healthcare as uncritical, or even supportive.

Eforia had a complicated history over the nineteenth century in terms of working with state institutions, but overall its financial operations had been supported by private endowments and donations.<sup>24</sup> Its funds came not only from princes and other male leaders of the boyar class. Many women—wives, daughters, and widows of boyars—donated from their wealth, some in extremely generous amounts.<sup>25</sup> This is a largely under-researched and underrepresented aspect of premodern philanthropy in Romania and deserves further attention.

The types of funding that helped build the large endowment of Eforia represented a complex articulation of various ideas about: public healthcare; Christian duty to serve the poor; fears of contamination (especially in terms of epidemics, but not only); and the impulse to separate those deemed normal and able to be fully integrated in society from those considered abnormal. Engaging with disability was a core consideration of how this organization operated, similarly to asylums run by philanthropic organizations in other parts of Europe.<sup>26</sup> In the 1932 monograph about Eforia, the word “disability” appears nowhere. Instead, other vocabularies suggest specific understandings of disability.

The motivation for the donations and endowments that lead to the building of the various hospitals is closely connected to the desire to perform Christian good deeds, as well as the goal to return those afflicted and considered estranged from God to the care of God and thus potential salvation. The level of close detail in which religious rituals are described and financially facilitated by the donors indicates that these donors saw themselves as interceding on behalf of individuals fundamentally unable, or disabled from performing their Christian duties and thus otherwise condemned to damnation. One deed uses the word “*pătimaș*” to describe the condition of the people to be taken in by these private foundations, which in the early nineteenth century parlance referred directly to illness.<sup>27</sup> But the word came to mean “overtaken by irrational passions,” which suggests a similar earlier understanding of illness: patients were overtaken by illness and became unable, or disabled, from performing their Christian duties. Hospitals offered the possibility for these poor lost souls to regain their proper place among other Christians, if not in terms of health, at least in terms of their salvation.<sup>28</sup>

One donation deed compares those who do not receive proper last rites to animals: “let them not die like mute/unspeaking [*“fara grai”*] beasts and let their bones not rot in the desert.”<sup>29</sup> The humanity of these patients is bound with their Christian faith and the rituals that mark it. Implicitly,

those unable to perform such rites could not achieve salvation, and that would also include anyone who was not an Orthodox Christian.

Such an understanding could include the notion that a deaf person could not hear the word of God and understand it, and thus could not possess full humanity. Someone who was physically disabled may not be able to perform the rituals associated with faithful observance of Christianity and may not be able to achieve salvation. For such individuals, the hospital was a place where others could intercede on their behalf, as protected, sanctuary-like spaces. Since most of hospitals were housed along monasteries or churches, one can see the direct linkage developed by donors between health and salvation, and, conversely, between illness and disability and damnation.

If spiritual salvation was a paramount goal for hospital donors, isolating the patients from the rest of the population was another objective. In the deeds endowing Eforia with real estate and funding, this goal is expressed repeatedly and with clarity: “do not allow anyone among the healthy to come together with the ill or anyone among the ill reach out to those who are healthy... and do not allow the ill to try and return to their homes here in the city among the healthy .”<sup>30</sup> Since some of these hospitals, such as Pantelimon, were intended in part for quarantining during cholera and typhoid fever epidemics, the urge to isolate and separate can be in part understood as a means to minimize the spread of epidemics. However, other patients were to be housed in the same hospitals, including Pantelimon. That hospital came to include a surgery section, an internal medicine section, and a mental illness section. Patients with mental disabilities were to be treated under the same umbrella principle of isolation from the rest of the community. This is a common pattern in many other hospitals and asylums around the world into the late nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> The fear of contagion from non-communicable diseases and disabilities was reinforced by these rules regarding the need to isolate the patients from the rest of the population.

This principle of isolating the ill begat several consequences for persons with disabilities and those around them. The Eforie hospitals created the infrastructure for rendering disabled persons invisible, and for freeing families of the need to care for them, especially among the poor. Those who had the ability to bring such patients to hospitals like Pantelimon, Filantropia, and Colentina could find peace of mind in the knowledge that the “expert” caregivers—doctors and priests, together with the burial staff (the job of “*cioclu*” [grave digger] was specified in

the endowment for Pantelimon, for instance)<sup>32</sup>—would tend to all the earthly and spiritual needs of the disabled. For the poor, this may have been a tremendous opportunity to avoid the shame and pain of dealing with a family member with needs that the rest of the family may not have understood and could not fulfill in the larger context of their daily lives and poverty. With Eforia committed to sheltering and feeding all patients who entered their hospitals, poor families were able to find a solution to a life-long problem of caring for someone who was a constant burden.

Three types of disability are mentioned specifically in the development of these privately endowed hospitals: mental disability, tuberculosis, and blindness. Mental disability appears under the name of “mentally alienated” patients, with several hospitals reserving special sections for such patients. A definition of “alienation” is not offered, but that terminology becomes common parlance in the twentieth century and continues to be used in Romanian today. The word suggests estrangement from the norm and may have been initially connected more directly to straying from Christian norms and behavior, regardless of the cause—psychological, economic, social, sexual. Though moral categories of alienation are not mentioned explicitly, the presence of Christian symbology and of language that associates Christian faith with the care for the ill, implies this additional layer of the cultural and social discursive framework for defining disability and illness.

One explicit reference in the history of Eforia suggests such implicit understandings: a hospital set up in Ploiești in 1846 included “fifteen beds paid by the city for ‘looking after women suffering from worldly maladies’.”<sup>33</sup> Most likely this refers to syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases, under definitions deployed at that time. The one curious aspect of the set-up is the exclusive reference to women, especially since such “worldly maladies” were transmitted through sexual contact, implying in the heteronormative discourse of that time a likely equal number of men with the same illnesses. Overall, the hospital was open to both men and women. I speculate that this specific care is a reflection of understanding sexuality in Christian normative ways, which extended men greater license in sexual activity outside and before marriage, while greatly restricting women’s appropriate sexual activity to marital copulation for the purpose of reproduction.<sup>34</sup> “Worldly maladies” might have also included pregnancies out of wedlock, and not just sexually transmitted diseases.

Tuberculosis was another illness whose origins and cure were poorly understood at that time, and which was considered a form of disability,

because of the pain and forms of physical immobility it produced in many who contracted it. The fact that it was also a communicable disease rendered tuberculosis another specific case for isolating the ill and physically disabled from the healthy population. Several sanatoria were developed by Eforia to provide such care and isolation, one in the mountains in Sinaia (with 70 beds), and another at the seaside, in Techirghiol, which later took on the name Eforie from the organization that founded the sanatorium.<sup>35</sup> The seaside sanatorium was initially reserved for a specific category of disabled patients: war invalids and orphans, adults and children brought together in the summer months for special cures to alleviate their condition. This blending of explicitly disabled patients (“war invalid veterans”) with children whose disability included their social status as war orphans, and thus in the special care of the state, is something that we see in other instances of policy making starting in the interwar period.<sup>36</sup>

Blindness is the third category of disability on which the Eforia efforts focused explicitly. Both the Colțea and Filantropia hospitals included ophthalmology sections. Blindness was not mentioned explicitly, but references to both ophthalmology sections and to “consultations for eye illnesses” imply an institutional interest in a variety of medical conditions that affect eyesight, which include the permanent loss of partial or complete eyesight, a physical functional disability.

Eforia hospitals were essential for training future doctors. As the director of the establishment, Carol Davila set up a system whereby students at the newly opened medical school were to do their clinical practice in these hospitals. According to the monograph written after the closing of Eforia, the institution shouldered “nearly all of the clinical education needs of the Faculty of Medicine” before World War I.<sup>37</sup> In 1932, the medical school had 15 specific clinics and 1000 beds reserved for this purpose. The number of beds was likely smaller by a quarter before 1916.<sup>38</sup> The specializations available to the students in the fifteen clinics were: surgery (including pediatric), dermatology, dentistry, radiology, ophthalmology, otorhinolaryngology, mental diseases, orthopedy, genital-urinary, and general medicine.<sup>39</sup>

The specializations represented in these clinics cover a wide range of illnesses, but not all hospitals saw every kind of patient and treated every kind of illness. The Colțea hospital had eight of the fifteen clinics and thus the widest scope of possible training. Filantropia had four and Colentina and the Children’s hospital each two. If someone did clinical

studies at Colentina, they would gain expertise in mental diseases and genital-urinary illnesses, but not any other specialization. If a student did their training at Colțea, they would be exposed to a much wider array of medical conditions, but not mental diseases. I insist on the importance of this uneven training because doctors who graduated from the medical school in Bucharest were among most of those who ended up in the military as part of recruitment commissions mentioned in the previous section. They were tasked with providing the expertise that would identify illnesses and disabilities which would count as reasons for not going in the army; therefore, the education they received in the clinical settings provided by the Eforia hospitals was of paramount importance. And, based on the organization of medical clinical education through the Eforia hospitals, it seems few in fact gained the ability to easily diagnose all the medical conditions presented on the long list of conditions that could excuse one from military service.

### **Philanthropic Organizations: Vatra Luminoasă**

In addition to the philanthropic establishments with a medical profile, a number of non-governmental organizations with a charitable and educational profile catering to disabled communities developed before World War I. The best known among them is Vatra Luminoasă (the Bright Hearth), a residential asylum for the blind established by Queen Elisabeth in 1906. This organization deployed some of the same definitions of disability in relation to social norms as the institutions described above, but it developed its own specific profile. Vatra Luminoasă stands out especially because persons with disabilities become part of the personnel who ran the establishment, and thus, it represents a meeting ground of societal norms about able-bodiedness and disability, on the one hand, and the understanding and embodiment of reactions to those definitions by persons with disability. Vatra Luminoasă is the closest institutional reflection of the voice of the disabled in shaping vocabularies of disability in Romania before World War I.

Vatra Luminoasă was the brainchild of Romania's first queen, Elisabeth, who was born in Wied and was brought up in the philanthropic culture of Catholic Germany. Her inspiration was the National Institute for Blind Youth in Paris, together with a similar establishment in her native Wied.<sup>40</sup> Starting in 1889, the queen spent nearly two decades advocating

for building an asylum where the blind—adults and children—could live together as a community, building lives, receiving an education, and acquiring skills that would enable them to live economically self-sufficiently. Initially imagined on a larger scale (as inspired by the French model), Vatra Luminoasă was eventually inaugurated in 1908. It represented the most substantial institutional investment in pre-World War I Romania in empowering persons with disability to lead full lives. Today it continues to do so for over 150 students, though it is no longer a living center for adults beyond those pursuing post-high school professional training.

Vatra Luminoasă was not the only institution in Romania where children with disabilities received an education and life-long employment skills. It was, however, the most developed one in terms of thinking comprehensively about the needs of persons with disabilities across their life cycle, inclusive of marriage and raising families. As such, it represents a unique and powerful model in Romanian society in terms of attending to the full humanity of persons with disability. Unfortunately, it remained the only such institution and eventually was transformed into a lesser version of its initial vision during World War I and afterwards.

From the beginning, Vatra Luminoasă included the voices of the blind in setting up the living quarters, in building the curriculum, and raising funds for the institution. The queen stood at the top of this endeavor and her title, wealth, and network of rich connections made an enormous difference in the fundraising and institution building efforts. Looking at the *Vatra Luminoasă* weekly publication that appeared for nearly two years as a fundraising and awareness raising mechanism, one can read the lists of names and amounts donated for the building and maintenance of the establishment. The predominance of non-Romanian names and locations is striking, as is the significant number of women who donated.<sup>41</sup> Based on these lists, it is tempting to conclude that the philanthropic effort was much more effective among the German-born monarchs' circle of admirers in Germany and other Western European places than among the Romanian aristocracy, who was donating more generously to the Eforia endowments.

Until today, the personnel and alumni from Vatra Luminoasă speak of Elisabeth with awe, almost like a mythological character. Of her generosity and dedication to the project, there is no doubt. She donated half of her living allowance to get the project going and spent a lot of her cultural capital to get others to donate generously. But the success of the



enterprise was as much connected to the role played by members of the blind community who worked to build and maintain the place.

In the years preceding the building of the permanent site of the “colony for the blind,” as Vatra Luminoasă was dubbed, members of the blind community spent time in temporary and not particularly well-suited buildings engaging in educational and work activities, as well as fundraising. The most important campaign was that of 1906. Carol I decided to celebrate his fortieth anniversary on the throne of Romania by organizing a National Exhibition modeled after the World’s Fairs or Universal Exhibitions hosted in Western Europe and North America at that time, and possibly as a response to Hungary’s stupendous millennium celebrations a decade earlier.<sup>42</sup> A huge swamp in the South of Bucharest was drained for this and six million lei allocated to the expansive display of regal accomplishments. In addition to many pavilions signaling either national strength or friendship with various other countries, the exhibition put on performances of various kinds, inclusive of projects for social welfare, such as infant care. It was also a place that aimed to entertain the masses of visitors who came from all over Romania and beyond.

Along these lines, members of the blind community were transported to the exhibit every day for months, to perform good deeds and raise money for building Vatra Luminoasă.<sup>43</sup> Adults sat around manufacturing chairs, making brooms, and crocheting. Children performed calisthenics and other choreographed movements. The blind orchestra, under the direction of a very talented composer and conductor, Avram Levi Ivela, performed live music. More than a million people visited the exhibition and many donated to the cause of the blind. In short, the blind community worked very hard to perform their deeds and their disability in front of a wide public, accomplishing several things at the same time. They raised the money needed to complete the building they would eventually live and work in. They familiarized the wider public with the kinds of activities—productive, recreational, creative—that the blind could perform. And they spent time together being seen and appreciated by the community of seeing people, and an enormous number at that.

We don’t know to what extent this experience was entirely positive and to what extent it felt exploitative to the blind. Writing about the event decades later, one of the residents at Vatra Luminoasă expressed gratitude regarding the opportunity given to the blind to participate in the fundraising and for the results of the campaign.<sup>44</sup> This is not a surprising perspective, considering both the lack of visibility and support for the

blind before Vatra Luminoasă, as well as after the beginning of World War I.<sup>45</sup> Every available piece of evidence (but there are not many that were not filtered for fundraising purposes) suggests the blind community saw this campaign and its results as an overall positive experience. I have no reason to doubt it.

However, in the larger context of understanding disability in Romanian society, this fundraising campaign enabled the continuation of a framework that focused attention and resources on the so-called “deserving” persons with disabilities. It was charity that undergirded the donations and rendered the disabled vulnerable, dependent on the whims of the able-bodied who may or may not be willing to be generous in relation to the blind. The king and queen provided direct resources for Vatra Luminoasă, but Carol I also spent enormous amounts on the pageant dedicated to his own greatness. In that larger context, the performance of “deserving” blindness was also a form of paying tribute to the great king, his generosity and vision. The notion that the state had the obligation to look after and see to the education of blind children, for instance, was not part of the vision and advocacy for Vatra Luminoasă. Neither the Romanian elected officials, nor their visionary German-born king saw the blind as individuals who deserved that type of attention and those types of resources by virtue of being born in Romania and being king’s subjects, though most of them were not yet full citizens.

Another initiative that focused on care and education for persons with disability was the combined effort of Alexandru Ioan Cuza and his wife, Elena, to establish in 1863 an asylum initially for orphaned girls, which eventually became also a place where deaf children were brought to be educated and housed. This overlap between orphan children and children with disabilities is a recurrent framework in healthcare and education in Romania and continued into the twentieth century. In this case, disability becomes related to the inability of children with no living family to be taken care of and to develop into well-functioning adults. The definition might be considered generous, if the charitable organization that created the asylum did, in fact, see to these needs. But the Doamna Elena Cuza Asylum was hardly such a place. It was well intentioned, though not well funded and staffed. And for deaf children to be placed together with the rest of the population without seeing to their specific needs was not necessarily an improvement in their lives. It may have been a place of daily pain and humiliation.

Carol Davila, already mentioned above, made the special effort to open the section for the deaf. While initially boys and girls were housed and educated together, in 1865 they were separated, with the girls remaining *in situ* at the Cotroceni asylum. The conditions under which these girls lived and were educated are largely unknown, but there is no evidence that staff with training in sign language and with an understanding of deafness as a condition existed in this establishment. The girls received some basic training in manual work and spent most of their time performing these tasks.<sup>46</sup> What happened to them after they became adults is not known.

In 1865 the boys were transferred to a hospital for mental diseases in Pantelimon.<sup>47</sup> It is hard to comment on what the conditions for those young men were in terms of living quarters and a space where they could develop their abilities. But the Pantelimon hospital did not have a good reputation and was seen as a place where the “mentally alienated” were put away, isolated from the rest of society. Placing these differently disabled children in that same overall space seems a rather ill-suited choice that disregarded their educational, emotional, and overall living needs.

As narrated by a historian of education for the deaf, the boys were integrated into a type of military academy education. They had to wear military uniforms and undergo military training.<sup>48</sup> In addition, they received professional training in tailoring, shoe repairs, wood work, draftsmanship, and several other skills appropriate for white collar office employment. But the institution lasted less than twenty years and the Ministry of Education dispersed the deaf boys in several smaller locations in Bucharest. After 1895, the deaf students from all Bucharest establishments were moved to Focsani, an action characterized by one historian as deleterious, since the location made it harder for the deaf to advocate for themselves and easier for the Ministry of Education to ignore their needs.<sup>49</sup>

The contrast between the Vatra Luminoasă and the schools for deaf children highlights the uneven thinking about disabilities among philanthropic and state institutions, and among the most educated and wealthy of Romania’s classes. Without Elisabeth’s interceding, one category of disabled persons fell between the cracks of medical and social indifference. Persons with mental disabilities continued to be placed in hospitals that aimed to isolate them from others and to limit the presumed burden on their families. But most people with disabilities lived in the countryside, where no hospitals, asylums, or schools existed. These people remained in the care of their families and at the whim of these rural communities’ understanding about their specific needs.

The 1893 education law, which contained a series of exclusionary provisions for some categories of children (especially the Jewish population), made the first mention regarding persons with disabilities. Within the larger context of the post-1864 mandatory primary education for both boys and girls, which obligated the state to train more teachers, open more schools, and enforce the law by ensuring that all children went to school, the law stated that “weak or mentally underdeveloped” (nedezvoltați la minte) children may attend regular school, with a delay of 1-3 years, and that they would be able to study until the age of 15, regardless of the highest grade in which they had enrolled the previous year. Such a provision may be charitably interpreted as providing universal access. But a closer and more contextualized reading suggests a different intention and certainly different outcomes. Giving permission to a family to keep a child with disabilities at home longer would not necessarily be to the advantage of the child, especially if the family was not able to provide some skills for interacting with other children, such as sign language for the deaf. By the same token, without any specific provisions for training teachers in specific skills necessary for working with children with disabilities, the classroom was not necessarily a place of inclusion and access to education, either. The state created no basic requirements and did not vet teachers to test the existence of such skills. In short, it provided the appearance of inclusion, while taking no responsibility for the actual outcomes. The first law to actually spell out some of these responsibilities was passed in 1924.

## **Conclusions**

Before World War I, exclusion, isolation, invisibility, and at best Christian charity framed the ways in which Romanian society understood disability and engaged with the disabled. Persons with disabilities rarely had the opportunity to define their own condition and to act on situating themselves inside society as participating members of the larger community of Romanians, alongside able-bodied persons. A few among the blind were in that relatively-speaking privileged community. Otherwise, state institutions, like the military, defined disability as a basis for exclusion. Educational policy, for instance, made no specific provisions for children with disabilities and their position in the classroom until after World War I.

A powerful framework for understanding disability was the Romanian Orthodox Church, which undergirded the development of Romanian philanthropy over the nineteenth century, inclusive of the Eforia Spitalelor, the most extensive private-public partnership in Romania regarding healthcare before 1918. As I have shown, the Eforia combined Christian understandings and vocabulary about care with an evolving understanding of disability among the medical community. Overall, the two yielded a perspective that privileged isolating the disabled as a way to insulate the able-bodied community from contact and the burdens of care-taking. Being seen as lesser than the able-bodied and thus missing core elements of their full humanity, the disabled were viewed at best with pity and at worst with disdain and even repulsion.

Some of these perspectives created, however, the potential for some persons with disability to build community among themselves and to become less isolated, at least among other disabled folk. This is most visible in the case of Vatra Luminoasă. Likewise, children and adults who were placed in tuberculosis sanatoria found that their pain and anxieties were shared by others and sometimes created friendships and even fell in love in these places of exclusion and isolation.

The trend that started during this period, to isolate and exclude the disabled from the rest of society, continued after World War I, with some important changes in terms of how state institutions and non-governmental organizations defined the rights of the disabled and the responsibilities of the government and able-bodied society towards these persons. Doctors became essential gate-keepers in the process, and eugenics one of the powerful frameworks for defining who deserved support from the state.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Constantin Bărbulescu, *România medicilor. Medici, țărani, și igiena rurală în România de la 1860 la 1910*. București: Humanitas, 2015; Călin Cotoi, *Inventing the Social in Romania, 1848-1914: Networks and Laboratories of Knowledge*. Leiden: Brill, 2020; *Medicină socială și identitate națională. Antropologie culturală, psihiatrie și eugenism în România: 1800-1945*. București: Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române, 2013.
- <sup>2</sup> See the presentations at the conference “Carantine, epidemii, medici și sănătate publică în Principatele Dunărene/România (1774-1914),” hosted by the New Europe College in May 2023; program available at: <https://nec.ro/events/carantine-epidemii-medici-si-sanatate-publica-in-principatele-dunarene-romania-1774-1914/>.
- <sup>3</sup> Cosmin Koszor-Codrea, “The Word of Science: Popularising Darwinism in Romania, 1859-1918,” 2021, PhD Diss., Oxford Brookes University.
- <sup>4</sup> Ligia Livadă-Cadeschi, *De la milă la filantropie. Instituții de asistare a săracilor din Țara Românească și Moldova în secolul al XVIII-lea*. București: Nemira, 2001.
- <sup>5</sup> Gheorghe Moldovan, *Educarea surdomușilor în România. De la primele preocupări până la sfârșitul celui de al doilea război mondial*. Timișoara: Editura Politehnică, 2019.
- <sup>6</sup> Nicolae Ionescu, *Azilul de orbi ‘Regina Elisabeta’ Vatra Luminoasă și rolul său instructiv-educativ. Monografie*. București: Pandora, 2005.
- <sup>7</sup> Michael Rembis, Catherine Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- <sup>8</sup> *Legea și regulamentul pentru recrutarea armatei*, București: Editura “Curierul Judiciar,” SA, 1918, p. 10.
- <sup>9</sup> On the ways in which service in the military was linked to masculinity and provided men with specific rights in Romania after 1918, see Maria Bucur, *The Nation’s Gratitude: War and Citizenship in Romania after World War I*. London: Routledge, 2022.
- <sup>10</sup> For anyone who might imagine that veteran rights were basically earned by all who fought and have nothing to do with exclusionary gender norms, I recommend the following works: Maria Bucur, *The Nation’s Gratitude: War and Citizenship in Romania after World War I*. London: Routledge, 2022; and Maria Bucur, “Natalia Milița Geormăneanu: Microistoria unei ‘nesupuse’ ca demers în studiile de gen.” *Transilvania*, no. 11-12 (2020): 9-17.
- <sup>11</sup> *Legea și regulamentul pentru recrutarea armatei*, pp. 30—31.
- <sup>12</sup> Arhivele naționale ale României, Ministerul de Război, Serviciul Sanitar, inventar 2122.
- <sup>13</sup> *Legea și regulamentul pentru recrutarea armatei*, p. 139.

- <sup>14</sup> The specific directive reads: “[the doctor will examine] if there is an infirmity which, without interfering with the exercise of [military] functions, would have the nature of disgusting people and, thus, be incompatible with the communal life of soldiers.” Ministerul de războiu, *Instrucțiuni asupra boalelor, infirmităților și vitiilor de conformație incompatibile cu serviciul militar*. București: Tipografia Culturală, societate colectivă, 1913, p. 4.
- <sup>15</sup> *Legea și regulamentul pentru recrutarea armatei*, pp. 20-21.
- <sup>16</sup> There are medical conditions that can cause baldness among the youth, from stress to autoimmune diseases and thyroid problems. But those conditions were not known at the time.
- <sup>17</sup> As in other places around the world, the loss of hearing was referred to as “deaf muteness” at that time. Though challenges to the improper nomenclature appeared in the interwar period, I have not seen any other terminology for this disability in Romanian before World War I.
- <sup>18</sup> *Legea și regulamentul pentru recrutarea armatei*, pp. 130-31.
- <sup>19</sup> *Instrucțiuni asupra boalelor, infirmităților și vitiilor de conformație incompatibile cu serviciul militar : publicate în Monitorul Oficial nr. 236 din 23 ianuarie 1911 și Monitorul Oficial, partea regulamentară nr. 5 din 29 ianuarie 1911 cu modificările aduse prin Decizia ministerială nr. 50 din 31 ianuarie 1913, Monitorul Oastei, partea regulamentară nr. 5 din 31 ianuarie 1913*. București: Cultura, 1913, p. 15.
- <sup>20</sup> Arhivele naționale ale României, Ministerul de Război, inventar 2235, Cercul de recrutare Buzău, dos.1/1891, Fila 334.
- <sup>21</sup> Henri-Jacques Stiker. *A History of Disability*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019.
- <sup>22</sup> *Eforia Spitalelor Civile, 1832-1932*. București: Institutul de arte grafice E. Mârvan, 1932, p. 3
- <sup>23</sup> Rembis, Kudlick, and Nielsen., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History*.
- <sup>24</sup> *Eforia Spitalelor Civile*, pp. 51—61.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid. There are at least 67 individual female donors, some of them well know, like Olga Mavrocordat and Dora D’Istria, but most others still waiting further attention from historians.
- <sup>26</sup> Striker, *History of Disability*; Catherine Kudlick, “Social History of Medicine and Disability History,” in Rembis, Kudlick, and Nielsen., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History*, pp. 105–124.
- <sup>27</sup> *Eforia Spitalelor Civile*, p. 15.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 16.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid, 17.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid. I am translating freely from the pre-modern version in Romanian, which reads: “să nu lase pe nimenea să se împreune cu cine-va au din cei bolnavi cu vre-unii din cei sănătoși, au din cei sănătoși, cu vre-unii din cei bolnavi...

- nici să lase pre vreunii din cei bolnavi să tragă a se întoarce înapoi pre la casele lor, aci in oraș, întru cei sănătoși.’
- 31 Kudlick, “Social History of Medicine and Disability History.”
- 32 *Eforia Spitalelor Civile*, p. 17.
- 33 Ibid., 26. The Romanian reads: “15 paturi întreținute de oraș pentru ‘căutarea pătimașelor femei de boale lumești.’”
- 34 For more on these gender norms see chapter 1 in Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu, *The Birth of Democratic Citizenship: Women in Modern Romania*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018.
- 35 *Eforia Spitalelor Civile*, p. 36.
- 36 Bucur, *The Nation’s Gratitude*.
- 37 Ibid., 38.
- 38 I make this speculation on the basis of the total number of beds, which was 2000 in 1932 and around 1500 in 1914.
- 39 *Eforia Spitalelor Civile*, p. 41.
- 40 Ionescu, *Azilul de orbi ‘Regina Elisabeta’*, p. 19.
- 41 The list of donors was published regularly in the periodical, a type of fundraising technique common at that time. It both made public and thus praise the donors, and also encouraged further donation through a sense of obligation or even competition for conspicuous praise. The importance of women for the success of the philanthropic endeavor is illustrated also through repeated features of prominent women of the Romanian elite, among them Alexandrina Cantacuzino. See, for instance the 7 December, 1908, issue of *Vatra Luminoasă*.
- 42 I want to thank Călin Cotoi for suggesting this parallel.
- 43 Ionescu, *Azilul de orbi ‘Regina Elisabeta’*, p. 16.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Moldovan, *Educarea surdomușilor*, p. 39
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid., 40.



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# EVOCATIONS OF CHINA IN THE MUSIC OF GYÖRGY LIGETI

Joseph Cadagin

## Abstract

This paper traces the shifting significance of China in the music of Hungarian composer György Ligeti (1923-2006). In early instances of *chinoiserie* from the 1940s—including a black-key piano exercise and incidental music for the puppet play *Spring Flower*—Ligeti resorts to pentatonic essentializing to evoke childlike visions of a fairytale Orient. A half-century later, in his 2000 song cycle *Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel*, China reemerges as a far more nuanced, though no less imaginary space. Ligeti’s settings of Chinese-themed verses by Hungarian poet Sándor Weöres function as coded expressions of alienation and foreignness from an exile composer separated from his homeland.

**Keywords:** György Ligeti, Sándor Weöres, Hungary, China, Orientalism, exoticism, pentatonicism, migration, exile

Following the 1978 success of his first (and ultimately, only) opera, *Le Grand Macabre*, Hungarian composer György Ligeti began planning a follow-up—an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. This project was abandoned around 1990 in favor of an *Alice in Wonderland* musical-theater piece, which also remained unrealized at the composer’s death in 2006.<sup>1</sup> Yet Ligeti left behind over two hundred pages in preparatory material for these two works combined, almost entirely in the form of verbal sketches. A large portion of his notes for *The Tempest* are devoted to the character Ariel. As he explained in a 1982 letter to German writer Herbert Rosendorfer, a possible librettist, “the magical atmosphere of the island, the Ariel world, attracts me.”<sup>2</sup> In an undated sketch, he imagines a “BEAUTIFUL MAGIC SOUND”<sup>3</sup>—the likes of which have never been heard—to represent Shakespeare’s airborne spirit. These “magical chords” would be constructed from string and flute harmonics, supplemented with harmonica and possibly electronics.<sup>4</sup>

For Ariel's voice type, Ligeti takes into consideration the spirit's ability to shapeshift and imitate the voices of others. In another undated sketch, he toys with the possibility of triple-casting the role for a coloratura soprano, a tenor, and a deep bass, all of whom wear the same costume and mask.<sup>5</sup> Beneath this jotting, Ligeti mentions a special vocal style that might suit the character—what he calls “Buddhist *Sprechgesang*.” For an example of this “pure” or “clean” singing, he reminds himself to consult a cassette of Chinese Buddhist music, specifically a “pagoda chant.”<sup>6</sup> Although none of the tracks contain “pagoda” in the title, it's very likely that Ligeti is referring to the field recordings of ethnomusicologist John Levy, released by Lyrichord in 1969 as *Chinese Buddhist Music* and later reissued on cassette.<sup>7</sup>

Like hundreds of other sketches in the composer's notebooks, the page references a recording from his vast collection of non-Western music.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s, Ligeti gained a newfound appreciation for an enormous range of folk and classical traditions from across the globe. While the composer immersed himself in certain traditions—especially those of Sub-Saharan Africa—others remained on the periphery of his musical radar. Chinese music was one of these blind spots, yet we still find scattered allusions to China throughout his sketches and published oeuvre. In many ways, this brief *Tempest* sketch might serve as an entry point into understanding Ligeti's complex and shifting relationship to “China” as both a musical and cultural construct, which I attempt to trace in this study.

It's crucial to note that, in this jotting, Ligeti associates Chinese music with a magical, inhuman character who resides on an enchanted isle. In this sense, the composer's invocation of China seems to play into the kinds of tropes that Edward Said deconstructs in his landmark volume. Ariel's “noises, sounds and sweet airs” are rendered strange and alien when tinged with the vocal styles of Buddhist chant. By extension, Prospero's island begins to overlap with European fantasies of the Orient as “a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences,” as Said puts it.<sup>9</sup> And, indeed, in his earliest compositional evocations of China in the 1940s, Ligeti was guilty of such Orientalist essentializing, painting “the mysterious East” through stereotyped pentatonic melodies.<sup>10</sup> These compositions, in the tradition of Bartók's ballet *The Miraculous Mandarin*, largely fit into Yayoi Uno Everett's third category of “East-meets-West” encounters in post-1945 art music: works that “evoke Asian sensibilities without the explicit borrowing of preexistent

musical materials or styles,” often through “Western approximations of oriental melodies.”<sup>11</sup>

However, returning to the *Tempest* sketch, it isn’t clear that Ligeti intended to imitate or appropriate Buddhist chant as an explicit musical evocation of China. Rather, he seems to be interested in a certain mode of delivery and a purity of vocal timbre in the abstract—a singing style that just happens to be represented on a cassette of Chinese music. Scholars have characterized Ligeti’s African borrowings in a similar manner, identifying a process of abstraction and admixture—i.e. extracting polyrhythmic structures and combining them with comparable techniques from other musical traditions.<sup>12</sup> Given his experiences as a Holocaust survivor and a Hungarian exile in Western Europe, Ligeti was sensitive to the dangers of essentialization. “As the antithesis of the exotic,” writes Amy Bauer, “Ligeti’s non-Western other would no longer be trivialized, marginalized, or parodied; it would take its rightful place as the new modernity.”<sup>13</sup>

But this is not to say that exoticism is totally absent from Ligeti’s late works. As we see in the *Tempest* sketches, the composer sought strange, unheard-of sounds that could instill a sense of magic and mystery. China, the original playground of exoticism in Ligeti’s early works, resurfaces fifty years later during his late period—in some respects, no less exoticized. Two of the central movements of his 2000 song cycle *Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel* (With pipe, drum, and reed fiddle) for mezzo-soprano and percussion are settings of Chinese-themed verses by Hungarian poet Sándor Weöres. To dismiss these songs as mere *chinoiserie* is to grossly misunderstand their cultural, biographical, and musical complexities. In what follows, I demonstrate how China—though consistently an imaginary space in Ligeti’s music—transforms as a concept in his oeuvre. In his late-period evocations of China, Ligeti consciously avoids essentializing musical stereotypes. But, rather paradoxically, he continues to strike a tone of foreignness, albeit as a form of self-reflection and not out of an Orientalist impulse to otherize China.

### **Chinese juvenilia and *Spring Flower***

It’s surprising that, given Ligeti’s enthusiastic embrace of non-Western music beginning in the 1980s—especially traditions from the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia—the composer never developed a taste for the rich classical and folk repertoire of China. When asked by

Eckhard Roelcke in the early 2000s if there were any musical cultures that he wasn't interested in, Ligeti responded rather diplomatically, "Yes, I haven't dealt technically with Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese music."<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, "Chinese" music—with ample quotation marks—played a role in Ligeti's early output as a young man in Budapest following the war.

In a composition notebook from his student days at the Liszt Academy, we find a short sketch for a jangly piano piece titled "Chinesisch. Schnell" (Fig. 1), probably composed in January 1946.<sup>15</sup> The D-flat-major key signature confines the player entirely to the black keys—a rather old-fashioned and even childish evocation of Chinese pentatonicism that Debussy utilizes for the melody line in "Pagodes." Then again, Ligeti's piece may have been intended for children. He reminisces in a 1972 essay that he used to indulge in such black-key Orientalizing as a boy: "When I was tinkling at the piano, I soon discovered—like all children—the euphonious magic of the black keys." Regarding the two ebony-framed pictures of kimonoed ladies above his aunt's out-of-tune piano, little Gyuri (as Ligeti went by) formed a "mysterious connection" in his mind between the black-key music and the black-haired geishas. "I called the music with these keys 'Japanese' without the slightest idea of pentatonic and Far Eastern music, since there were no records with such music at the time."<sup>16</sup>



Figure 1. Transcription of Ligeti's sketch for a pentatonic piano piece titled "Chinesisch. Schnell," likely drafted in January 1946 (reproduced with the permission of the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel)



An encounter with genuine Asian music would come in 1949 during the World Festival of Youth and Students in Budapest.<sup>17</sup> Along with the premiere of Ligeti's socialist-themed cantata, the festival featured a Beijing-opera troupe from the PRC delegation.<sup>18</sup> The performance impressed the composer and no doubt influenced his score for the puppet play *Spring Flower* (*Tavaszi Virág*), which inaugurated the newly nationalized Budapest Puppet Theater in October of that same year. Translated by János Zsombor from a Soviet puppet play by Sergei Preobrazhensky,<sup>19</sup> the plot injects Marxist rhetoric into a pastoral fairytale set in China.

Loyal Heart (*Hűség Szív*), a shepherd boy, tracks his missing sheep to the garden of Spring Flower (*Tavaszi Virág*) and her greedy father, Shady Elm (*Árnyas Szil*). In *Spring Flower*, Loyal Heart encounters, for the first time, "someone who knows that the fate of the poor cannot be eternal oppression, but that it is possible to fight against tyrants," and falls in love with the revolutionary-minded girl. Shady Elm will only permit their marriage if Loyal Heart brings back three gold bars, a golden keg, and the Pearl of Truth. With the help of three masons, a gardener, and a 500-year-old turtle, Loyal Heart reaches the Wise Dragon (*Bölcs Sárkány*), who offers him this advice: "He who helps others, helps himself." Loyal Heart returns with the treasures, only to find that Shady Elm has betrothed his daughter to the tyrannical emperor. In the end, "due to the guidance of the Wise Dragon and the cleverness of Spring Flower, power falls into the hands of the people," and the couple are happily wed.<sup>20</sup>

A critic, writing in the pedagogical journal *Köznevelés* (Public Education), praised the solid ideological grounding of the new Puppet Theater's repertoire: "Empty entertainment and aimless comedy have been replaced by the working man and the fight against exploitation."<sup>21</sup> There's a brief mention in the review of Ligeti's "lovely melodies" and "catchy tunes," which also impressed the young György Kurtág. The commission was, in fact, first offered to Kurtág, who dismissed the song texts as "tasteless, primitive verse." "To our astonishment," recalls Kurtág, "Ligeti shows an interest and takes on the job. The result is a brilliant piece of music with hits that live on until today in our circles."<sup>22</sup> Beyond Budapest, however, the score remained almost entirely unknown throughout Ligeti's lifetime, with the exception of one tiny excerpt. In 1984, Ligeti arranged Loyal Heart's song "Sík a tenger, kék az ég" (The sea is flat, the sky is blue, Fig. 2) for solo trumpet, giving it the title *Big Turtle Fanfare from the South China Sea*.<sup>23</sup> The hero sings this optimistic number while riding the back of the ancient turtle, and the creature takes up the tune himself in a later scene.

**Allegro moderato**

*mf*

1. Sík a ten-ger, kék az ég. Ním-csen raj-ta egy má-rék Fod-ros pi-ci fel-hő.  
 2. Ví-gan ú-szik, mint a hal, Ap-ró lá-bacs-ká-i-val Ez az ő-reg tek-nő.

Sík a tenger, kék az ég.  
 Nincsen rajta egy marék  
 Fodros pici felhő.

The sea is flat, the sky is blue.  
 There isn't even a handful  
 Of ruffled little clouds.

Vígan úszik, mint a hal,  
 Apró lábacskaival  
 Ez az öreg teknő.

He swims happily as a fish  
 With his little legs,  
 This old turtle.

Figure 2. Transcription of Loyal Heart's song "Sík a tenger, kék az ég" (No. 14) from Ligeti's score for the 1949 puppet play *Spring Flower* (reproduced with the permission of the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel)

Ligeti produced thirty numbers for *Spring Flower*, including a prelude, interludes, incidental/action sequences, sound effects, and songs for most of the central characters. The flexible chamber scoring calls for at least three instrumentalists: a recorder player (ad lib. flute/piccolo), a violist (ad lib. recorder), and a pianist, all of whom can double on percussion. Responding to the Sovietized *chinoiserie* of Preobrazhensky's play and Zsombor's translation, Ligeti adopts what is, for the most part, an Orientalist musical language. The score's pentatonic melodies are about as authentic as the meaningless string of *Hanzi* characters Ligeti copied onto the manuscript score's title page (音的樂他及目/趙中其学科).<sup>24</sup> For example, the scale in "Sík a tenger" contains semitones, which aren't found between principal pitches in Chinese pentatonicism. Rather, Ligeti's mode here is closer to pentatonic collections derived from the *pelog* tuning system of Javanese gamelan music, such as the *pelog barang* scale.<sup>25</sup>

*Spring Flower's* ode to the heroine Mulan, "Mulján, te hős leányka" (Mulan, you heroic girl, Fig. 3), is more modally accurate. But even if the anhemitonic tune corresponds to the Chinese *gong* scale,<sup>26</sup> its dotted rhythms and octave leaps are thoroughly Hungarian features.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, there are certain compositional touches that show the influence of Ligeti's run-in with Chinese music at the World Festival of Youth. In

this number and others, the viola and/or flute shadow the vocal line in unison or at the octave. It's a clear nod to the accompanimental style of Beijing opera, where the *jinghu* fiddle and bamboo flute double the singers heterophonically.<sup>28</sup> Ligeti also attempts to replicate the clangor of a Chinese-opera percussion section in a number scored for xylophone, wood drums, snare, triangle, cymbals, gong, and six pentatonically tuned liter-bottles (Fig. 4).<sup>29</sup> Anticipating the unconventional instrumentation of his late-life song cycle *Síppal, dobbal*, this ensemble of wood, metal, and glass underscores a pantomime sequence in which a conjurer performs a bit of sorcery with a cabinet before being chased off the stage by the emperor.

Andante

TAVASZI VIRÁG  
(Spring Flower)

Mul - ján, te hős le - ány - ka, te ham - vas, szép vi - rág. Bát - ran ki - űz - ted egy - kor a tá - ma - dó ki - rályt.

Füsz[ulya]  
(v. Fuvola)  
(fl. fejtőbb)  
[Recorder  
(or flute an  
oct. higher)]

Fegy - vert a - pád he - lyett vett két ki - csiny ke - zed. És fér - fi - ak kö - zött is meg - áll - tad he - lyed!

Öt év - ig a büsz - ke had - dal győz - tél száz ca - tán, El - ső fény - su - gar a sza - bad - ság haj - na - lán!

Mulján, te hős leányka,  
te hamvas, szép virág,  
Bátoran kiűzted egykor  
a támadó királyt.

Mulan, you heroic girl,  
you blooming, beautiful flower,  
You once bravely drove out  
the attacking king.

Fegyvert apád helyett vett  
két kicsiny kezéd,  
És férfiak között is  
megálltad helyed!

You took up arms in place of your father,  
with your two little hands,  
And among men  
you stood your ground!

Öt évig a büszke haddal  
győztél száz csatán,  
Első fény sugar a  
szabadság hajnalán!

Five years with the proud army,  
you won a hundred battles,  
First gleam of light at  
the dawn of freedom!

Figure 3. Transcription of Spring Flower's "Mulján, te hős leányka" (No. 2) from Ligeti's score for the 1949 puppet play *Spring Flower* (reproduced with the permission of the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel)

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Vivace

16

Vánzólás  
[Sorcery]

Xilofon  
[xylophone]

Palackok  
[bottles]

Fadobok  
[wood drums]

Kücsök  
[snare drum]

△  
[triangle]

Réz. [ányér]  
[cymbals]

Gong

22

Kinyitja. Húzd is.  
[The conjurer opens (the cupboard),  
also at the back]

**ff PRESTO.**

Csakár kidobja.  
[Empress has him thrown out.]

Figure 4. Transcription of the conjurer's pantomime (No. 28) from Ligeti's score for the 1949 puppet play *Spring Flower* (reproduced with the permission of the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel)

## The problem with pentatonicism

In Ligeti's early works—including his juvenile improvisations at the keyboard—we find pentatonic *chinoiserie* (or, by extension, *japonaiserie*) closely associated with childhood, magic, and fairytale whimsy. Tellingly, in 1950, he arranged excerpts from *Spring Flower* for school orchestra under the title *Chinese Imperial Court Music* (*Kínai császári udvari zene*), a work now considered lost.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Ligeti would have been familiar with the pedagogical methods of his teacher, Zoltán Kodály, who recommended that kindergarteners begin learning music by singing pentatonic melodies: “It is through them that children can achieve correct intonation soonest, for they do not have to bother with semitones.”<sup>31</sup> Yet music teachers didn't need to look as far east as China for pedagogical material; such anhemitonic tunes were to be found in the Hungarian folksong tradition, which is rooted in pentatonicism.

Granted, as Kodály points out, most of this folk repertoire is too rhythmically complex for kindergarteners and extends beyond the narrow compass of their voices. He calls for newly written pentatonic tunes “in the spirit of folksongs but without their difficulties,” like those he composed for his own instructional collections.<sup>32</sup> It was crucial that “the soul of the child should be nursed on the mother's milk of the ancient Magyar musical phenomenon,” whether that be in the form of an authentic pentatonic folksong or a faithful imitation.<sup>33</sup> For Kodály, musical pedagogy can serve as a platform for building national identity along ethnic lines. At the same time, he heads off accusations of chauvinism by couching his arguments in the language of decolonization: “shall we continue to be a colony, or shall we become an independent country not only politically but culturally, in asserting our personality, too?”<sup>34</sup>

Still, there's no denying the aggressiveness of Kodály's wish to expunge foreign (especially German) influences from musical education and foster those qualities that are quintessentially Hungarian. It's initially surprising, then, that he invariably locates the origins of Hungarian pentatonicism—the “core” and “foundation” of his people's music<sup>35</sup>—in the Far East. While he admits that pentatonicism is widespread “among peoples without mutual contact,” he identifies certain melodic structures that link Hungarian folksongs to a cross-continental lineage: “the Magyars represent the outermost edge of that great Asiatic musical tradition, many thousands of years old, rooted in the spirit of the various peoples who live from China, throughout Central Asia, to the Black Sea.”<sup>36</sup> He even

adopts Chinese theoretical nomenclature to analyze pentatonic melodies, referring to “extraneous” notes as *pien* pitches and the tonic as the *kung*.<sup>37</sup>

For Kodály, Chinese music obviously doesn’t pose a foreign threat to autochthonous Hungarian traditions. Rather, it symbolizes the ancient and noble beginnings of a hypothesized musical lineage extending westward via Ugrian and Turkic peoples to the Hungarians. “Time may have wiped away the Eastern features from the face of the Magyar community,” he writes in *Folk Music of Hungary*, “but in the depth of its soul, where the springs of music lie, there still lives an element of the original East.”<sup>38</sup>

He continues this racially charged rhetoric elsewhere: “The tenacity with which the pentatonic system persists testifies, moreover, to the fact that for Hungarians it has always been the instinctive means of musical expression. This is why it has not been suppressed by European influences, by assimilation, by racial mixing, etc.”<sup>39</sup> Paradoxically, the latent Asianness of Hungarian folksong serves to reinforce its Hungarianness. By invoking ties to China, Kodály sets Magyar folksong apart from European music. In his eyes, the absence of pentatonicism in neighboring traditions offers proof of the Hungarian people’s exceptionalism, the endurance of its ethnonational character, and its primordial pedigree.

All this is to say that Chinese pentatonicism may have carried implicit associations with Hungarian nationalism for Ligeti. In seeking ties to the “original East,” Kodály was motivated less by a spirit of Bartókian cosmopolitanism than by the desire to attach Magyar folksong to a grand music-historical narrative. As Ligeti observes, his former teacher rarely drew on foreign traditions in his compositions: “Kodály nationalistically limited himself to Hungarian folk music as a source of inspiration. Bartók, on the other hand, was international.”<sup>40</sup>

To be sure, Bartók also subscribed to the theory that Hungarian folksong was “a branch of the great Central-Asiatic Turkish, Mongolian, and Chinese pentatonic center.”<sup>41</sup> At the same time, in a 1942 essay, he decries the concept of racial purity in music that sullies Kodály’s writings, arguing that what makes his nation’s music “incontestably Hungarian” is its crossbreeding with neighboring traditions. Given our discussion, the metaphor Bartók draws is ironically apt: “an artificial erection of Chinese walls to separate peoples from each other bodes no good for [folk music’s] development.”<sup>42</sup>

### ***Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel: III. Kínai templom***

Over half a century after the premiere of *Spring Flower*, Ligeti returned to Chinese themes—or, more accurately, Hungarian visions of China—for his 2000 song cycle *Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel* (With pipe, drum, and reed fiddle). Written for Hungarian mezzo Katalin Károlyi and the Amadinda Percussion Group, the piece comprises seven settings of poems by Ligeti's friend and compatriot, Sándor Weöres. The composer set a number of Weöres' verses during his pre-migration days in Budapest. But after the 1955 choral diptych *Éjszaka – Reggel* (Night – Morning), Ligeti didn't revisit Weöres until 1983 with *Magyar etűdök* (Hungarian Etudes) for sixteen voices. The cycle draws on an eponymous collection of nursery-rhyme-like texts, penned between 1947 and '56, that have become a staple of children's literature.<sup>43</sup>

While Ligeti admired the cosmic scope of Weöres' long-form poetry, for musical purposes, he preferred the writer's more compact verses, such as those found in *Magyar etűdök*. Ligeti was especially "attracted by these constructions in his very small poems"—the kinds of linguistic games that also drew him to Lewis Carroll's nonsense verses.<sup>44</sup> Like Carroll, Weöres experimented with unusual typographic layouts, notably in his 1941 "Kínai templom" (Chinese Temple). The words are arranged into four columns, which are read top-to-bottom, as in classical Chinese. Weöres evokes a temple garden in atmospheric language, restricting himself entirely to monosyllabic Hungarian words.

While the pentatonic scale would initially seem suited to a poem like "Kínai templom," this obvious approach was now an impossibility for Ligeti in the year 2000. Aside from the Hungarian nationalist baggage attached to Chinese pentatonicism—the supposed ancient ursource of Magyar pentatonicism—it is crucial to consider the composer's late-life embrace of non-Western traditions. In the 1980s, he was introduced to a wealth of diverse musical styles, thanks to his student, Roberto Sierra.<sup>45</sup> Ligeti was particularly taken by ethnomusicologist Simha Arom's field recordings of Banda Linda horn ensembles from the Central African Republic, which he drew on for compositional inspiration.

Yet his borrowings of Sub-Saharan African music were never essentialized imitations. Ligeti typically abstracted and absorbed concepts from several different traditions—e.g. blending African polyrhythmic structures with comparable techniques from *ars subtilior* polyphony and Conlon Nanarrow's player-piano compositions. Moreover, his



appropriations of African music were informed by intense, scholarly engagement with field recordings and ethnomusicological literature by Arom as well as Gerhard Kubik.

Having cultivated a deep respect for non-Western traditions—and given his self-admitted ignorance of Chinese music—Ligeti would have undoubtedly felt uncomfortable with pentatonic Orientalizing. “I don’t use these scales and tonal systems directly,” he avers in a 1990 interview, “I never resort to exoticism.”<sup>46</sup> As an alternative, we find Ligeti taking the complete opposite route from the limited tonal content of pentatonicism. In the melody line of “Kínai templom,” all but four of the twenty-six chromatic pitches between E3 and F5 make an appearance.<sup>47</sup> No pitch class is repeated more than three times by the mezzo, and no discrete tone is sung more than twice, with only six duplications total.

This heterogeneity of pitches is the product of a tallying system that Ligeti utilized while sketching the movement. In the top margin of a draft for “Kínai templom,” he lists two transpositions of a Lydian scale with the sixth and seventh scale degrees lowered—a mode often referred to as the Lydian minor (Fig. 5). Overlapping only on B and C, these two transpositions together constitute a chromatic aggregate. The mezzo’s opening and closing passages at mm. 1-3 and 7-8 are based on the first scale, while the middle portion at mm. 4-6 is based on the second, resulting in a kind of ternary form. Ligeti draws short lines above, below, and to the side of the note names in his two modes to keep track of the number of times he uses each pitch class, ensuring a high degree of heterogeneity.



*Figure 5.* Transcription of Ligeti’s note-tracking system from an undated sketch for “Kínai templom” (note that the two center lines are dividers, not tally marks)  
(reproduced with the permission of the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel)

However, there are few discrepancies between Ligeti’s tallying and the actual notated content of the sketch, which is melodically identical to the published version. Eb in the first scale is marked with two lines instead of the correct three, though this is probably just an honest mistake on the

composer's part. In addition, B and C in both scales each erroneously have one additional tally—these two pitches appear only twice in the outer Scale 1 measures and only once in the inner Scale 2 measures. Ligeti's error might be explained by the fact that both scales contain these pitches. Indeed, they even act as a point of common-tone "modulation" at the beginning of m. 7.

At any rate, one shouldn't read too far into this tallying system. There seems to be little significance, for instance, to the positioning of the tick marks in relation to the letter names—i.e. there's not obvious correlation between octave level and the placement of these dashes.<sup>48</sup> Neither does it seem as if he had in mind a specific ordering akin to a tone row. Rather than a systematic serial procedure, it's more likely Ligeti was simply using this as a casual tallying device to limit the repetition of notes.

At the same time, there are features of the vocal line that suggest he was mentally monitoring complex tonal and intervallic relationships without the aid of a written mnemonic. For instance, the first three cadences on C, D, and E at mm. 2, 4, and 5, respectively, are the first appearances of those pitch classes in the mezzo line. The third of these cadences, from B to E, is the only perfect interval in the overwhelmingly tritonal melody, and the whole phrase outlines an appropriately consonant E-major triad on the phrase "Four metal [objects] ring" ("Négy fém cseng"). Finally, if we ignore the Eb in m. 7, the five remaining cadences on C, D, E, F#, and G trace a transposed version of the Lydian pentachord from Ligeti's tick-mark scales.

Such constructivism is a response to the strict form and visual layout of Sándor Weöres' poem, an example of a classical Chinese quatrain known as *jueju*: four lines of either five or seven monosyllabic characters. Weöres, who was a great admirer of Chinese philosophy and visited the nation twice,<sup>49</sup> encountered *jueju* while translating the work of Tang poets such as a Li Bai and Bai Juyi.<sup>50</sup> Although his translations mostly eschew the original limitation to twenty or twenty-eight syllables, "Kínai templom" is an attempt to write an original *jueju* in Hungarian that adheres to the form's syllabic constraints. Moreover, as mentioned, Weöres preserves the typography of classical Chinese, stacking the seven words of each line vertically.

Imitating the abstraction and ambiguity typical of Tang verse, Weöres' poem is arcane in its language, conveying a complex image in strings of adjectives and nouns with minimal reliance on verbs. In his liner notes for the premiere recording of *Sippal, dobbal*, Ligeti describes the poem as

an expression of “the contentment of the Buddhist view of life.”<sup>51</sup> Yet the composer’s own unpublished translation of “Kínai templom” into German (Fig. 6) suggests a tone of fatalism rather than renunciation: the pleasures and successes of life are like the sound of bells ringing and dying away in a temple garden at nightfall.<sup>52</sup> This tolling takes instrumental form in an assortment of metallophones supplemented with vibraphone, which bathes the mezzo line in strange, reverberating harmonies that evoke the complex overtone series of struck bells.

There’s no indication that these chords are derived from either of the two tally-mark scales. In fact, while Ligeti resisted the temptation to employ the pentatonic scale in the vocal line, Amy Bauer identifies scattered pentatonic collections in her harmonic analysis of the song.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, as Frederik Knop points out, the score doesn’t necessarily offer a realistic picture of how these harmonies sound in performance: “Ultimately, only spectral analysis of a recording could provide an approximate explanation of the de facto relationship between the notation and the actual sound.”<sup>54</sup>

<p>III. Chinesische Tempel (in ungarischen jedes Wort einsilbig)</p> <p>Heiliger Garten, reicher Laub, geöffnete grüne Flügel, oben, unten kommt (die) weite Nacht, blauer Schatten.</p> <p>Vier Metall(gegenstände) klingen: (das) Schöne, (das) Gute, (der) Ruhm, (der hohe) Rang, dann schwingt tiefe Stille, wie (ein) verklungener Klang [= (eine) ausgekühlte Stimme].</p>	<p>III. Chinese Temple (in Hungarian, every word monosyllabic)</p> <p>Holy garden, rich foliage, open green wing, above, below comes (the) wide night, blue shadow.</p> <p>Four metal (objects) ring: (the) beautiful, (the) good, fame, (high) rank, then resounds deep silence, like (a) faded sound [= (a) cooled voice].</p>
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*Figure 6.* Transcription and English translation of Ligeti’s handwritten German translation of Sándor Weöres’ “Kínai templom” (note that Ligeti does not follow Weöres’ typographical layout nor attempt a monosyllabic translation; the brackets in the last line are Ligeti’s) (reproduced with the permission of the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel)

### ***Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel: IV. Kuli***

The recurring Lydian minor collection of “Kínai templom” acts as a point of overlap with the following song, “Kuli” (Coolie). Stripped of its C, the first of Ligeti’s two tally-mark scales in movement III becomes the basis of the mezzo’s whole-tone melody in movement IV. Moreover, the singer’s rising tritonal sequence in mm. 1-2 of “Kínai templom” is transformed into the accompanimental ostinato in “Kuli.” Here, the xylophone and first marimba descend through tritonal chains on the same whole-tone scale as the mezzo, shadowed in parallel sixths by the second marimba and bass marimba on the other possible whole-tone transposition.<sup>55</sup>

Amy Bauer, in her analysis of “Galamb borong” from Ligeti’s second book of piano etudes (1988-94), examines how the composer assigns complementary whole-tone collections to the pianist’s right and left hands to approximate the paired *pelog* tuning of Balinese gamelan music.<sup>56</sup> While there might be some superficial resemblance to Indonesian music in “Kuli,” we shouldn’t read the movement as overt an evocation of gamelan as the piano etude. Ligeti avoids metallic percussion in favor of wooden marimbas, and unlike “Galamb borong,” there are no quasi-Indonesian interlocking melodies or pentatonic passages.

The ostinato chains in “Kuli,” variable in length, serve as a vivid musical representation of the phrase “guri-guri,” a Hungarian onomatopoeia for rolling.<sup>57</sup> The titular rickshaw driver of Weöres’ 1931 poem repeats this refrain as he describes his endless toil. Indeed, the *guri-guri* spinning of his pedicab wheels becomes a metaphor for the ceaseless torture of life and labor. Syncopated passages in the vocal line (e.g. mm. 2-3, 14, 16) lend the impression that the Coolie is struggling to keep up with the *perpetuum mobile* of his daily grind. The mezzo’s final elliptical line, “Coolie forever: just *guri-guri, guri-guri...*,” is carried on by the percussionists, who fade out one-by-one to lend the impression that this process continues *ad infinitum*.<sup>58</sup>

By reprising the opening pitch set and tritonal sequence of “Kínai templom” in “Kuli,” Ligeti signals that we are meant to hear these two consecutive movements as a pair—a fact reinforced by the shared Chinese themes of their texts. Granted, the Hindi-derived word “coolie” can also refer to a South Asian laborer, and Weöres never explicitly mentions the ethnicity of the poem’s subject. However, the Coolie’s (admittedly stereotypical) nickname for his rickshaw, “dragon cart” (*sárkányszékér*), indicates his Chinese origins.

More specifically, he is a Chinese immigrant. His broken Hungarian, marked by illeism and omissions of verbs and articles, casts him as a foreigner learning an unfamiliar language. While these grammatical errors may seem racistly infantilizing from a contemporary perspective, Weöres is reproducing features of spoken Chinese, such as its lack of articles. And the Coolie's third-person self-reference is a common linguistic expression of subservience in Chinese.<sup>59</sup> He bemoans the "big bad people" who beat him with sticks and humbles himself as a "rice-grain, bean, poppyseed, little child." The first of these epithets—another clue to the character's Chinese ethnicity—is Ligeti's addition.<sup>60</sup>

In the literature on *Síppal, dobbal*, scholars tend to view the texts Ligeti selected for these two Chinese-themed songs as comparable to the pure linguistic games of Weöres' "Táncdal" (Dance Song) and "Szajkó" (Jay), respectively set in movements II and VII. Amy Bauer observes that the words in "Kínai templom" "seem to be chosen for their sound, but may be juxtaposed at random" while Richard Steinitz calls "Kuli" "a humorous burlesque in pidgin Hungarian."<sup>61</sup> Such readings fail to consider the deeper biographical significance these two poems must have had for the composer. Yet there are musical hints that Ligeti felt an emotional connection to their themes, especially in "Kuli."

At mm. 10-13, the *guri-guri* ostinato breaks off, and the mezzo intones the Coolie's complaints of greying hair and old age on a series of chromatically descending lines. Even if Ligeti rebuked one interviewer for perceiving a "dying fall" in such gestures, it's impossible not to hear these as manifestations of the composer's favorite *lamento* topos, given the tragic nature of the text.<sup>62</sup> Further complaints of exhaustion and hunger in this line are set to angular tritone motives that swell in frustration, the second—marked "impatiently"—threatening to burst into a genuine cry.

And indeed, no sooner has the Coolie taken up his street calls again than he has a terrible revelation: should he die, there would be no one to pull his rickshaw. "Coolie dies?" he asks on another pair of chromatic *lamento* figures at m. 24, "Coolie caaan't die!!"—an unset portion of text that Ligeti marks, "screaming, desperately." Are we to understand these expressions of pain as exaggerated slapstick? Are the Coolie's sighs and cries akin to Astradamors' yelps in Ligeti's opera, *Le Grand Macabre*, when the character's wife comically whips him? Or is something much deeper at play here?

## The question of biographical analysis

There is a tendency in recent Ligeti scholarship to address the composer's traumatic past while simultaneously questioning the usefulness of such experiences in understanding his music. Florian Scheduling chides his colleagues for underplaying the role of the Holocaust in Ligeti's life but then proceeds to dismiss its relevance in analysis. He argues, "The presupposition that biographical experiences are the sole determinant of creative output absurdly suggests that every minute experience likely shapes a creative artist's art."<sup>63</sup>

Granted, Scheduling does admit the possibility that "a careful analysis of his works may reveal traces of Ligeti's biography as a survivor" and that such traces might be hidden "deep within the texture of the work." But these biographical traces shouldn't be "the starting point or basis from which to approach his works."<sup>64</sup> In his later monograph, Scheduling applies the identical argument to migrant composers. Although Ligeti isn't the main focus of that chapter, Scheduling's assertions no doubt extend to the composer as an exile: "while every piece of music written by a migrant is just that, a composition by a migrant, not everything composed by a migrant bears traces of migration."<sup>65</sup>

I agree with Scheduling that biographical elements shouldn't necessarily be the starting point of analysis for every work by Ligeti—especially when considering untexted or highly abstract pieces like the piano etudes. As the composer himself remarked in 1997, "Real life, what you experience (and I experienced a lot of very bad things in the Nazi times and communist dictatorship, also), I would not put in connection with the music."<sup>66</sup> Scheduling cites a similar statement from a much earlier interview with Ligeti, conducted in 1978: "if you try to understand a work from the actual circumstances of the artist, you will get nowhere."<sup>67</sup>

Yet Scheduling fails to mention the numerous occasions when Ligeti himself finds points of autobiographical significance in his oeuvre. In writings and interviews, he often locates the origins of compositional techniques in childhood memories—e.g. an oft-quoted recollection of a spiderweb nightmare from his youth that later inspired his micropolyphonic textures.<sup>68</sup> Unless we choose to doubt the sincerity of these "autobiographical alibis," as Charles Wilson disparagingly dubs them, such self-contradicting statements seem to invite the very mode of biographically informed analysis that Ligeti warns against elsewhere.<sup>69</sup>

It's also crucial to note that, in the realm of Ligeti's verbal reflections on his past, we witness a significant shift toward emotional openness and a readiness to share as the composer ages. Compare, for instance, his contribution to the 1978 essay collection *Mein Judentum* with his comments to Eckhard Roelcke in a 2001/02 interview. In the former testimony, he only briefly discusses his forced labor service in the Hungarian army, mentioning in passing that in 1944 he "worked as a sack carrier in the army's grain silos."<sup>70</sup> Over two decades after writing this essay, Ligeti reveals to Roelcke that this was one of the darkest episodes of the war for him. He goes into detail here about a particularly harrowing incident in Szeged, where he and his fellow laborers were forced to carry sunflower seeds out of a burning silo and threatened with execution when they dropped the sacks.<sup>71</sup>

Ligeti was subjected to further horrors and near-death experiences during his escape to Cluj. Here in his hometown, he discovered his family's apartment occupied by strangers—only his mother returned in 1945, having survived Auschwitz. Ligeti's father died in Bergen-Belsen, and his brother was likely murdered at Mauthausen. "I try to speak without emotion," Ligeti adds after recounting the deaths of his family in the same 2001/02 interview, "though of course I am full of hatred for the Nazis."<sup>72</sup>

Further expressions of hatred and anger are found in Ligeti's other late-life writings and interviews. Granted, in his 1978 *Mein Judentum* testimony, he does address feelings of survivor's guilt and what he calls "refugee neurosis" (*Flüchtlingsneurose*).<sup>73</sup> But at the turn of the millennium, there is a noticeable shift toward greater forthrightness from the emotionally reticent composer. "I harbored a deep-rooted hatred of the [Hungarian communist] system, as I had of the Nazi dictatorship," he writes in a 1997 liner note. "I am permanently scarred; I will be overcome by revenge fantasies to the end of my days."<sup>74</sup> Addressing this hatred again in a 2001 interview, he discloses, "I cannot forget it and it never diminished. Emotions, with time which is going on [*sic*], these emotions of hate and disgust become stronger."<sup>75</sup>

If Ligeti displays an enhanced willingness to *verbally* open up about his emotions and experiences, can we expect a corresponding *musical* engagement with trauma in his final works? I have discussed the composer's geriatric displays of frankness and vulnerability mostly in relation to his experiences during the Second World War, yet there are admittedly few instances in his late pieces that one might convincingly analyze in connection to the Holocaust. While the composer observes

that “one dimension of my music bears the imprint of a long time spent in the shadow of death,” he points out that an artist in his position is “more likely to alienate” than “to create terrifying works of art in all seriousness.”<sup>76</sup>

In a 1983 interview conducted on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, Ligeti hints at more accessible point of biographical entry into his late-period works:

In my opinion, what characterizes my present situation is not so much a return to this Hungarian-Bartókian style of composition as something more general and comprehensive: a feeling of nostalgia, the longing for homeland, which is certainly related to aging. ... [W]here is my homeland? Surely it is Transylvania just as much as Budapest, where I studied and lived until 1956, but I wasn't a child in Budapest. So there is a double-rootedness, and my homesickness is for Transylvania—for my birth town of Dicsőszentmárton and the city of my schooldays, Cluj—as well as for Budapest. I believe that when one gets older, that plays an important role.<sup>77</sup>

The nostalgic current that Ligeti identifies in his own works points to another major life disruption that, like the Holocaust, had a profound effect on the composer: his exile in Western Europe. Having fled Budapest during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, Ligeti sought asylum in Germany and then Austria, eventually settling in Vienna and gaining Austrian citizenship in 1968. By that time, the political situation in Hungary had softened enough for Ligeti to make official visits in 1970, '79, '83, and '90.<sup>78</sup> The composer also visited Budapest “incognito,” as Amadinda Percussion Group member Zoltán Rácz put it, to rehearse *Síppal, dobbal* with the ensemble in 2000.<sup>79</sup> Yet he never returned to Transylvania, his childhood homeland that constituted the other half of his “double-rootedness.”<sup>80</sup>

In the final section, I consider the possibility that Ligeti was addressing his exile status in the two Chinese-themed movements of *Síppal, dobbal*. Granted, as Scheding warns, “not everything composed by a migrant bears traces of migration.” Yet this shouldn't prevent us from seeking these traces when there are strong indications that they exist. After all, *Síppal, dobbal* is a work steeped in biographical relevance, as it nostalgically reengages with the language, folk music (notably in movement VI), and people (Weöres, recall, was a friend of the composer's) of Ligeti's past. Still, one could argue that the China of “Kínai templom” and “Kuli” is far removed from Ligeti's Transylvanian identity. But as I argue, these movements act as



coded self-references, covertly divulging a migrant composer's profound feelings of foreignness.

### **Diasporic intimacy, exoticism, and the significance of China in *Síppal, dobbal***

Given the self-professed tinge of homesickness in Ligeti's late works, cultural theorist Svetlana Boym's seminal study on nostalgia proves a useful tool in understanding how the composer navigates his émigré status. Boym develops the concept of "diasporic intimacy," which she describes as "a survivalist aesthetics of estrangement and longing." The word "intimate," as she points out, is both an adjective, meaning "very personal," and a verb, meaning "to imply subtly." Diasporic intimacy offers a mode "of speaking about the most personal and intimate pain and pleasure through a 'cryptic disguise,'...through indirection and intimation, through stories and secrets." It can also be a sense of identification between exiles: "the mutual attraction of two immigrants from different parts of the world." But Boym stresses that diasporic intimacy doesn't promise security; on the contrary, it "is not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but is constituted by it."<sup>81</sup>

I read the central Chinese-themed movements of *Síppal, dobbal* as enacting something akin to diasporic intimacy. The composer was in his late seventies when he wrote the cycle and no doubt identified with the Coolie's geriatric fatigue, which he tellingly set to sinking *lamento* motives. To be sure, Ligeti would have been the first to admit that his comfortable life in Vienna was incomparable to the toil of a wretched rickshaw driver; at the same time, the composer had been forced to perform grueling labor under equally abusive conditions during the Holocaust. After a lifetime of toil and strife, is it Ligeti's scream we're hearing channeled through Weöres' Coolie?

But the character is more than a yellowface mask for the composer to disappear behind. Through this "portrayal of an Asian pariah's monotonous hopelessness and pent-up aggressiveness," as Ligeti described the poem, he allies his experiences as a refugee to an imagined immigrant community.<sup>82</sup> Like the Coolie, Ligeti was well acquainted with the feeling of being an outsider and the uselessness of his mother tongue. Separated from his homeland, his native language grew into something unfamiliar: "I have to search for the words when I suddenly have to switch to Hungarian

after speaking German, French, or English for a prolonged period, I have christened this language ‘emigranto’ since the purity of the language is lost.”<sup>83</sup>

This is where “Kínai templom” comes into play. In this preceding movement, the Hungarian language is presented as something strange—a tongue as unintelligible to a Westerner as Mandarin or Cantonese. Moreover, the words are rendered alien even for native speakers. Weöres seems to have selected vocabulary that superficially resembles Chinese, such as “cseng” (ring) and “rang” (rank). Ligeti further defamiliarizes the text by instructing the mezzo to perform in a “distorted, nasal voice.” The slow, meditative tempo (“like a mystical ceremony”) coupled with the singer’s enormous leaps serve to isolate individual words. Most notable is the tone of exoticism that the composer strikes in this song—albeit, an exoticism that intentionally steers clear of cheap Orientalizing.

As we saw, in lieu of pentatonicism, Ligeti employs quasi-serialist pitch-tracking based on two Lydian minor scales. This method ensures not only total chromaticism, but a near-maximum heterogeneity of discrete tones across the mezzo’s range. Still, the tintinnabulous accompaniment might seem to revert to the clangorous *chinoiserie* of Ligeti’s *Spring Flower* puppet pantomime from 1949. Yet we find that in “Kínai templom,” the composer assembles a variety of Western and Asian percussion instruments, none of which are Chinese. In addition to unmotored vibraphone, tubular bells, crotales, and glockenspiel, he calls for tuned sets of Japanese *rin* and Burmese gongs.<sup>84</sup> The former—also called *rei*—are standing bells rung during sutra recitations in Japanese Buddhism; the latter are nipple gongs of the kind played in Burmese *hsaing waing* ensembles.<sup>85</sup>

Ligeti therefore combines several parameters in this song that allow him to conjure an atmosphere of exoticism without resorting to lazy musical essentializing: the obsessive non-repetition of pitches; the eschewal of pentatonicism; the ritual tempo; the sparse texture; the spectra-like harmonies rich in perfect intervals; the global assortment of gongs and bells. “Kínai templom,” in spite of its title, isn’t about China or Chineseness; like “Kuli,” it is a coded expression of alienation and unbelonging from an aging migrant composer. Diasporic intimacy, as Boym argues, “is spoken of in a foreign language that reveals the inadequacies of translation.”<sup>86</sup> These pseudo-Sino songs are neither in Chinese nor Hungarian, but linguistically and musically convey the composer’s uprootedness in a polyglot “emigranto.”

## Conclusion

Across Ligeti's oeuvre, then, China remains something of a musical and cultural Other, but in vastly varying ways. Out of his juvenile piano improvisations emerged a mysterious and erotically charged connection between black-key pentatonicism and images of black-haired geishas on his aunt's wall. The "euphonious magic of the black keys," associated in his boyhood mind with visions of a vaguely eastern Cathay, became the basis for a "Chinesisch" piano sketch he drafted in his early twenties, likely a pedagogical exercise for little ones. A few years later, in 1949, Ligeti revisited this Chinese childhood playground in the puppet play *Spring Flower*—a fairytale which, though tainted by Soviet propaganda, still retained the enchantment and adventure of youth. In the instrumentation, the heterophonic accompaniments, and the pentatonic melodies of his incidental music, we might hear echoes of the authentic Chinese-opera performance Ligeti attended. But these features are rhythmically contorted to fit the idiosyncratic accent patterns of the Hungarian language.

A half-century later, Ligeti revisits a fantasy of China that, while no less imaginary, has completely transformed after the composer's lifetime of migration and cultural encounters. Within the context of *Síppal, dobbal*—a work steeped in boyhood nostalgia—the two Chinese-themed movements might seem to perpetuate the childish Orientalizing we witnessed in Ligeti's *chinoiserie* of the 1940s. However, given his newfound respect for non-Western music and his self-acknowledged ignorance of Chinese music, the composer resists the juvenile urge to engage in pentatonic essentializing (perhaps, also, with an eye to avoiding the kind of Hungarian musical nationalism associated with the mode). At the same time, Ligeti doesn't entirely abstain from exoticism in his setting. His quasi-serialist procedures in the vocal line combined with the bell-spectra harmonies in the accompaniment generate an alien tonal world that isn't tied to any musical culture—least of all to China.

"China," therefore, remains just as inauthentic a concept as it was in Ligeti's early works. But its significance has drastically changed, becoming a shorthand for unspecified foreignness, divorced from any ethnicity. Yet, this is not to say that Ligeti is Othering Chinese people, for we aren't dealing with literal Chineseness in his settings. On the contrary, the composer seems to signal a sense of identification with the tragic figure in Weöres' "Kuli"—an ironic recognition that, as an aging immigrant and linguistic outsider, he fills the role of the Other himself. Theatrical

musical gestures—e.g. the perpetually cycling ostinato, the mournful *lamento* motives, the climactic scream—communicate a migrant worker's profound sense of exhaustion and frustration. Can we attribute these stylized emotions to Ligeti? Svetlana Boym demonstrates that the personal is never overt in the work of exile artists; it is hinted at and implied in the "game of hide-and-seek" that constitutes diasporic intimacy.<sup>87</sup> If we're seeking Ligeti in his music, we may find him hiding where we least expect him—as far off as China.

NOTES

- 1 For an overview of this unfinished project, see the author's forthcoming article in *Perspectives of New Music*: "Ligeti's Unfinished *Alice in Wonderland*."
- 2 "Doch die magische Atmosphäre der Insel, der Ariel-Welt zieht mich an." György Ligeti to Herbert Rosendorfer, May 15, 1982, Paul Sacher Stiftung, György Ligeti Collection. Translations are the author's, unless otherwise noted.
- 3 "SOSE HALLOTT SZÉPSÉGŰ VARÁZS-HANGZÁS." All verbal jottings are transcribed from Ligeti's compositional notebooks and sketches, held at the archives of the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, Switzerland. My thanks to Heidi Zimmermann, Evelyne Diendorf, and Orsolya Moser for assisting me during my visit in September 2022.
- 4 "Ariel: Grisey PARTIELS—felhang-struktúrából a mágikus akkordokat kifejleszteni: vonós-flag., + szájharmonikák, flauto-armonici. elektronikus hangszerek? ESETLEG ELEKTR. NÉLKÜL! (?)"
- 5 "Fontos SZEREPOSZTÁSI VERZIÓ: Ariel (ugyanaz a maszk-kosztüm) különböző hangon: KOLORATURA SOPR—TENOR—MÉLY BASSZUS, 3 énekes játssza"
- 6 "Buddhista 'Sprechgesang'—tisztá ének, lásd Buddh. kínai kazetta (pagoda-ének)"
- 7 John Levy, *Chinese Buddhist Music*, Lyrichord LLST 7222, 1969.
- 8 A portion of this collection was catalogued by Louise Duchesneau, who lists four LPs of traditional Chinese music. See Louise Duchesneau, "'Play it like Bill Evans': György Ligeti and Recorded Music," in *György Ligeti: Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds*, ed. Louise Duchesneau and Wolfgang Marx (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), 140-41.
- 9 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 52.
- 11 Yayoi Uno Everett, "Intercultural Synthesis in Postwar Western Art Music: Historical Contexts, Perspectives, and Taxonomy," in *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music*, ed. Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 17. See also Hon-Lun Yang and Michael Saffle, eds., *China and the West: Music, Representation, and Reception* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017).
- 12 Kofi Agawu, "Appropriating African Music," in *The African Imagination in Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 305-44; Martin Scherzinger, "György Ligeti and the Aka Pygmies Project," *Contemporary Music Review* 25, no. 3 (June 2006): 227-62; Stephen Andrew Taylor, "Ligeti, Africa and Polyrythm," *The World of Music* 45, no. 2 (2003): 82-94.

- <sup>13</sup> Amy Bauer, "The Other of the Exotic: Balinese Music as Grammatical Paradigm in Ligeti's 'Galamb Borong'," *Music Analysis* 27, nos. 2-3 (2008): 340. See also Amy Bauer, "The Singular Exotic," in *Ligeti's Laments: Nostalgia, Exoticism, and the Absolute* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 141-57.
- <sup>14</sup> György Ligeti, "Träumen Sie in Farbe?": *György Ligeti im Gespräch mit Eckhard Roelcke*, interview by Eckhard Roelcke (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 2003), 138.
- <sup>15</sup> The sketch is undated, but the previous sketch in the notebook is dated January 8, 1946, and the one that follows it is dated January 14 of that year.
- <sup>16</sup> György Ligeti, "Musikalische Erinnerungen aus Kindheit und Jugend," in *György Ligeti: Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Monika Lichtenfeld (Mainz: Schott, 2007), 2:12-13.
- <sup>17</sup> Richard Steinitz, *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination*, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 46-48.
- <sup>18</sup> Emily Wilcox, whose research examines the dance groups sent by the PRC to such festivals, confirmed for me that a Beijing-opera troupe accompanied the Chinese delegation to Budapest in 1949. Email message to author, February 21, 2023. See also Emily Wilcox, "When Folk Dance Was Radical: Cold War Yangge, World Youth Festivals, and Overseas Chinese Leftist Culture in the 1950s and 1960s," *China Perspectives* 2020, no. 1 (2020): 33-42.
- <sup>19</sup> The original Russian title is *Vesenniy tsvetok* (Весенний цветок).
- <sup>20</sup> This synopsis is based on a digitized copy of the program booklet from the 1949 Budapest Puppet Theater premiere, which also reprints the texts of three songs. See "Tavaszi virág," Hungarian National Digital Archive (MaNDA), accessed June 14, 2023, [https://en.mandadb.hu/tetel/266124/Tavaszi\\_virag](https://en.mandadb.hu/tetel/266124/Tavaszi_virag).
- <sup>21</sup> "Bábszínház: A legkisebbek színháza," *Köznevelés* 5, no. 21 (Nov. 1, 1949): 614-15.
- <sup>22</sup> György Kurtág, "Mementos of a Friendship: György Kurtág on György Ligeti," trans. John Lambert, in *György Kurtág: Three Interviews and Ligeti Homages*, ed. Bálint András Varga (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 95.
- <sup>23</sup> In 1982, Per Nørgård composed a short trumpet solo for the nine-year-old Martin Nordwall, son of Swedish musicologist Ove Nordwall (Ligeti's first biographer) and harpsichordist Eva Nordwall (for whom Ligeti composed *Passacaglia ungherese*). Ligeti and several other major composers followed suit, producing trumpet miniatures for the young Nordwall that were eventually published as a collection by Universal Edition. See Ove Nordwall, "Ligeti- dokumenter - et rapsodisk vue," *Dansk Musik Tidsskrift* 64, no. 7 (1989-90): 234-37; Edward H. Tarr, ed., *Fanfares: New Trumpet Pieces for Young Players* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1989).

- 24 My thanks to Linda Rui Feng for identifying the characters and confirming their meaninglessness. According to Richard Steinitz, “they were only decoration. Ligeti found them in a Chinese book and had no idea what they meant.” See Steinitz, *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination*, 47-48.
- 25 Jaap Kunst, *Music in Java: Its History, Its Theory and Its Technique*, ed. Ernst L. Heins, 3rd ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 1:74.
- 26 Lu-Ting Ho, “On Chinese Scales and National Modes,” trans. Kuo-huang Han, *Asian Music* 14, no. 1 (1982): 133.
- 27 Lajos Vargyas, *Folk Music of the Hungarians*, trans. Judit Pokoly and Lucy Hunyár, ed. Katalin Paksa and Márta Bajcsay Rudas (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2005), 40-41, 101-2.
- 28 Elizabeth Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre: The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 244-46.
- 29 In his performing manuscript, Ligeti has crossed out the bottles from his instrumentation list, suggesting that they weren’t employed in the final production.
- 30 In 1951, he also arranged vocal excerpts from *Spring Flower* under the title *Music for a Chinese Puppet Theater (Zene egy kínai bábjátékhoz)*, also considered lost. See Friedemann Sallis, *An Introduction to the Early Works of György Ligeti* (Cologne: Studio, 1996), 281-82, 286.
- 31 Zoltán Kodály, “Music in the Kindergarten,” trans. Lili Halápy and Fred Macnicol, in *The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály*, ed. Ferenc Bónis (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1974), 147.
- 32 Zoltán Kodály, “Pentatonic Music,” trans. Lili Halápy and Fred Macnicol, in *The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály*, ed. Ferenc Bónis (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1974), 221.
- 33 Zoltán Kodály, “Hungarian Music Education,” trans. Lili Halápy and Fred Macnicol, in *The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály*, ed. Ferenc Bónis (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1974), 153.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 154.
- 35 Zoltán Kodály, “A Hundred Year Plan,” trans. Lili Halápy and Fred Macnicol, in *The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály*, ed. Ferenc Bónis (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1974), 162; Zoltán Kodály, “The Pentatonic Scale in Hungarian Folk Music,” in *The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály*, ed. Ferenc Bónis (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1974), 20.
- 36 Zoltán Kodály, *Folk Music of Hungary*, trans. Ronald Tempest, Cynthia Jolly, Laurence Picken, and Gyula Gulyás, ed. Lajos Vargyas (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), 60-61.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 25-26, 55, 98.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 61.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 40 Ligeti, *Träumen Sie in Farbe?*, 201.

- 41 Béla Bartók, "Harvard Lectures," in *Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 371.
- 42 Béla Bartók, "Race Purity in Music," in *Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 31-32.
- 43 Ildikó Mándi-Fazekas and Tiborc Fazekas, "Magicians of Sound: Seeking Ligeti's Inspiration in the Poetry of Sándor Weöres," in *György Ligeti: Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds*, ed. Louise Duchesneau and Wolfgang Marx (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), 53-68.
- 44 György Ligeti, "'Everything Is Chance': György Ligeti in Conversation with John Tusa, 28 October 1997," transcribed and annotated by Joseph Cadagin, in *"I Don't Belong Anywhere": György Ligeti at 100*, ed. Wolfgang Marx (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 260.
- 45 György Ligeti, "An Interview with György Ligeti in Hamburg," interview by Stephen Satory, *Canadian University Music Review* 10, vol. 1 (1990): 109-10.
- 46 György Ligeti, "A Conversation with György Ligeti," interview by Tünde Szitha, *Hungarian Music Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1992): 15.
- 47 G#3, A3, E4, and Bb4 are missing.
- 48 In another, earlier sketch for "Kínai templom," Ligeti uses a range of symbols (circles, squares, plus signs, long dashes, and short vertical/horizontal tallies) to keep track of pitches. Note names are listed in chromatic order in this sketch, rather than divided into two diatonic collections.
- 49 Emery George, "Sándor Weöres: Cosmic Poet (1913-1989)," *Cross Currents* 9 (1990): 283. See also Susanna Fahlström, *Form and Philosophy in Sándor Weöres' Poetry* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1999), 41-42.
- 50 Sándor Weöres, *Egybegyűjtött műfordítások* (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1976), 1:5-342. See also Zuzana Dudášová, "An Unlikely Meeting of Minds," in *China from Where We Stand: Readings in Comparative Sinology*, ed. Kate Rose (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 132-33.
- 51 György Ligeti, "György Ligeti on His Works," trans. Louise Duchesneau, in *György Ligeti: The Ligeti Project*, Teldec 2564 69673-5, 2008, 14.
- 52 The Teldec liner notes feature abysmal German, English, and French translations of "Kínai templom" (none by Ligeti) that clumsily attempt to preserve the monosyllabism of the original. For far more accurate and elegant renderings into English, see George, "Sándor Weöres: Cosmic Poet," 295; Mándi-Fazekas and Fazekas, "Magicians of Sound," 65.
- 53 Amy Bauer, "Singing Wolves and Dreaming Apples: The Cosmopolitan Imagination in Ligeti's Weöres Songs," *Ars Lyrica* 21 (2012): 30.
- 54 Frederik Knop, *Retrospektiven: Die Inszenierung von Tradition in den letzten Kompositionen György Ligetis* (Mainz: Schott, 2017), 191.
- 55 The published score incorrectly labels the marimbas as "Marimbaphones," which is a mistranslation. In German, *Marimbaphon* refers to a standard



- marimba; in English, a marimbaphone is a defunct metal marimba produced in the early 20th century by the instrumental manufacturer J.C. Deagan, Inc. Ligeti's fair-copy score correctly refers to these instruments as marimbas.
- 56 Bauer, "The Other of the Exotic," 337-72.
- 57 The Hungarian verb for "to roll" is *gurít* or *gurul*. The word *guriguri*, with or without a hyphen, can also refer to a curtain runner.
- 58 See Frederik Knop's more extensive analysis of this movement in Knop, *Retrospektiven*, 204-11.
- 59 Horng-Yi Lee, "Linguistic Politeness in the Chinese Language and Culture," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 10, no. 1 (Jan. 2020): 6.
- 60 Sándor Weöres, *Egybegyűjtött írások* (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1975) 2:521-22.
- 61 Bauer, "Singing Wolves and Dreaming Apples," 29; Steinitz, *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination*, 360.
- 62 Ligeti, "Everything is Chance," 266. See also Bauer, *Ligeti's Laments*.
- 63 Florian Scheduling, "Where Is the Holocaust in All This?: György Ligeti and the Dialectics of Life and Work," in *Dislocated Memories: Jews, Music, and Postwar German Culture*, ed. Tina Frühauf and Lily E. Hirsch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 213.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 212.
- 65 Florian Scheduling, *Musical Journeys: Performing Migration in Twentieth-Century Music* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), 115.
- 66 Ligeti, "Everything is Chance," 266.
- 67 György Ligeti, "György Ligeti in Conversation with Péter Várnai," trans. Gabor J. Schabert, in *György Ligeti in Conversation* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1983), 21.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 69 Charles Wilson, "György Ligeti and the Rhetoric of Autonomy," *Twentieth-Century Music* 1, no. 1 (2004): 5-28.
- 70 György Ligeti, "Mein Judentum," in *György Ligeti: Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Monika Lichtenfeld (Mainz: Schott, 2007), 2:25.
- 71 Ligeti, *Träumen Sie in Farbe?*, 51-52.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 73 Ligeti, "Mein Judentum," 28.
- 74 György Ligeti, *György Ligeti Edition 6: Keyboard Works*, trans. David Feurzeig and Annelies McVoy, Sony Classical SK 62307, 1997, 12.
- 75 György Ligeti, "György Ligeti: 'The cogs have to mesh, exactly,'" interview by John Tusa, in *On Creativity: Interviews Exploring the Process* (London: Methuen, 2003), 189.
- 76 Ligeti, "György Ligeti in Conversation with Péter Várnai," 21.
- 77 György Ligeti, "Gespräch mit György Ligeti," interview by Monika Lichtenfeld, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 145, no. 1 (Jan. 1984): 10.

- 78 Rachel Beckles Willson, *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music During the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 188-92; Steinitz, *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination*, 337.
- 79 Zoltán Rácz, "'Az embert megérinti az univerzális tudás': Rácz Zoltán Ligeti Gyögyről," interview by Zoltán Farkas, *Muzsika* 49, no. 10 (Oct. 2006): 30.
- 80 Richard Steinitz, "The Innate Melodist," in *György Ligeti's Cultural Identities*, ed. Amy Bauer and Márton Kerékfy (London: Routledge, 2018), 64.
- 81 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xix, 251-58.
- 82 Ligeti, "György Ligeti on His Works," 14.
- 83 Ligeti, "A Conversation with György Ligeti," 14.
- 84 In the score, the German phrase "Birmanische Gongs" is erroneously translated into English as "Birmanian Gongs." These instruments can also be referred to as "Thai gongs."
- 85 William P. Malm, *Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2000), 249; Peter Fletcher, *World Musics in Context: A Comprehensive Survey of the World's Major Musical Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 313-14.
- 86 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 252.
- 87 Ibid.

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# EMPLOYERS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERWAR ROMANIAN WELFARE STATE\*

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## Abstract

The present paper offers an exploratory case study of employer-centric approaches to welfare state development in interwar Romania. By focusing on ideational debates rather than macro-structural conditions, I argue that, similarly to the well-researched cases of developed countries, employers also played key roles in the historical creation of welfare institutions in late developing countries. Focusing on the nuances of historical contingencies, I show when, why and how Romanian employers acted as consenters, supporters or dissenters of an emerging welfare state, envisaged by policymakers as a key tool for catch-up development.

**Keywords:** Policy transfers, International Labor Office, interwar Romania, welfare state development, varieties of capitalism, power resource approach, employers and the welfare state

## 1. Introduction

Replying to Minister of Labor Grigore Trancu-Iasi's passionate speech on the state's duty to protect worker rights, Stefan Cerkez, former president of the Association of Industrialists from Romania (UGIR) and current Senator for industries, noted: "employers are happy to *consent* [to new welfare taxes], as long as we are not subjected to random terror by petty bureaucrats" (DS, 8<sup>th</sup> Febr 1927).<sup>1</sup> Emphasizing that employers recognize the needs of workers better than the socially disconnected state (DS, 8<sup>th</sup> Febr 1927), Cerkez (re)strengthened UGIR's long-standing position that

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it was in fact the state's overbearing desire for control that damaged worker-employer relationships, more than the latter's putative "malintent" (1922, 1-3). At the same time however, Romanian employers' nuanced approach seems to contradict conventional social policy studies which posit that the dominant profit-seeking logic should prompt business representatives to strive and block forms of worker compensation. This raises significant research questions regarding why, when and how employers support or block social policy construction.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the role of business associations in the construction of the Romanian interwar welfare state. Following Mares (2003) and Korpi (2006), I break down the umbrella of a "welfare state" and proceed to argue that employers play differential roles across the social policy spectrum as protagonists, consenters and antagonists. Concretely, I show that employer participation or lack thereof varies between policies based on *both* political contingencies (Paster 2013) *and* the mix between risk redistribution and firms' control (Mares 2003, 17). While conventional employer-centric approaches focus on differences in welfare support between high-skill and low-skill industries and firms (Paster 2013 for in depth review), I analyze the way in which business associations operate with both intrinsic and instrumental logics of action (du Gay and Pryke 2002). This allows integrating the individual political salience of respective social policies into a more detailed account of employer preferences. The paper thus builds specifically on political science studies which seek to reconcile the power resources approach (PRA) on social policy development (Korpi 2006) with the influential varieties of capitalism (VoC) literature (Hall and Soskice 2001; Iversen 2005).

In order to compress the empirical diversity of social policies (Mares 2003, 14), this paper zooms in on two crucial welfare state expansions: firstly, the process of creating a unified insurance system in Greater Romania; secondly, key transfers from the International Labor Office (ILO; 8 Hour Work Day Convention – henceforth 8WDC, Unemployment Convention – henceforth UC), which played an intricate political role in the minds of Romanian policymakers. Creating an insurance unification law was a winding process, constantly debated and postponed since the 1920s, with a crucial developmental role – creating the economic-institutional scaffolding that would in turn help to replicate the social basis of advanced industrial capitalism. This cross-cutting role implies that debates on the unification law should perfectly illustrate the central theme of risk redistribution and benefit control as drivers of

employer preferences (Mares 2003). On the surface, transfers from the ILO typically unfolded in more marginal social policy areas, with less political salience (van Daele 2008, Kott 2013). At the same time however, interwar Romanian policymakers theorized that for a small state such as Romania, the ILO could function as a unique gateway for diplomatic opportunities. This specific conceptualization fundamentally revamped the power relationships between policymakers and direct stakeholders such as employers. The dual selection opens up space to show how employers reacted both to structural shifts, as analyzed in the conventional literature, as well as more contingently-defined political reconfigurations (Paster 2013).

Thus far, employer-centric approaches have only been superficially applied to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), with most studies focusing on post-socialist “dependent market capitalism” (Nolke and Vliegenthart 2009) or “FDI-lead growth” (Ban 2022). While such studies do include isolated reflections on historical developments, they do not offer a fully-fledged explanation of employers’ role(s) in the early creation of welfare states. This is typically justified by a stereotypical view of late development, wherein state-lead industrialization distorts power relationships by granting employers more-or-less stable markets and protection from oscillations of global capitalism. Yet, as will be shown throughout the paper, the Romanian state’s relationship with local industries was far from linear, leaning more often than not towards neglect than overprotection (Busila 1931, 371). While undoubtedly Romanian employers did greatly benefit from state-led industrialization, they were not fully isolated from the ebb and flow of capitalist markets, including the type of institutional intervention observed in advanced capitalist economies. As such, although conceptual refining is clearly mandatory, the analytical toolkit used to dissect employers’ welfare preferences in developed economies can be a useful starting point for studying social policy development in late industrializing CEE.

Typically under-explored in the broader welfare state literature,<sup>2</sup> interwar Romania thus serves as an exploratory case for a broader conceptual scaffolding (George and Bennett 2005; Delcea 2021). On a first level, “Greater Romania” embodies the common structural features of CEE late industrialization (Murgescu 2010). On a second level, Romania also displays the typical political debates of a “semi-peripheral society” seeking to deal with the ebb and flow of global capitalist markets (Chirot 1978). As such, similar to other late modernizing cases, replicating

the institutional structure that balanced power resources in developed countries became a key political desiderate (Leisering 2018). This brought employers, employees and policymakers into open conflict, above and beyond local nuances of delayed industrialization. The case-study starts from 1922, with the inaugural meeting of the enlarged UGIR, and ends in 1938, with the abolition of formal democratic policymaking.

Echoing recent trends in the broader welfare state literature, I start the analysis from a complete review of the 1919-1938 plenum proceedings of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, to capture the entire ideational space where social policymaking unfolded (Singh 2015). This overarching focus allows analyzing discrete welfare reforms within the broader societal debate on social policymaking, wherein ideas of order from multiple spheres (Leisering 2018) have differential impact on power resources (Korpi 2006, Paster 2013). Because institutional structures and historical legacies rendered partisanship secondary (Sdrobis 2015), I analyze discrete debates in diachronic fashion, as integral to long-running stances on development (see also Delcea 2021). Secondly, I rely on the journal of UGIR published between 1922 and 1938 to fully illustrate the proactive strategy of employers regarding welfare development. Lastly, I further analyze Governmental sources (journals, reports, policy proposals) to illustrate when and how the open ideational debates from Parliament integrated employer voices into institutional creation. The paper proceeds as follows – a general overview of the employer-centric literature, the Romanian case-study and a set of conclusions.

## **2. Literature review**

At their core, comparative social policy studies typically argue that as welfare states seek to “decommodify labor” (Esping-Andersen 1990), they raise direct opposition from “capital”, which inherently takes labor as a commodity (Iversen 2005, 6-7). The key tension is that “the cost of social policy for employers do not always outweigh the benefits provided to firms” (Mares 2003, 24). As such, welfare intervention (to use the terminology of Kaufmann 2013) is essentially a form of compensation offered to workers (Mares 2003), given the asymmetric power of capital forcing them to face new life risks, or given the state’s own attempt at forcefully engendering social integration (Vis and van Kersbergen 2014 for summary).

On closer scrutiny however, a “neat antagonism” between labor and capital is neither historically documented (Swenson 1991), nor “theoretically” discernible in the shape and functioning of modern welfare arrangements (Iversen 2005, 6-12). In fact, starting with Swenson (1991) a consistent research tradition unearthed that, historically, labor power is built *with* rather than *against* employer power. For instance, building on Katzenstein’s “small state argument” (1985), Swenson (1992) shows that in the topical Swedish and Danish cases, since employers lacked markets, they could only withstand the ebb and flow of global capitalism by “forcing” labor centralization, which in turn coerced the state towards organizing markets to increase efficiency. In his sweeping historical analysis encompassing both small and large Western European cases, Lindert (2004) further showed that the link between public spending, investment and national income is far too weak to justify any argument that welfare states are a limit to growth and as such could only have been developed against employer interests (for a broader summary Iversen 2005, 6-12).

In this line of thought, a range of studies show that while employees seek welfare protection against sickness, injury and old-age as new risks specific to industrial life-course employment, employers themselves also seek to minimize the risk of losing the skill-sets that generate added value and profits (Iversen 2005, 9). At its broadest, Mares (2004) thus argues that there is a generally positive correlation between economic insecurity and the level of social protection. The more specific crux of the issue is that conventional accounts of welfare state development neglect the differential impact of differentiated skills on employer preferences (Iversen 2005, 9, 77-111). On a basic level, as Mares (2003) shows, high risk industries were in fact proactive in supporting welfare benefits, as a way to lower their own cost (specifically on accident insurance, see also Moses 2018). On a more refined level, economic insecurity deepens sectoral cleavages over the scope and design of social insurance (Mares 2003). Essentially, whether and how employers support welfare intervention thus becomes a function of balancing their own cost in employees’ skills investment with the cost of insurance (Mares 2003). The topical case is unemployment insurance where, as Mares (2003) shows building on both Swenson (1991) and the emerging VoC tradition (Hall & Soskice 2001), partisanship and trade union strength are statistically negligible, while the size of the high-risk industrial sector is key. An additional key variable that may prompt employers to become proactive supporters of

welfare state development is the level of retained control (Mares 2003). Control is particularly important during uncertain times, as it allows firms both a tight coupling between insurance benefits and wage hierarchies, *and*, perhaps more importantly, the ability to use welfare benefits as an incentive (Mares 2003).

Pushing the argument forward, Iversen (2005) focuses on the *politics of markets* rather than the traditional politics against markets, to argue that welfare state development should be seen simultaneously as an arena for distributive struggles *and* a source of comparative advantage. Focusing on a welfare state's insurance function, rather than its purely distributive mechanisms, Iversen (2005) essentially argues that employers do not just acquiesce to welfare intervention, but actually form the basis for a clear supporting constituency. This in turn better explains specific gaps in power resource approaches regarding democracy and inequality – because the dominant skill profile of industries<sup>3</sup> dictate employer preferences, unequal democracies do not *ipso facto* generate more generous welfare states. In this sense, employers are not only proactively involved in welfare state development, but they are in fact integral to the political game that previous scholars saw as decisive for social insurance creation and/or expansion (Esping-Andersen 1990).

For Paster (2013), employers are also involved in welfare state development, but within a broader perspective that transcends the immediate “business interest hypothesis” (Mares 2003). Building on Iversen's idea of welfare as competitive advantage, Paster (2013, 417) argues that employer support for welfare is essentially a response to the political challenges that business confronts. In this view, employers proactively support welfare creation or expansion when faced with a system-disruptive challenge, while advocating for limits on redistribution when faced with conventional attempts at economic policy reforms (Paster 2013, 418-419). This occurs because business elites can always resort to occupational social policy to settle their skill-investment requirements, without necessarily having to take a position on a politically contentious public system (Paster 2013, 421). This adds an important nuance to previous models – not only is employer preference not static, but it also varies according to considerations that may not always be linked with macro-structural economic change, affecting the dominant skill profile of a given market.

By analyzing short-term shifts alongside long-term structural change, Paster (2013) effectively opens up space to analyze welfare state

development as a layering of multiple interests, rather than abrupt change during highly specific windows of opportunity (in the sense of Streeck and Thelen 2005). This in turn, highlights that understanding employers' welfare preferences requires focusing on microfoundations of political behavior, rather than macro-structural economic profiles (see also Korpi 2006). Specifically, as Korpi (2006) shows, differences in "logics of the situation" generate "asymmetric effects of expanded citizenship rights" that aim above and beyond the "efficacy of economic resources". As such, while cross-cutting coalitions between employers and employees are sometimes affected by structural factors, more often than not "distributive strife is also focused on influencing the relative importance of competing lines of cleavage" ranging from ethnicity, to religion, to occupation (Korpi 2006). Similarly, different logics of the situation also imply that timing matters to the point that employer preferences are not set *a priori*, but may even change across the states of policy-making (Paster 2013). Essentially, not only are "employers" not a fully homogenous group, with a unitary welfare preference, but they also oscillate between consent, proactive support, proactive neglect and contingently-defined combinations of preferences, depending on specific social insurance policies.

In this line of thought, the present article offers an exploratory case-study, applying the microfoundations approach to interwar Romania. On a first level, the article seeks to offer a broad historical overview of the understudied phenomenon of employer involvement in welfare state development in late industrializing Romania. On a more advanced level, by going beyond a macro-structural approach, the article seeks to outline potential conceptual building blocks and research hypotheses for a broader study of the role of employers in social policy in late industrializing economies.

### **3. Employers and the welfare state in interwar Romania**

#### *3.1 The winding road to an insurance unification law*

On the surface, early 1920s Romanian welfare politics took on the appearance of "emergency policymaking" (Inglot 2008) because of the sheer breadth of existing challenges (Halippa, DCD, 28<sup>th</sup> Nov 1924). The crux of the issue was the realization that the formal creation of "Greater Romania" was not in and of itself sufficient to solve late

development – despite gaining a larger population and better resources, the country was a “small economy” and a “middle-tier state in world politics” (Ionescu, DCD, 9<sup>th</sup> Jul 1921). In fact, the aftermath of World War I had unleashed such a dire situation that simply adjusting salaries and welfare benefits to inflation was not enough (DS, 15<sup>th</sup> Jul 1920), for either state-employees (DS, 17<sup>th</sup> Febr 1920), or private-sector workers (Inculeț, DCD, 10<sup>th</sup> Feb 1920). The cost of forging a unitary state was so high that employers themselves proposed solutions involving mixed worker-owner associations, wherein the latter would buy essential goods for supporting workers’ livelihoods, as a more efficient economic intervention than just raising salaries (Lorenti 1922, 34). This was part of a broader narrative, wherein business representatives constantly claimed not just awareness of the need for joint action, but in fact willingness to co-operate and be involved in policymaking (Lorenti 1922, 34). On a deeper level therefore, the common denominator across the political and the business arenas was that crisis-management measures, such as the formal extension of the seemingly generous 1912 Nenițescu Insurance Law over provincial systems inherited from Austria-Hungary and/or imperial Russia, would not suffice. What was needed was the creation of an integrative framework, with state-wide economic and social policies acting in concert as a safety net against the ebb and flow of post-war capitalism.

However, creating a coherent welfare intervention was not at all straightforward. On the one hand, political elites seemed to overwhelmingly agree that economic recovery and modernization needed to start from state-building, to the detriment of the private sector (Delcea 2021). On the other hand, the few measures that did aim above and beyond crisis-management (Florea, DCD, 27<sup>th</sup> Mar 1928), were unilaterally designed, embodying the paternalistic view that tight state-control would preclude fights and radicalization (Sandor, DS, 11<sup>th</sup> Febr 1927). For instance, in the construction of the Chambers of Labor and the High Council of Labor, the underlying idea was two-fold – firstly, the state sought to protect against Bolshevik-style worker radicalization; secondly, by rendering the impression that the state imposed worker rights to otherwise reluctant employers, policymakers wanted to leave room for potentially instrumentalizing worker grievances against business representatives (Report, DS, 10<sup>th</sup> Febr 1927). This essentially forced employers, who were in fact only opposed to the randomness of over-bureaucratized state institutions rather than to welfare intervention as such,<sup>4</sup> to espouse their own brand of strategic pro-worker narrative (Cerkez, DS, 8<sup>th</sup> Febr 1927).



In this line of thought, employer MPs abandoned passive consent for an apparent proactive support, in the guise of promoting “exclusive worker leadership” rather than mixed employer-employee committee (Cerkez, DS, 8<sup>th</sup> Febr 1927).

At the same time however, because the state also constantly intervened in forceful fashion to preempt worker radicalization, this particular narrative remained secondary to the more dominant cleavage surrounding institutional autonomy and funding. On the surface, Romanian employers seem to validate in full Mares’ (2003) hypothesis regarding control, as they pledged consent to welfare intervention if either full institutional autonomy was granted *or* the state took on the costly financing of the social insurance bureaucracy (*Memorii* 1922, 100). While the former may have been necessary but not sufficient, the latter was in fact absolutely vital, as business representatives cited cases from “developed states” where the cost of managing a welfare system eventually bankrupted the whole system (*Memorii* 1922, 97-100). The crux of the issue was that policymakers’ theorization of catch-up modernization involved a top-down intervention designed not just to respond to real worker grievances, but also to attempt and pre-empt potential ones that may in fact never unfold (Mircea 1924, 274 (a)). This would in turn create overgrown institutions with a fiscally unsustainable bureaucracy and an artificial separation between welfare policies that should act in concert (Penescu-Kertesch 1924, 171). To avoid such a scenario, Romanian employers even became proactive proponents of welfare intervention, rather than just passive consenters, seeking to ensure that the emerging centralized system would be created from the ground-up rather than vice versa (Lorenti 1922 (b), 162). On a deeper level however, things were not fully clear, as employer support may have in fact been less about the long-term economic benefits of welfare intervention and more about ensuring the benevolence of a state which had failed to live up to its financial obligations towards businesses (Busila 1931, 371).

Such multi-faceted cleavages running in the background became even more obvious in the debates building towards an insurance unification law. On a first level, the 1923 Chirculescu project was redacted and compiled essentially without any stakeholder input (Dimitriu 1922, 208). In fact, even after failing to pass from the technical committees to the Parliamentary plenum, the project continued to be debated in mostly political fashion for virtually the entire decade, with only UGIR representatives to Parliament and ad hoc industry MPs being consulted. This prompted employers to craft a double-layered critique. On a very broad level, given UGIR’s

national representation (Cerkez 1922), employers argued that their own debates on the project should precede the public parliamentary sessions (*Adresa* 1926, 8 (a)). The issue was more than one of democratic representation, as employers claimed that the state lacked vital actuarial data regarding the nature of specific social insurances. In this line of thought, the state's commitment in front of the ILO regarding an overhaul of invalidity insurance and its inclusion in a comprehensive welfare net was purely rhetorical, as it would be simply unaffordable, even with employer contributions, which were nigh impossible to actually acquire (*Contra-propuneri* 1926, 63). This feeds into the more discrete criticism that, since a unified insurance legislation would not survive without employers' "material sacrifices", business representatives needed to be involved in the framing of the law (*Adresa* 1926, 7 (a)). In fact, employers argued that irrespective of their contribution, the type of comprehensive insurance system envisaged under the Chirculescu draft would raise the costs of production and in turn workers' cost of life beyond anything the emerging welfare net could cover (Mircea 1926 (b)).

At the same time however, UGIR's narrative also reached beyond the issue of payment and control (Mares 2003). Concretely, employers also sought to insure against potential worker radicalization, which in turn would attract harsh political clampdown (Paster 2013) – "what worries us [more than material sacrifices] is to find a way to make it publicly known that these [welfare] measures are the result of [employer] consent, and not pure political imposition." (*Adresa* 1926, 7 (a)) This was crucial for "social peace" understood as worker quiescence (*Adresa* 1926, 7 (a)) because, as employers argued, without their involvement, any purely political unification law would be unsustainable, hence quickly unpopular, resulting in potential worker radicalization (Mircea 1926 (b)). The key stake was to show that a unified insurance system was not a "political gift" but rather a case of "leeching off" employers' own sustainable development plan (Lorenti 1929, 3). It is precisely in this line of thought that employers argued for diluting state control – a sustainable co-operation between employers and employees could be orchestrated from the ground-up, but was difficult to maintain in an artificial, top-down institutional framework (Mircea 1926, 100 (a)). While the state quite clearly needed to have some control on the actual implementation of laws, the functioning of the bureaucracy and the real allocation of funds, the Central Insurance House should retain otherwise full autonomy in defining the nature and scope of the unified insurance system (*Contra-propuneri* 1926, 63).

Exactly how potent was UGIR's critique is difficult to discern. By 1933 and the passing of the Ionișescu Unification Law, business representatives had successively claimed to both have "had some success in blocking the ongoing project in the relevant parliamentary committees" (*Adresa* 1926, 172 (b)), but also to have "found out only from ministry journals that such a project was coming to Parliament" (*Adresa* 1926, 182 (b)). The version of the draft that did find its way to UGIR by 1930 embodied virtually all of the previous points of contention – overbureaucratization, political control, unclear funding etc., prompting business representatives to note that the project had not passed due to sheer incompetency and political turmoil rather than attempts at including stake-holder input (Raport 1930, 320). In fact, neither of the successive iterations that seemed to have reached employers (Pennescu-Kertesch 1931, 112), nor the final Ionișescu Law itself, fully solved the issue of overbureaucratization (Manoilescu, DS, 18<sup>th</sup> Mar 1933). On paper, the Ionișescu Law seemed to have streamlined the welfare bureaucracy by creating a management system that placed employers and employees on equal footing (Ionișescu, DS, 21<sup>st</sup> Mar 1933). In practice, collapsing the budget of the Central Insurance House into the general state budget stripped away all institutional autonomy, to the point that employers even offered to take on some of the costs if that would retain some degree of institutional freedom (Samoil, DS, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1934).

Superficially, the Ionișescu Law seemed to include an important employer request – a unitary and homogenous system of contributions (Banu, DCD, 24<sup>th</sup> Mar 1934). While the actuarial calculations were poor (Banu, DCD, 24<sup>th</sup> Mar 1934), it was immediately obvious that this inclusion sought to secure at least passive consent from employers (Ionișescu, DS, 6<sup>th</sup> Apr 1933). Over the short term, lowering taxes achieved the purported aim of having "employers embrace social reforms" (Ionișescu, DS, 21<sup>st</sup> Mar 1933), with the clear caveat that this may disappear if taxation would rise abruptly (Mircea, DS, 21<sup>st</sup> Mar 1933). In fact, policymakers made it quite clear that a relatively low level of taxation was a political concession *vis-à-vis* employers, going in the face of much higher worker demands (Ionișescu, DS, 6<sup>th</sup> Apr 1933). Over the long term however, the aforementioned shallowness of the actuarial calculations and the self-admitted "experimental nature of the Ionișescu Law" (Banu, DCD, 24<sup>th</sup> Mar 1934) quickly made it clear to employers that virtually all subsequent reforms would raise expenses (Herzog, DCD, 27<sup>th</sup> Febr 1935). For instance, already by 1934 the inclusion of employers' duty to fully cover an employee's costs during the first 7 days of illness raised huge

concerns and vociferous criticisms (*Necesitatea* 1934, 5-8). Similarly, despite having labelled the loanițescu Law as an attempt at reducing overbureaucratization (loanițescu, DS, 21<sup>st</sup> Mar 1933), policymakers soon continued to swell the welfare bureaucracy entirely on the employers' costs (*Necesitatea* 1934, 5-8). Not only was the emerging insurance system essentially neglecting all previous employer criticisms, but policymakers even continued to reduce employer representation (Raport 1935, 7-8), claiming in parallel that state control was needed to shield business from a putative worker radicalization (Deleanu, DCD, 3<sup>rd</sup> Mar 1934).

On the whole, the trajectory of the insurance unification law in interwar Romania highlights that employers were highly interested in the emerging welfare intervention, but were forced by various political contingencies to constantly alter their narratives, strategy and purported interest. While classical issues such as the balance between costs and control were of key importance, the awareness that employers lacked power resources, due to dependency on state funding and market protection, created a multi-layered narrative. Essentially, employers tried to balance at least a modicum of influence with an overt political recognition of their consent, if not proactive involvement, that would allow for potential cross-class coalition with labor, to offset political power.

### *3.2 Employers and policy transfers – the case of ILO Conventions*

The realization that the formal creation of Greater Romania did not solve late development prompted many political elites to argue that learning from abroad could act as a shortcut (Coltor, DCD, 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug 1920) for a country lacking both adequate capital and political experience with a complex capitalist economy (Popovici, DS, 15<sup>th</sup> Dec 1922). This was not however straightforward because the profound changes unleashed by World War I had blurred categorizations of “advanced” countries and respective “best practices” that could be adopted (Constantinescu, DS, 11<sup>th</sup> Febr 1927). In addition, the unification had also yielded at best a “strong middling player” in a political-military sense, highly susceptible to revisionism which meant that internationalization, in the guise of a complex system of alliances, also needed to seek international guarantees (Ionescu, DCD, 9<sup>th</sup> Jul 1921). The emergence of large International Organizations (IOs) only partly solved the problem. On one level, IOs did function as overarching knowledge-actors, pooling enough technical resources to potentially help a late developing country cut across multiple

new uncertainties. On a different level, IOs varied greatly in terms of both capacity and intentionality. For instance, the International Labor Office had few formal means of enforcement, but at least under Albert Thomas' presidency had created an integrative forum for global co-operation (Hughes and Haworth 2013). Conversely, while the League of Nations formally had enforcement capabilities, it quickly came to lack actual political thrust (Roman 1935, 5-6).

Such imbalances prompted Romanian political elites to carve out a holistic strategy – by co-operating in fashionable international fora such as the ILO or in the area of minority protection, Romania could craft an image of a modern state (Weyland 2006) which allowed networking with Great Powers and attracting the security guarantees that the League of Nations qua direct forum could not offer. This was most visible in the case of the ILO which went from an initial perception of “imposition” (Madgearu, DCD, 20<sup>th</sup> Dec 1919) to earning the unanimous support of the international community (Hristu 1935, 11) and the “exclusive role to preempt wars by keeping nations quiescent” (Roman 1935, 5-6). Such a specific ideational construction was layered on top of the theorization on ILO best practices as a solution to late development (Filliti, DS, Mar 1920), prompting policymakers to at least rhetorically embrace a “highest responsiveness” to ILO policies (Setlacec 1930, 108). For instance, this meant that during the 1920s Romania ratified 13 out of 16 ILO conventions (NAC 1038, 27/1930). In addition, the layering of multiple considerations meant that even if any opposition were to congeal, within the political spectrum, or, more importantly, from relevant stakeholders, it could immediately be overcome within the broad understanding that ILO templates embodied the “national interest” for modernization and development (Ghiulea 1934, 3).

The recognition by employers that legislation such as the ILO Convention on the 8 Hour Work Day (8WDC) was not “economic policymaking” (Mircea (b) 1928, 200), but part of a broader “political-diplomatic logic” (Mircea 1930, 6), prompts a reconsideration of their various positions as passive consenters, proactive supporters or dissenters. On the surface, similarly with the case of the insurance unification law, employers qua stake-holders were virtually not at all consulted (Mircea 1924, 531 (b)). In fact, because policymakers agreed on full compliance with ILO policies, at least over the short term, they simply ignored employers' rights to participate in delegations (Mircea 1924, 461 (b)). On a deeper level however, once this covert strategy (Botez 1934, 16)

no longer became tenable, employers gained new avenues for critique and even influence. For instance, employers could highlight to the ILO how Romanian governments were either misusing or in fact ratifying conventions without implementing them (Mircea 1930, 6). This would greatly hamper policymaker's efforts towards creating the image of a modern state and it explains why employers specifically focused on the 8WDC or the Unemployment Convention (UC), which were crucial to the ILO's own strategy for bolstering its power (van Daele 2008, Kott 2018). In addition, Romanian employers could also use the ILO to network with fellow business representatives (Kott 2013) and thus hamper policymakers' abilities to access international credit and/or markets. This was also predicated on the way in which policymakers intended to use the 8WDC for instance as cheap and readily available competitive signaling for foreign investment (Appel and Orenstein 2018).

In this line of thought, employers adopted a strategy similar to the case of the unification law – passive consent offered for being involved in the debates and the framing of ILO conventions (Mircea 1924, 459 (b)). Recognizing that they lacked power resources, employers sought to peg their own narrative on the trope of ILO conventions as developmental tools, claiming that they do not oppose the substance of the policy transfers, requesting exclusively the possibility to offer input regarding timing (Mircea 1924, 459 (b)). Over the short term, employers thus limited their critique to the unilateral, top-down application of transfers (Mircea 1924, 461 (b)). This was visible both regarding the 8WDC in the 1920s when Romanian governments were vocal regarding ratification, albeit shallow or hap-hazard *vis-à-vis* implementation (Lupu, DCD, 24-25<sup>th</sup> Mar 1928) and subsequently *vis-à-vis* the UC during the 1930s, when it became a key topic at the ILO and as such for Romanian policymakers' quest for the image of a modern state. The minimal aim of such a critique was to potentially trade passive consent for either a modicum of predictability or at least some form of being included in the policymaking process (Mircea 1924, 461 (b)).

Over the long turn however, since this type of strategy only achieved a modicum of success *vis-à-vis* conventions that policymakers deemed secondary, but virtually no success over more structural reforms (*Adresa* 1925, 144-145), employers resorted to a more substantive strategy. For instance, the 8WDC was criticized as being particularly costly for a late industrializing country where low-skill workers constituted the bulk of the workforce, as it increased production costs (Mircea 1928, 93-94 (a)).

Raising production costs would in turn negatively affect workers' income and in a broader guise, the development of a national market (Mircea 1928, 93-94 (a)). Similar concerns were raised regarding unemployment insurance, seen by employers as an incentive for free-riding in an economy where low-skilled workers naturally reverted to agriculture, which, while not desirable, was at least some form of productivity. Given this specific structural feature of the Romanian economy, employers argued that if ILO conventions were to have any developmental role, they needed to include the type of local data that the state lacked, but UGIR could provide if properly consulted (Mircea 1924, 553 (b)). This could be achieved by granting UGIR equal rights within Romanian delegations to ILO (Mircea 1924, 459 (b)), including the liberty to properly carry out ILO inquiries and use them to provide policy input (Mircea 1924, 553-555 (b)). *Mutatis mutandis*, Romanian employers were at least in part concerned about insuring and/or putting premiums on highly transferable skills, similarly to arguments found in the varieties of capitalism literature (Hall & Soskice 2001). In context however, what Romanian employers seemed to have sought was, similar with the case of insurance unification, the public recognition that their input was neglected by policymakers, so that if the transfers proved to be an economic deadweight, business representatives would appear to workers as allies rather than enemies (*Adresa* 1927, 71-73).

As employers increasingly noticed that policymakers used foreign policy language rather than economic or social policy concepts to debate ILO conventions, they also crafted a corresponding critical narrative. On a first level, Romanian employers sought to signal that since the 8WDC was drafted mostly considering the experience of advanced capitalism, it was at the very least improper for a late developing industry (Mircea 1935, 3-5) and at worst an actual instrument of economic domination (Lărgeanu 1935, 11). While it was true that other late-comers did see some intrinsic developmental potential in such a social policy, employers were quick to point out that these were not the fore-runners of semi-peripheries that Romania sought to compare itself with (Poland, Czechoslovakia – Mircea 1928, 93-94 (a)), but rather countries considered laggards even by Romanian standards (Greece, India, Bulgaria – Mircea 1924, 529 (b)). Although by the 1930s some perceived laggards had “leaped ahead” by using ILO practices, this did not seem to be inextricably tied to specific conventions, but rather to a concerted use of industrial and labor policies (Casetti 1929, 120). In fact, UGIR specifically pointed out that employees

in developed countries had protested quite vigorously precisely because the shorter working day raised production costs, thus signaling that the 8WDC may have originally been more of a political tool than an actual developmental policy (Mircea 1926 (a)). If such a shallow approach may have worked in developed countries which had sufficient resources for policy experimentation, in late developing Romania simply copying the law with no stake-holder input and no contextual amendments only engendered confusion and economically costly strikes (Mircea 1928, 92-93 (a)).

In addition, employers further pointed out that while Romanian policymakers correctly observed that powerful global actors such as France, Germany and England were indeed engaged in negotiations and networking on the 8WDC or subsequently the UC (UGIR 1928, 100), they were mostly seeking ways to use it against each other (Godeanu 1934, 25-36). In fact, employers highlighted that “Great Powers” also resorted to token-ratification, conditioned by a range of mutually-binding agreements that they knew would never be passed by economic rivals (Mircea 1935, 14-15). In this line of thought, employers tried to peg themselves on a narrative originating in the 1920s and subsequently growing exponentially in the specific global context of the 1930s, claiming that while international organizations may formally bring together small and large states, they essentially provide templates that virtually exclusively embody the geopolitical interests of Great Powers (Lărgeanu 1935, 11). Such a critique aimed to dilute the perceived diplomatic value of ILO conventions, particularly in the autarkic climate emerging after the 1929-1933 Global Crisis.

On a superficial level, the huge variations in actually applying and/or enforcing ILO conventions in interwar Romania suggest that employer dissent had at least some partial effect. Particularly in large industries, where organized labor had the possibility to organize protests (Lupu, DCD, 24-25<sup>th</sup> Mar 1928), employer critique is likely to have at least been taken into consideration if not fully successful in prompting policy change. Similar to the case of insurance unification, it is difficult to fully disentangle when, why and how employer dissent mattered because faulty implementation was also often due to lack of state capacity, in the form of infrastructure and trained personnel (*Probleme* 1936, 17). In addition, while employer critique was constant (*Dare de seamă* 1931, 211), ILO conventions went through multiple moments of intense Governmental clamp down, suggesting that the foreign policy logic, defined as “national



interest” typically overcame any stake-holder opposition. It is precisely in this line of thought that business representatives nonetheless opted to voice discontent – despite realizing they lacked power resources, by making their opposition public, they could portray any putative employer-employee as a political construction, rather than a class conflict, in the classical sense.

#### 4. Conclusions

On the whole, the present article has shown that above and beyond structural specificities of state-led modernization (Gerschenkron 1962) and the creation of a dependent-market economy (Ban 2022), employers in late developing interwar Romania were not at all passive, but proactive agents in the debate on creating social insurances. For instance, Romanian business representatives sought balancing the weight of their economic contribution with retaining a sufficient degree of control. While they were not interested in coupling insurance benefits with wage hierarches as had been the case in developed countries (Mares 2003), Romanian employers were clearly seeking to limit state interference and over-bureaucratization so as to create a predictable legal-institutional framework. This in turn was argued to be beneficial for long-term growth and allowed employers to leverage their specific power resources (Korpi 2006). Similarly, given that huge economic fluctuations often prompted workers to oscillate between engaging in industries and reverting back to agriculture, Romanian employers were clearly interested in a type of welfare network that protected skills investment. To a high degree, the in-between-ness of mostly unskilled Romanian workers prompted employers to adopt the type of vocal dissent that underpinned the creation of liberal market capitalism in developed countries (Hall & Soskice 2001; Iversen 2005). Quite clearly, the fact that both employers and policymakers sought the rapid construction of Western-style capitalism (Delcea 2021) meant that, at least at a discursive level, some *topoi* were common with developments from early industrializers.

Yet, while the article highlights the existence of a stable basis for expanding employer-centric approaches outside the narrow universe of industrialized states, it also clearly shows the need for conceptual reconsiderations. For instance, the lateness of unemployment insurance in interwar Romania seems less a function of a predominantly low-skill industrial profile and more a function of policymakers’ lack of resources for

implementation. As the article has shown, although the narrative of using ILO conventions as diplomatic liaisons conferred policymakers enough power resources to overcome employer dissent, this did not equate with actual policy intervention. In this line of thought, while employer dissent may have played into policymakers' intent to ratify but not implement policies such as the 8WDC or the UC, it did not constitute the conceptual driver of delayed welfare construction. Rather, the way in which UGIR sought to make public both their dissent and their inability to sway a political elite that essentially dominated the modernization project (Delcea 2021) suggests that, as predicted by Paster (2013), employers react to changes in the political spectrum. This can be seen for instance in that Romanian employers constantly supported the perspective of a costly unification law seeking to create a stable institutional framework, wherein spurious political decision-making could be avoided. To no small degree, this was also visible in employer dissent regarding ILO conventions – above and beyond immediate economic costs, UGIR essentially feared the banalization of a purely top-down ethos regarding policymaking, which gave political elites enough room for potentially revolutionary change (in the sense of Paster 2013).

A similar consideration should be given to the causal order of policy development – while VoC and power resources approach have varying degrees of validity in explaining the individual logics of social policies, neither approach is fully relevant regarding the causal order of welfare intervention in interwar Romania. The case of insurance unification is particularly telling for the specificity of late industrialization – as political elites faced simultaneously challenges which had been tackled in developed countries in a gradual and layered fashion, they sought a cross-cutting solution (Delcea *forthcoming*). Similarly, the layering of various ILO conventions followed their ebb and flow as fashionable international norms, more than as welfare intervention, in the sense predicted by conventional employer-centric models. This also explains why it is virtually impossible to measure in a late industrializing state if, why and how extensions of social citizenship have asymmetric effects on power resources (Korpi 2006). Recognizing that radical mobilizations of labor were unlikely due to deep histories of political repression, employers supported the expansion of social rights as long as their opinion was publicized, so they could potentially ally with labor and dilute policymakers' control.

Consequently, extending employer-centric models to the multiple universes of late industrializing states will require a more complex analysis of late development, factoring in multiple ideational stakes, rather than macro-structural conditions. This opens up space for a much broader study on the microfoundations of class, which, as Korpi (2006) shows, do not produce the same outcomes over time and space, but are likely to offer tangible hypotheses regarding the probability of some outcomes over others. By analyzing late development as open-ended ideational contestation (Delcea *forthcoming*), future research can shed new light on the specific ideational stakes that constitute the basis for welfare intervention (Leisering 2018).

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For editorial purposes throughout the dissertation I use the following acronyms for archival references – *DS* – Debates of the Senate; *DCD* – Debates of the Chamber of Deputies; In text reference style – Speaker, Chamber, Date of session; *NAC* – National Archives Collection; in text reference style - *NAC*, Collection Number, Folder number / year; Archival journal and/or book sources are quoted as regular citations. The list of references contains the entirety of the archival references with summoning numbers for the particular collections.
- <sup>2</sup> Missing from the landmark Inglot 2008; shallow analysis in Cerami and Stanescu 2009 or Haggard and Kaufman 2008.
- <sup>3</sup> Predominantly low-skill industrial profile implying interchangeable workers, requiring little social protection as a safeguard for skills investment and as such a *liberal market economy*, whereas high-skill profile puts a premium on social investment, leading to a generous welfare state within a *coordinated market economy* – see further Hall & Soskice 2001.
- <sup>4</sup> For a deep historical analysis of over-bureaucratization see further Sorescu, A. (2017) “Funcționarism: la rhétorique de la corruption morale et institutionnelle au XIXe siècle en Roumanie”, in O. Dard, S. Marton and F. Monier (eds) *Moralité du pouvoir et corruption en France et en Roumanie, XVIIIe-XXe siècles*, pp. 83–97, Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne.

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# LONG LIVE THE FOREST! THE FOREST EXPLOITATION PROCEDURES AND THE POWER OF THE INSTITUTIONS. THE CASE OF THE ROMANIAN COMMUNAL VILLAGES\*

David Diaconu

## Abstract

This paper examines forest exploitation in Romanian communal villages from a new-institutional perspective. Using mixed-methods research but with an emphasis on qualitative data, it explores the specificities of forest exploitation. Starting from three research questions, the paper addresses the ideas of corruption, illegal logging, and the types of institutions that exist(ed) in the Romanian *obști* and their forest exploitations. Findings reveal that although institutions tend to be inclusive, extractive elements and challenges related to illegal logging and corruption persist. Thus, although the State increases its power, the situation is far from perfect.

**Keywords:** Institutions, communal villages, forest exploitation, illegal logging

## Introduction

The idea for this paper started during the postdoctoral research fellowship that I had at the New Europe College in the 2022/2023 academic year. During my last six years, I worked on the study of commons and commons management institutions in the case of Romanian villages. This paper, in addition to the other that I wrote,<sup>1</sup> aims to discuss a slightly different issue regarding the communal villages' challenges: the problem of forest (over)exploitation. Thus, in the following pages, I will try to map the forest

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exploitation procedures in Romanian communal villages,<sup>2</sup> employing a new-institutional political science and economic perspective.

The general objective of the present paper is to map the local-based institutions affecting non-cooperation in the exploitation of forests and to achieve a comprehensive opinion; the paper aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Are there any (historical) differences among the institutions (rules-in-use) governing forest exploitation in communal villages in different geographical areas?

RQ2: Are the forest exploitation institutions rather inclusive or rather extractive?

RQ3: Are corruption and adverse long-term outcomes – illegal or over-exploitation practices – enabled or encouraged by local institutions, despite nationwide institutions related to forest exploitation?

From a methodological perspective, the paper involves a mixed-methods research design emphasizing qualitative aspects. It starts with an exploratory design based on interviews, group interviews, and document analysis. I am also employing quantitative data such as population or agricultural censuses.

In the following sections, I will discuss the new-institutional theoretical framework that I am employing. Still, I will also describe the characteristics and the historical evolutions of the Romanian communal villages and the commons they govern. The core concepts of this paper are *institutions*, *communal villages*, *the tragedy of the commons*, and *collective action*. The theoretical framework and its evolution will be presented in the following sections.

The present analysis considers three different development periods in the case of the local-based institutions and four geographical areas of nowadays' Romania. Communal villages from Argeş, Gorj, Vrancea, and Suceava represent the case studies. In the *Discussion* section, I will discuss the relevant differences between these areas related to forest management and I will shortly present a case study related to a specific village.

## **New-institutional theoretical framework**

Theoretically, this paper may be considered at the intersection of political science and economics. I extensively wrote about the new institutional economic literature on *Commons and Local Development Disparities*.<sup>3</sup>

In this section, I will shortly present the main concepts needed for understanding the argument developed in the paper.

The core concepts of this paper are *institutions*, *the tragedy of the commons*, and *collective action*. These concepts were developed within the new-institutional economics theoretical framework.

One of the most recognized institutionalists is Douglass North. In his 1990 book, he stated that „*institutions are the rules of the game in a society, or more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. In consequence, they structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social or economic.*”<sup>4</sup> Following North, institutions are understood as rules or norms, either formal or informal, that are relevant for shaping human behavior. Thus, institutions have an essential role also in shaping society. Douglass North was not the only economist who discussed this topic. Another Nobel Prize winner in economics, Elinor Ostrom,<sup>5</sup> narrowed the definition by introducing the idea of institutions as a “set of working rules”.<sup>6</sup> Those two approaches are complementary, and both follow the same tradition. Coming to the present, there are many other economists or political scientists who offer different specificities regarding institutions. For example, another well-cited author is Daron Acemoglu. Although he is not considered a complementary theoretician with Ostrom or North, Acemoglu introduces an important distinction in the literature: inclusive and extractive institutions. These two concepts enriched the institutional approach. Inclusive economic institutions enable the participation of the entire population based on their skills and choices, including private property rights.<sup>7</sup> Extractive institutions – defined in contrast with inclusive institutions – extract wealth from one group to benefit another without emphasizing private property.<sup>8</sup> In other words, for Acemoglu and Robinson, inclusive institutions encourage a free market and transparency, while extractive institutions encourage corruption.

The literature in economics provides a relevant typology of goods, which is important for the next concept I will present – the tragedy of the commons. Scholars such as Elinor Ostrom, Vincent Ostrom, or Cornes & Sandler classify goods based on two main criteria: excludability and rivalry. While excludable goods allow for benefits to be restricted to specific users or managed by the provider,<sup>9</sup> rivalry can be understood as diminishing the consumption opportunities for others.<sup>10</sup> Referring to the combinations of excludability and rivalry, four categories of goods may emerge private, toll, common, and public goods.<sup>11</sup> The common goods –

commons, hereafter – are those that any person may use, but with each usage, their quality or quantity will suffer.

The tragedy of the commons is a concept that was widely used in different domains. Garret Hardin introduced it in his 1968 paper.<sup>12</sup> His famous metaphor refers to a pasture where two herders brought cattle. The central assumption is the one of rationality. That means each herder is pursuing its own interest in maximizing income, which means it is expected – as rational – to bring more and more cattle to the common pasture. This action will, of course, result in an increased individual profit while both herders share the costs. However, this behavior leads to the destruction of the pasture, as the number of cattle exceeds the pasture's capacity for regeneration. This is the *tragedy of the commons*.<sup>13</sup>

Elinor Ostrom explored three solutions to the tragedy of the commons. The first, to which she refers as the Hobbesian solution (or the centralized power solution), refers to the idea that a state entity imposes regulations, controlling everything from monitoring the number of herders and cattle each brings to the pasture to sanctioning instruments that have to be imposed by the same entity. The second, known as liberal solution or privatization, suggests that the common should be divided among users, transforming the commons into private goods for individual exploitation. Ostrom's third solution advocates for individuals to construct the institutions governing the commons, arguing that local communities are best equipped to determine exploitation limits.<sup>14</sup> In this paper, I will present an evolution from the third solution to the first, arguing that the present situation is imperfect.

Moreover, I will refer to some situations in which some communities successfully avoided the tragedy through certain institutions. Of course, this is not an exceptional case; many other scholars present such situations. For instance, Berkers *et al.* discuss the case of the Cree Amerindian fishermen of James Bay, who regulate the use of their common through mutually agreed rules, such as waiting turns for prime fishing sites.<sup>15</sup> Those rules do not have to be respected in any general context but in the specific situation they were built on.

The third core concept of this paper is the one of collective action. This concept was introduced by Mancus Olson in 1965.<sup>16</sup> Richard Wagner simplified the main argument of the book. He considered that Olson's book should be understood as exploring the link between individual rationality and individual engagement in self-interested group activities.<sup>17</sup> In other words, Olson's argument is part of the rational choice theory,

assuming (similarly to Hardin) that individuals are driven by self-interest and prioritize their outcomes. Olson added that when individuals belong to a group with a shared interest, a potential conflict between common and individual interests may appear.<sup>18</sup>

Considering this conceptual framework, this paper aims to offer an explanation for forest overexploitation in some Romanian villages.

### **The Romanian communal villages and their history**

Conceptually, communal village refers to a specific type of village that owns what I previously described as commons. In the literature, we may find different terms for the same concept. For example, Monica Vasile refers to those as *commons*, and other scholars refer to those as *collective forests*. I stick to the term communal village instead of *commons* because, as I previously argued, *commons* are a type of goods that are governed by these organizational forms of villages. Some examples of commons managed by the *obști*<sup>19</sup> are forests (mainly), meadows, pastures, or even buildings or infrastructure elements. Thus, I am considering the definition of Henri Stahl that stated that the communal village has a leading organization that governs those types of goods, *the obște*.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the paper, I will use the terms *obște* and communal village interchangeably to describe the same cases. The main characteristic of those villages is related to the undivided group ownership over certain land. Those areas are not based on clear boundaries between the properties, but each villager owns a part of the total area, and there is no specification regarding the points where the area starts or ends. Stahl described those villages as “neither a unique household, nor a simple spatial coexistence of autonomous households. The communal village is an association of family households on a commonly owned territory, in which the collective has anterior and superior rights, exercised by the *obște*”.<sup>21</sup> Adding to this definition, another relevant scholar in the field, Petre Panaitescu refers to the *obște* as “a community of work”.<sup>22</sup> In this way, the central aspect of the *obște* is to develop and impose institutions that encourage the members to work more efficiently. In the same way, as a result of previous research, historically, the central aspect of an *obște* was related to how the villagers were involved in the *obște*'s activity: they had political, economic, and social activity within. The political activity was related to decision-making processes – there were many different voting and preferences aggregation

rules from case to case. Regarding economic activity, all the members of the *obști* were involved in many types of paid or income-related activities. Usually, men were engaged in forest harvesting while women and children were involved in complementary activities such as clothing or food. Last but not least, the social links may be found in all the villagers' activities, social capital and social bonding being central in this kind of community.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the abovementioned ideas, some historians considered that the *obște* was initially a blood-related community.<sup>24</sup>

The Romanian communal villages research was initially based on the work of the Bucharest Sociological School. Dimitrie Gusti – the School's founder – along with his students, Henri Stahl<sup>25</sup> and Vasile Caramelea, developed and proposed a monographic approach to analyzing these villages. Their fieldwork documented these cases' communal aspects and property ownership, laying the foundation for subsequent analyses. In addition to that, Petre Panaitescu's work<sup>26</sup> contributed to a distinct analytical approach to Romanian communal villages. Building upon these foundations, various perspectives and analyses emerged over time. The subject was discussed from a political science perspective, and scholars such as Adrian Miroiu<sup>27</sup>, Mirela Cerkez<sup>28</sup>, Șerban Cerkez<sup>29</sup>, Horia Terpe,<sup>30</sup> and myself,<sup>31</sup> along with other colleagues, have also contributed to this discussion. Sociologists or anthropologists such as Monica Vasile,<sup>32</sup> Ștefan Dorondel,<sup>33</sup> and Oana Mateescu,<sup>34</sup> as well as forestry researchers like Nichiforel and collaborators,<sup>35</sup> explored forest exploitation practices within a particular social context. The other papers I mentioned above broadly discuss the characteristics, institutions, norms, and a few further details referring to the Romanian communal villages. In the present section, I will briefly present the relevant theoretical framework needed for developing an argument.

First of all, the Romanian communal village must not be understood as Romanian exceptionalism. Several other countries have similar organizational forms on each continent. For example, we may find commons-related organizational forms in Germany, France, Denmark,<sup>36</sup> or even in southeastern Asia. Secondly, their rise and history have many aspects, and many hypotheses were developed. First, there is a classical hypothesis known as the theory of the eponymous hero. This states that each village was created or built on the life of a local ancestor.<sup>37</sup> As I will present in the methodological overview, there are many villages where I did fieldwork that have local narratives about a hero. The local stories regarding their history are based on several ancestors from which the



village's name was derived (for example, see the names of the *obști* of Vrancea, many of them being related to *Baba Vrâncioaia*, her sons, and Stephen the Great). This model does not include any discussion about how the property (private property in our case) appeared or who was the land's former owner. In this way, Henri Stahl argued that there is no clue to consider that vast areas that nobody owned existed.<sup>38</sup> Another hypothesis is the one that refers to a previously existing larger area that was split into smaller organizational forms that will be afterward known as *obști*. My own argument is an institutional one, following Olson, Oppenheimer, and Miroiu: the social context, autonomy, and the lack of the State's power helped build locally-based institutions that governed and incentivized the villagers at best. In that way, the form that we refer to as an *obște* is a set of working rules that, to a point, contributed to developing similar self-governing ways of managing their commons.

In the next section, I will present the forest exploitation procedures enforced at different points in the history of Romanian *obști*. To do that, at this point is relevant to discuss the *critical junctures* that existed in the history of *obști*. The term *critical juncture* was coined by Acemoglu and Robinson, referring to it as "a double-edged sword that can use a sharp turn in the trajectory of a nation. On the one hand, it can open the way for breaking the cycle of extractive institutions and enable more inclusive ones to emerge. Or it can intensify the emergence of extractive institutions"<sup>39</sup>. Thus, the *obște* development period may be split according to a few critical junctures that contributed to a *sharp* turn in the trajectory of the village. Those moments were 1948 and 1989. Both moments represented relevant points in Romania's political and economic history, implicitly in the history of the Romanian villages. In 1948, after the imposition of the communist regime, many centralized policies – such as nationalization or collectivization – were enforced, so all the local institutions developed in order to govern the commons could not be relevant anymore because all the lands that *obști* owned were transferred to the property of the State. The second year that may be characterized by a critical juncture was the year 1989, when in December, the Romanian Revolution took place. Starting with that point, Romanian society transitioned to democracy. During the transition period, there were many restitution policies on the one hand, or improvements in forest exploitation, on the other. I will develop these ideas in the following section. Still, until that point, I propose the terms of "Old *obște*" for the period until 1948, the "socialist period" for the period

of 1948 – 1989, and the “New obște” for the period between 1989 and the present.

Being part of different historical regions – Valachia (Southern Carpathians) and Moldavia (Northeastern Carpathians) – there are also other governing characteristics. Based on the differentiation between membership rights – inegalitarian or egalitarian – I argued<sup>40</sup> in favor of this simple distinction. The inegalitarian *Obști* are those that are governed by political or economic rules that are based on inequality. For example, the voting rules within the *obște* are based on the number of parts (or shares) owned by each villager, and all the decisions are made considering these differences.<sup>41</sup> The *obști* characterized by inequality are those from Argeș or Gorj county.<sup>42</sup> On the other side, the egalitarian *obști* are those placed in Eastern Romania, known as Vrancea Country.<sup>43</sup> Shortly, the egalitarian *obști* are characterized not by a shares-like organizational form but by the idea that each villager is equal to the other. None have more political power, higher incomes, or influence on *obște*'s decisions.

### **Forest exploitation procedures in the three periods**

In the previous section, I discussed three development periods of the Romanian communal villages, as I labeled them: the period of the old *obște*, the socialist period, and the period of the new *obște*. In the present section, I will briefly present some aspects regarding the framework of forest exploitation procedures in Romania in those periods. The critical junctures on which I developed the *obști* timeframe are relevant because of their impact not only on forest exploitation but also on the changes within society.

Starting in 1948, after the imposition of the socialist government in Romania, the processes known as collectivization or nationalization started. That means all the significant areas belonging to private owners or local communities were transferred to State's property. Regarding the forested areas, in 1948, all the forest lands owned by private owners (at that point, that were about 23 percent of the total) and those owned by local communities (49 percent of the total) – so a total of 72% – were transferred to the State.<sup>44</sup> Regarding the Forest management policy, Nichiforel *et al.* consider that in post-1989 Romania, there was a transition from a centralized system to a market-based economy. This period included, on the one hand, the privatization of the forest industry and, on the other, the

forest restitution processes.<sup>45</sup> The results of the restitution processes may be seen by comparing the total surface of the private forests in different years. Following Nichiforel *et al.*, while in 1990 there were no private forests, in 2018 – 39.4% of the forested surfaces were private.<sup>46</sup> At this point (1948 vs. 2018), there is a certain difference between the forested surfaces that were owned by the private sector. Of course, the total surface is different, but in relative terms, these differences persist. Those differences may be not only a result of different formal institutions (such as Codes) but also of practices. Following Albulescu and collaborators, the three periods presented distinct forest management practices: While in the pre-communist and communist periods, wood harvesting was made respecting forest regenerative limits, nowadays the approach is known as “cut and leave”.<sup>47</sup> Another relevant distinction is based on the decision of exploitation. In the case of the pre-communist period, the decision was “at the discretion of the owner”. In contrast, in the communist and post-communist periods, the decision was based on forest management plans.<sup>48</sup>

Historically the exploitation rules are governed by the Law on the Forest Code. The first one that refers to the forests managed by the communal village is the Code from 1910. There were few other policies regarding the same issue before 1910 (for example, the first forest management plans were developed in 1851 by French foresters, who helped in building the first forestry school in Bucharest).<sup>49</sup> Still, the Code was the first comprehensive policy act of this type. As Oana Mateescu argued, the Law on the Forest Code of 1910 was “a crack into the history of the Romanian Communal villages.”<sup>50</sup> I am adding to her argument that the Forest Code of 1910 was the beginning of a Leviathan-like solution. I will recall this idea at the end of the paper.

Considering that after 1948 all the forested areas were confiscated, starting with the moment of communism fall in December 1989, restitution policies have been developed. The first point was Law 18/1991, which had many restitution phases – the first one permitted restitution of only 1 hectare for individuals or 10 hectares for a family, despite the total forested area that person or family had in 1948. In the second phase, the law introduced in 2005 introduced a limitation of up to 30 hectares, while the last and the most impactful one – at least for the communal villages – was Law 1/2000.<sup>51</sup> This Law permitted the restitution of entire forested areas to all the entities that owned large surfaces before 1948. The case of the communal villages is vital because there was a twist – as previously presented – it was necessary to show a list of owners and

their link to the members of the old *obște*. Those three restitution phases represent just the tip of the iceberg because, in the entire transition or democratic period of Romania, many policies or legislative frameworks related to forest exploitation or management were developed. Related to forest exploitation, those policies also impacted biodiversity, rural development, and wood production.<sup>52</sup> Nowadays, the Forest code is the one adopted in 2008, and it has been updated regularly since then. The main characteristics remain the same: forest exploitation has to be carried out in accordance with a forest management plan. In addition, there are certain other rules regarding wood cutting or transportation. The exploitation rules are enforced by the forest ranges, the National Forest Administration (Romsilva), or Forest Guard (Garda Forestieră). There may be two forest district types in Romania: public districts (governed by Romsilva) and private districts organized by local authorities, other organizations, or persons that own enough forested areas.<sup>53</sup> The private forest districts started to exist in 2002, and from then on, many private ranges appeared. Following Abrudan, after just ten years (in 2011), more than 23 percent of the total forest area was under the responsibility of private forest districts.<sup>54</sup> In 2022 the data showed that only 48.3% of the forested area in Romania is owned by the State.<sup>55</sup>

Forest exploitation is an all-time relevant subject because of its impact on everyone's lives. The development of new institutions or their modifications contributed to specific incentives regarding forest exploitation. We may find many cases of legal or illegal logging due to the enforcement of each Forest Code. All these social and economic transformations, along with the newly developed institutions, defined a series of human behaviors. For example, there were the incentives that the "new" owners had – harvesting as much as they could in order to gain short-term profits.<sup>56</sup> The profits and the economic value of the forest represented an important incentive in finding new unorthodox ways of harvesting. In other words, historically, the Romanian forests were known as a significant source of income that played a central role in the livelihoods of rural communities.<sup>57</sup> For example, the annual amount of forest harvested areas dropped in the 2000s compared to the 1910s, from approximately 85000 hectares in the 1910s to 42000 hectares in the 2000s.<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, when discussing forest exploitation, we may discuss about forests' sustainability, but we can also discuss illegal logging or overexploitation. An example of the latter can be found in George

lordăchescu and Monica Vasile's paper. They discuss the link between illegal logging, criminalization, and violence, starting from a case of a forester found dead.<sup>59</sup> They also present and discuss different cases in which other foresters were either threatened or assaulted when they were on duty in their areas that were known as illegal logging spots.<sup>60</sup> These behaviors may result from rapid societal changes due to the transition period.<sup>61</sup>

### **Methodological aspects**

I am employing a mixed-methods research design. This research design is an approach that combines elements of both qualitative and quantitative methods within the same study. Starting from the research questions, the mixed-method research design refers to collecting and analyzing data using different investigation methods.

In the twenty-first century, many papers were published based on a mixed-methods research design in various fields.<sup>62</sup> As Small presents in his review on the usage of mixed-methods approaches in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries papers, there were many debates in the previous 50 years regarding which method is superior to the other. He states that although there is a mixture of methods and multiple data sources, usually, the researchers "analyzed multiple data sources the way they examine single data sources."<sup>63</sup> In other words, the regular mixed-methods research projects and papers in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century include a classical way of analyzing data from each perspective. For example, Small argues that in the case of interviews, ethnographic field notes, or historical texts, researchers "developed narratives and generally avoided numbers", while in the case of classical quantitative techniques (surveys or censuses), they "computed averages and plotted distributions."<sup>64</sup>

As one of the most relevant authors of the mixed-method research design, John Creswell considers that a mixed-method research design is basically the case in which both quantitative and qualitative research methods are employed.<sup>65</sup> The topic of mixed-methods is discussed in various papers written by Creswell.<sup>66</sup>

In other recent literature, there is also a discussion not just related to mixing both quantitative and qualitative approaches but mixing different methods from different domains, such as social and natural sciences. Eva Kinnebrew and her colleagues discuss this subject: "Combining

quantitative and qualitative data from the natural and social sciences allows one to interrogate quantitatively measurable processes and how these processes are interpreted or perceived – and therefore acted on – by humans.”<sup>67</sup> Although this may initially seem simple, some scholars discuss the challenge of mixing methodological frameworks or vocabulary inconsistencies across different fields. This is a discussion that Patric Brandt and his collaborators developed in their paper related to transdisciplinary research.<sup>68</sup> There are also several epistemological challenges in mixed-methods research. In other words, there were many discussions (and the discussions have not ended in the present) about the compatibility between quantitative and qualitative methodologies in the social sciences.<sup>69</sup>

Although this approach is a recent one, the first mixed-method approach was involved in the *multitrait-multimethod* matrix published by Campbell and Fiske in 1959. Their paper advocated for “a validation process utilizing a matrix of intercorrelations among tests representing at least two traits, each measured by at least two methods.”<sup>70</sup>

Also, the implementation of the Geographic Informational Systems (GIS) is used in the study of land change research, but usually complementarily, not as an integrated research method in a mixed-method approach.<sup>71</sup> In my present research, I will use GIS to develop maps, not to analyze data. This represents one of the methodological limitations of the present paper.

Considering the abovementioned literature, I employ a perspective that Creswell names as a *concurrent approach*. That means I was simultaneously collecting quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive view and analysis of the subject.<sup>72</sup> Within this framework, I am developing a quantQUAL approach. That means the emphasis is based on the qualitative data that I collected, while the quantitative ones are used as support for some arguments. Regarding the qualitative research methods, this paper is based on data collected through interviews and document analysis in various Romanian communal villages. At the end of this section, I will enumerate all the villages where I conducted research activities. In other words, I am employing this type of research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the forest exploitation procedures and local institutions in the case of the communal villages where I have done fieldwork.

The research questions that I proposed to investigate are as follows:

RQ1: Are there any (historical) differences among the institutions (rules-in-use) governing forest exploitation in communal villages in different geographical areas?

RQ2: Are the forest exploitation institutions rather inclusive or rather extractive?

RQ3: Are corruption and negative long-term outcomes – illegal or over-exploitation practices – enabled or encouraged by local institutions, despite nationwide institutions related to forest exploitation?

The data used in this paper were collected in different periods: in Argeş County, I first collected data in 2016 in *Obştea Dragoslavele*.<sup>73</sup> In Suceava, I was in August 2018 and conducted interviews with the presidents (and not only) of *Obştea Cozăneşti-Ortoaia*, *Obştea Gura Negrii*, *Obştea Ouşorului*, and *Obştea Negrişoara*. Those were all the communal villages of the Dorna Valley Area. In Suceava, another cluster of communal villages is nearby Câmpulung Moldovenesc, but to this point, I did not succeed in doing fieldwork there. Vrancea is the best-known area of communal villages. I have done fieldwork in that area twice, in 2016<sup>74</sup> and 2018. In both trips I collected data from the following *obşti*: *Obştea Năruja*, *Obştea Nistoreşti*, *Obştea Spineşti*, *Obştea Nereju*, *Obştea Bîrseşti*, *Obştea Herăstrău*, *Obştea Poduri*, *Obştea Poiana*, *Obştea Topeşti*, *Obştea Valea Sării*, *Obştea Colacu*, *Obştea Ruget*, *Obştea Mare Vidra*, *Obştea Mică Vidra*, *Obştea Viişoara*, *Obştea Spulber*, *Obştea Muntele Frumoasele (Vrâncioaia)*, *Obştea Păuleşti*, *Obştea Tulnici*, *Obştea Coza*, *Obştea Hăulişca*, *Obştea Negrileşti*, *Obştea Vilcani*, *Obştea Prahuda*, *Obştea Condratu*, *Obştea Paltin*. Last but not least, in 2023, during my fellowship at the New Europe College, I organized a fieldwork research activity in Gorj County. I spent a week in *Obştea Peştişani* and *Obştea Runcu*.

I also analyzed social monographs for every area to understand the historical details better. Thus, in the case of Argeş, the analysis of the documents covered the monographs written by Răuţescu<sup>75</sup> and the one written by Mogoş and his collaborators.<sup>76</sup> In the case of Suceava County, I took into account the information presented in the monograph of Dorna Arini<sup>77</sup> and the one of Dorna Candrenilor.<sup>78</sup> There were also many other relevant documents written or collected by Theodor Bălan in the period between 1933 and 1943.<sup>79</sup> Vrancea, as discussed in the literature review section, is one of the most analyzed areas when talking about the communal villages. Starting with the works of Henri H. Stahl more than 60 years ago and continuing with the monographs written by Cezar Cherciu<sup>80</sup> or by Ţibrea and Cherciu<sup>81</sup>, the *old obşti* of Vrancea may be nowadays understood. Last but not least, the document analysis of the Gorj area is, at this point, based only on one monograph, the monograph of *obşte* Peştişani.<sup>82</sup>

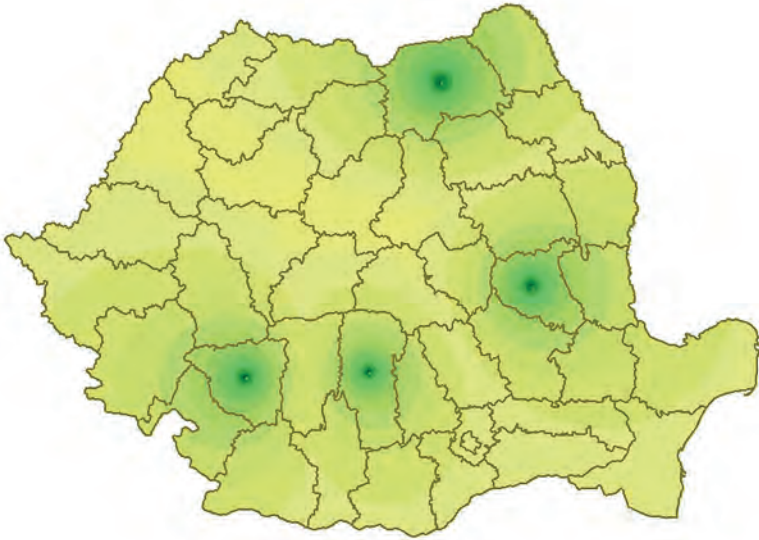


Figure 1. The counties where the data were collected<sup>83</sup>

## Discussion

Employing the new-institutional theoretical framework that I briefly presented at the beginning of this paper and referring to the fieldwork activities that I have done in the four abovementioned areas, in this section, I will discuss each topic, offering answers to the research questions. This section will be based on an exploratory view of the analyzed situations. Firstly, I will discuss the differences between the rules in use that govern forest exploitation in the communal villages situated in different geographical areas (RQ1). Secondly, I will recall the distinction proposed by Acemoglu and Robinson and analyze if those institutions are rather inclusive or extractive (RQ2). Lastly, I will briefly discuss the corruption and illegal or over-exploitation practices and if those are encouraged or not by locally-based institutions (RQ3). The end of this section will consist of a short presentation and analysis of the case study of Obșteța Peștișani.

The *obști*, where I organized fieldwork activities, are situated in four counties. More than that, all of them are placed at different altitudes,



have certain geographical specificities, and so on. Starting from North to South, the first area is the one of Suceava – the *obști* of Dorna Valley. They are situated in Northeastern Carpathians, and the median altitude is the highest (peak Oușorul – Obșteța Oușorului has an altitude of 1639m). Coming souther, Vrancea *Obști* are in the Eastern Carpathians, while those of Argeș and Gorj are in the Southern Carpathians. Although some mountain peaks are high, all three areas have a lower median altitude than Suceava's. This discussion may be relevant for the type of trees harvested in each area, referring to their economic value. While in the case of Dorna Valley, almost the entire area is covered with coniferous trees (fir, spruce, and pines), the forests of Gorj and Vrancea are basically populated with broadleaf trees (oak and beech). The economic value may be represented by the usage; while the coniferous are used for construction, the oak and beech are used as firewood. More than that, the altitude also influences the exploitation costs. The steeper the versant, the more expensive the harvesting will be in terms of both time and equipment.

Despite those differences that are more adapted to local issues, the exploitation institutions are the same, at least in the period of the new *obște*. In short, referring to the Forest Code enforced nowadays, all the monitoring is the responsibility of the Forestry District (private or public). At the same time, the sanctions may be applied by representatives of the District, Police workers, or sentenced by Judicial Courts, depending on the severity. In the period of the old *obște*, the State was not so present in communities' life. Then each village developed its own rules: the monitorization could be made either by every villager or by a paid worker, while the sanctions usually were applied by the villagers. There were some cases in which, depending on severity, the sanctions were imposed by local priests or judicial courts<sup>84</sup>. Answering the first research question (RQ-1), in the case of the analyzed *obști*, the exploitation differences may arise because of different technological needs on the one hand or because of how the locally-based institutions were developed in the old *obște*.

Regarding the type of institutions (RQ-2), either inclusive or extractive, all the above mentioned situations refer to likely more inclusive institutions. As an argument for that, all the institutions in any case (old or new *obști*) were known by each villager, and their incentives were internalized in their behavior. Of course, there were some cases when the institutional arrangement was changed – see the critical juncture-related discussion presented in previous sections – which affected the villagers' compliance with the new rules. Although there are predictable ways of

forest exploitation, some issues may be linked to an extractive way of developing institutions. Recalling the argument of Acemoglu & Robinson, extractive institutions are those that do not offer a possibility to voice over a subject. Today, the exploitation procedures and the legislation on forest management do not accept a strong *voice* of forest users. The legislative development in the field is slow and not well-adapted to the on-spot issues that may arise at any point. For example, many cases of illegal logging, corruption, or even violent actions may appear in forest exploitation. In the third theoretical section, I mentioned the example George Iordăchescu and Monica Vasile discussed, that of a forester that the illegal exploiters killed. That was not uncommon; several other cases in the press referred to foresters or NGO activists that were attacked or even killed by illegal harvesters. In addition to the example presented by Iordăchescu & Vasile, in October 2021, a journalism investigation described a violent case that happened in the Northern Carpathians.<sup>85</sup> In that case, a press officer was beaten until he lost consciousness, while an NGO activist was attacked and threatened with an axe in the middle of the forest. The attackers were representatives of illegal harvesting in that area. These kinds of actions are a result that raises the ideas of the lack of the State's power in the field or the high level of corruption.

*The case of Obșteța Peștișani. A short description*

This section plays a special role in the economy of this paper for two reasons. On the one hand, it is the first place I introduce the data I collected in Obșteța Peștișani, which was collected during my fellowship at the New Europe College in 2023. Secondly, Obșteța Peștișani is one of the largest obște in Romania, governing more than 12000 hectares of forests and having 2900 members in 2023. In addition to those forest areas, the *obște* also owns 1162 hectares of pastures. Owning so many forest hectares, the *obște* annually harvests about 40000 cubic meters of timber (including all the wood categories). Thus, forest exploitation institutions are so relevant in order to avoid the tragedy of the commons.



Figure 2. Overview of the forests governed by Obștea Peștișani.  
Photo credits: the author

As a brief historical aspect, Obștea Peștișani was built on the territories of 12 old *obști* that owned five mountains. The re-establishment of the *obște* started immediately after the adoption of Law 1/2000. Thus, in April 2000, a table with 36 heirs of the former members of the *obște* was developed and sent to the judicial courts to start restituting the forested areas.<sup>86</sup> After all trials and documents needed, the first general assembly of the *obște* took place on 21.04.2002 when the formal directorate was voted.<sup>87</sup> Today there are more than 2900 members in the *obște*, and there are a number of 912908 shares within the *obște*. Those have the title of *jugăre*, standing for the Austrian-Hungarian adapted measurement unit.<sup>88</sup> Recalling the two types of *obști*, the one of Peștișani is purely inegalitarian. Being an inegalitarian *obște*, there is an intrinsic incentive for increasing revenues and profits to return them to the members at the end of the year as dividends. Usually, in the case of inegalitarian *obști*, there are just a few investments in the commons or public infrastructure, but an interest in increasing each year's revenue. The case of Peștișani fits the pattern, but there are some cases of infrastructure investments, such as exploitation roads that are maintained by the *obște*, a timber processing point, a touristic guest house, and other related investments. Although at the first glance, that seems not to be a way that an inegalitarian entity has to follow, all these investments are made in order to develop a market-oriented organization. Those are relevant in increasing the timber prices or

increasing the total revenue that the *obște* has at the end of the year, thus the dividends rates. For the last fiscal year – 2022 – the dividend was 350 RON (about 70 EUR or 79 USD) for each hectare every person owned. In addition to those benefits, each member has a special – discounted – price for buying timber. In the case of 2022, it was about 590 RON (120 EUR or 135 USD) per cubic meter, less than the market price.

Regarding the forest exploitation procedures, in this case, the forest exploitation rules are enforced by Brâncuși Forest District. This private forest district is built only on the forested areas of Obșteța Peștișani. Developed in 2008, the Brâncuși Forest District appeared after a decision taken by the Council of Obșteța Peștișani.<sup>89</sup> Although formally they are different organizations, the headquarters of both *obște* and Forest District are in the same building, and, of course, some of the Forest District employees are members of the *obște*. A contract between the *obște* and the Forest District refers to the forest management services of the entire surface.<sup>90</sup> That being said, it is reasonable to think that there is an informal influence between the *obște* and the Forest District, but considering the legislative aspects (The Law on Forest Code from 2008 and the following additions), in fact, there must not be any involvement in influencing forest exploitation aspects. There have to be forest management plans that describe the partitions that may be harvested, the replanting procedures, and the way that illegal logging (if there is any) is confronted. In the concluding paragraph, I will recall the link and the discussion of formal and informal institutions in this case.

The choice of this case was made not only by referring to it as one of the largest communal villages in Romania but also because of several scandals discussed in the local and national press.<sup>91</sup> All those scandals are related to the dividends, the timber price, or, more recently, to the elections within the *obște*. As one of the further research ideas related to the topic and the case, the politics and the fight over power within the *obște* will interest me. As a result of the present research ideas and fieldwork activity, I consider that a sociopolitical investigation on the role of power, voting, and decision-making issues may complete the picture.

The paper aimed to present a mapping of the institutions that govern forest exploitation in the case of Romanian communal villages. In addition to reaching that objective, I proposed some answers to the three research questions that were advanced into the discussion. As a general conclusion, during the last century, many formal forest exploitation rules were imposed by the State to prevent corruption or illegal logging. Starting with the Code

from 1910, which represented the first way of recognizing the associative forms of property known as *obști* (including their locally-based norms and rules), and ending with the Code enforced right now, the State improved its power in the field. Step by step (starting in 1910), the solution that seems to be followed is the one of the Leviathan. The State increases its power to rule more and more aspects of community activities, but, at this point, the solution is far from perfect: there are many cases of corruption, violence, or illegal logging.

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the fieldwork that I have done. We may also find other inegalitarian Obști  
in other Romanian areas.
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# BODY AWARENESS, ACTIVITY TRACKERS, AND THE COGNITIVE UNCONSCIOUS\*

Alexandru Dincovici

## Abstract

This paper investigates the role activity trackers play for their users, focusing on the transformative role of wearable technology in shaping our perceptions of our bodies and health. Drawing on autophenomenography, in-depth interviews and online content analysis, it questions the neutrality of tracking data and interpretation, by drawing on Annemarie Mol's concept of ontornorms and highlighting the built-in normativity of the assemblage that makes it constantly prone to enacting a certain kind of optimal performance. Using Katherine Hayles' concept of cognitive assemblages, it defines trackers as being specific types of cognizers, entering alongside humans in assemblages in which their role sometimes ends up dethroning the body's own perceptual systems and changing the way we are aware of our own bodies. Throughout the research, three different types of users are identified and described, for whom the cognitive assemblage takes a different shape: regular users, users with medical issues and power users.

**Keywords:** body awareness, activity trackers, wearables, ontornorms, cognitive assemblages

## 1. Introduction

Fitness and health trackers are usually presented as tools that gather data to help humans get better. That means, in most discourses, being able to live healthier and more productive lives. To give an example from the website of one of the fitness trackers encountered during this research, "WHOOOP monitors your sleep, recovery, and daily effort around the clock to deliver actionable insights on how you can optimize your performance" (Pink & Fors, 2017, p. 376).

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This paper aims to uncover what lies behind such a specific narrative and explores what fitness trackers perform in the world, by going beyond some of its premises. I do this by addressing three main research questions.

The first one is ontological and questions their status as mere tools. I am interested in uncovering what exactly activity trackers are, what is their relationship with humans and human bodies and what role they play.

The second one is phenomenological and questions the way in which using a tracker affects perception and being in the world. To do this, I will look at how bodily awareness is impacted by the usage of a tracker, whose function is, in a sense, exactly that of body awareness, through which “we are aware of our bodies from the inside” (Bermúdez, 2011, p. 157).

The third one is ethical and tackles the neutrality of activity trackers, especially as it surfaces through the discourse embedded in the various graphs, insights, and recommendations they generate. It will be only shortly addressed here and will make the aim of a different article.

To tackle the tasks described above, I will be using two main conceptual pillars in my discussion on wearables and the body. The first one is Katherine Hayles’ notion of cognitive assemblage, and the second one is José Luis Bermúdez’ concept of body awareness. I will apply them to an extensive ethnographic endeavour, comprising of in-depth interviews, autophenomenography, online research, and content analysis.

## **2. Methodological approach**

Most of the insights in the current research are based on in-depth interviews with various kinds of fitness wearable users, both current and former. I have also tried to gain access to people with different roles in the wearable ecosystem, but until now I have only managed to have an informal interview with a user-experience designer, working for one of the large fitness wearable corporations. To develop the insights, more perspectives are needed, both from inside the industry and from other closely related domains, such as the medical one. However, my two attempts to engage with industry professionals working for wearable companies were unsuccessful. It seems that inside access is very hard to gain, and the requests are usually denied at the corporate head offices, if they even get there. To protect the identity of my informants, I will not disclose their names or those of their employers. The names and identities of the other respondents have also been obscured and anonymized.

20 interviews have been conducted so far, with a wide range of respondents, both male and female, between 22 and 50 years old. Most respondents are male, with only 5 females in the sample. This might be a secondary effect of the snowball sampling that started amongst a fighting sports community, where men are the overwhelming majority. However, since that has been doubled with call for interviewees on my personal social media profiles and among networks of peers, it might also draw attention to the fact that wearable users might be mostly male. This is something that warrants further exploration but is beyond the scope of the present research.

The interviews have been supplemented with online research on various forums (on platforms such as Reddit) but also on the websites of some of the fitness wearable manufacturers, where I have looked mostly at product advertising and claims. The respondents have also provided me with screenshots of their apps or reports, which I have also used to go further in depth into the topic.

In addition, the current research also has a very important autophenomenographical component, as I have drawn insights from my own personal experience as a fitness wearable user. Autophenomenography is a term coined in 2004 by Maree Grupetta (Grupetta, 2004) and developed by Allen-Collinson (Allen-Collinson, 2011) to describe a kind of auto-ethnography rooted in the phenomenological method. While developed in sports research, wearable use is a similar domain in which any analysis could benefit from the personal engagement of the researcher in the practice, something that, in the words of Loic Wacquant, might be called a *carnal ethnography*, a way of *deploying the habitus as both empirical object and method of inquiry* (Wacquant, 2014, p. 3). While I won't be using the terminology that Wacquant draws from his mentor, Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977), his approach raises very important methodological questions regarding the way in which we could look at either the habitus or any kind of profoundly corporeal practice with the tools at our disposal. Similar issues have been under the scrutiny of many other scholars, either researching various kinds of sporting or embodied practices (Samudra, 2008) or critiquing classical phenomenological approaches for their limitations on accurately describing the world out there (Warnier, 2001, 2007).

Anthropologist Jean-Pierre Warnier observes a phenomenological shortcoming he calls *the Magritte effect* (Warnier, 2007), by which he means that in phenomenological and Foucauldian analysis, when we speak

about the body, we don't refer to the real body, but to a representation of it. Just as the pipe in Magritte's painting is a two-dimensional representation of a real object reduced to something completely devoid of the initial materiality, so is the phenomenological body just a representation of something much more complex, which involves, for Warnier, motricity, perception and, most of all, a very specific material culture (Warnier, 2001, p. 20). For Warnier, when an anthropologist confronts the uncanny, what was usually thought of as a credibility gap, so mostly framed in epistemological terms, is more probably a subjectivity gap (Warnier, 2011). By reframing the difference between the anthropologist and the world he is studying in ontological terms as different subjectivities, he brings to light yet another methodological issue: how can we understand, let alone describe something that's entirely strange to us? If we use language alone and ask questions, we will only gain access to representations, even if those are in line with phenomenological inquiry and relate to lived experiences. As Baars remarked in 1997, we can only *deal with descriptions of our experiences*, not with experiences in themselves (Baars, 1997, p. x). Moreover, most of what happens with and to us takes place in the nonconscious realm (Baars, 1988, 1997; Hayles, 2017), and we are aware of only a fraction of what really happens. Many processes and events compete for consciousness, but its space is extremely limited, as some consciousness theories stipulate. One of the most well-known, Baars' Global Workspace System theory (1988) compares it to a classroom blackboard or a television set. Consciousness, thus, is only what can be displayed on the board or screen.

Warnier's solution is straightforward. Instead of listening to or reading representations, we should investigate material culture, since any kind of bodily conduct, motricity and, implicitly, any kind of subjectivity is propped on material culture and objects give us a better window into what really happens out there. However, autophenomenography can present an additional solution to this problem. Especially during an enskilment or apprenticeship process (Ingold, 2000; Woods et al., 2021, p. 33), one must become very attentive to both material culture and events that would otherwise go unnoticed for a skilled practitioner, since they would be embodied and thus performed out of the global workspace, as unconscious or non-conscious processes. We might argue that the same thing can happen when material culture changes, and as such my choice to change the fitness wearable I was using during the study and later experiment with another third-party app, as detailed below, allows

for the autophenomenography to partially compensate for some of the shortcomings of the interviews critiqued by Warnier.

I have been using a fitness bracelet for the last four years and have gone through three successive iterations of the Xiaomi Band. During three of those years I have also used, infrequently, a smart body composition scale from the same brand, all the data being gathered on the same smartphone app, initially Mi Fit, then rebranded into Zepp Life. The data were also fed into Google Fit, which I never used or checked. During the current research I have switched from using the fitness bracelet to a Samsung Galaxy Watch 4, a much more advanced tracker. This has also made me change from Zepp Life to the Samsung Health App. For the last three months I have also purchased an additional yearly subscription to a third-party app, Welltory, which uses a wide ecosystem of fitness wearable manufacturers to analyse heart rate variability data and metrics.

The respondents used a wide range of different devices, from Withings, Apple, Xiaomi, Oura, Whoop, Samsung, Fitbit, or Garmin, and have had experiences with many other kinds of devices, from the first generations to the current ones. The diversity was a conscious methodological choice, as I have tried to become familiar with as many types of users, devices, and use cases and patterns, as possible. The wearable market is becoming more and more sophisticated, with new products appearing every few months, and new sensors and capabilities being constantly developed. A smartwatch or bracelet seem to have a technological lifespan of at most a year, until a new iteration comes in, and there seem to already be established niches on the market.

Some of the watches and bracelets can become very specialized and embedded in specific sports communities, as some of the Garmin or Suunto products, some are very fitness oriented, while others are more geared towards health, wellness, or sometimes very general daily usage, as a complement or even replacement to the smartphone. As the landscape was so diverse, specialization might have been a risky strategy, considering the very broad research questions I have started from. However, the downside of having so diverse viewpoints and devices is that every interview can become a very specific case study, and finding patterns or generalizing becomes a very risky academic endeavour. Despite the shortcomings, having such a broad overview has allowed me to get a glimpse of what is common among users and devices, and what has stayed the same despite the accelerated pace of change that sweeps technological developments nowadays.

### 3. Activity trackers

Technically, wearable fitness or activity trackers are devices designed to monitor and track fitness related data to help improve the users' overall health. In a sense, they are also personal medical devices, even if they are marketed as consumer technologies and explicitly distance themselves from the medical field and the specific domain regulations.

Wearables can do a lot of things, but what most fitness trackers have in common is the ability to extract biological data from an individual's activity and bodily functioning, send it to a more powerful processing unit, be it on the phone or on an external server, and measure it. Additionally, a lot of them – especially devices that have screens – also relay to the wearer happenings from the socio-technical environment, including the smartphone with which they are synchronized. This is done by either translating the events in haptic terms (through vibrations) or by relaying them as visual information. They also transform and translate what they extract and measure from bodily processes and actions into a specific visual form, usually as a graph. In addition, all fitness wearables also suggest or even prescribe specific courses of action, and, sometimes, they can even act independently or on our behalf<sup>1</sup>.

I consider wearable fitness trackers to be made up of three different layers. The first one is material and contains the stuff of which they are made, the design, as well as the very specific sensors. The material design affords different capabilities for action as well as capacities for mining. This is considered a separate layer for at least two reasons. First and foremost, even wearable manufacturers consider this stable layer as the basis for future development of the devices. The Samsung Galaxy Watch, for instance, was first introduced to market with a temperature sensor that users could not utilize, since it had no corresponding measurement built into the phone app<sup>2</sup>. It was what we could call a latent sensor, to be enabled only later<sup>3</sup>. Second, there are already third-party apps, from Google Fit to Welltory, that can connect to a large range of devices and sensors to extract different data than the default app with which the manufacturers ship these devices.

The second layer is what I call the computational. This is the invisible layer, made from the algorithms, data infrastructures and applications that extract data from the sensors, operate on it and feed it back to either the users or to other computing infrastructures, but usually to both.



The third and final layer is, arguably, even more invisible, and includes the conscious or sometimes even unconscious or nonconscious ethical parameters and ontionorms (Mol, 2013). Just as Annemarie Mol's research on dieting noticed that "different dieting techniques enact different versions of food and concern themselves with different bodies" (Mol, 2016), different kinds of fitness wearables also enact different lifestyles and concern themselves with different bodies.

#### **4. The ontological question**

As the first research question states, fitness trackers are usually presented as technological tools, helping humans to achieve various outcomes. However, considering the artificial intelligence debate as well as the recent ontological turns in anthropology and science and technology studies (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017), I argue that it might be more fitting to grant them a different status. From this it will follow that the human plus wearable entity is not just an augmented human, or a mere human with a tool.

Much of the more recent literature on ontology, be it from anthropology (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017), social and technology studies (Pickering, 2017) or the speculative realism branch of philosophy, most notably object-oriented ontology (OOO) (Harman, 2018) insists on approaching humans and non-humans, be them biological entities, matter, or even fictional entities, from a symmetrical perspective. This has a few interesting and important implications. First, all these ontological approaches, no matter how different, grant agency to non-human entities. But symmetry pushes it forward and, from an ontological perspective, both kinds of actors become equal. Once they enter a relation, their status is identical, and they become equal partners. This means, for instance, that if we conceive the human plus wearable entity as a cyborg, then the cyborg is not necessarily a new type of entity or being, in which a human's capacities for action are enhanced by technology, since this might mean that, once embodied, technology loses its specificity and only becomes an accessory. On the contrary, the new entity becomes some sort of assemblage, in which two kinds of equal actors or entities coexist.

My own ontological perspective is, however, what we might call asymmetrical in terms of relations, with asymmetry being less a type of relationship that would privilege humans over non-humans, and more

about entities with a capacity for cognition over those without it. This is the position adopted by Katherine Hayles (2017), whose notion of cognitive assemblage is also, in my opinion, the most fitting concept we could use to describe the human-with-wearable entity.

The cognitive assemblage refers to “complex interactions between human and nonhuman cognizers and their abilities to enlist material forces” (Hayles, 2017, p. 115). It “emphasizes the flow of information through a system and the choices and decisions that create, modify, and interpret the flow. While a cognitive assemblage may include material agents and forces (and almost always does so), it is the cognizers within the assemblage that enlist these affordances and direct their powers to act in complex situations” (Hayles, 2017, p. 116).

For Hayles, cognition is a “process that interprets information within contexts that connect it with meaning” (Hayles, 2017, p. 22). Her definition of cognition also allows for a transference of capacity from the biological to the technical, something she also does in her text, and is more broadly detailed in her “tripartite framework of (human) cognition” (Hayles, 2017, p. 27), a pyramid with three layers, made from consciousness on top, unconsciousness in the middle, and nonconscious cognition (or material processes) at the bottom. Together, the top two layers are modes of awareness, as the unconscious, understood here as an anthropological rather than psychoanalytical concept, easily communicates with consciousness. What separates the two layers and is the crucial difference between cognizers and material processes are choice and decision, which only arise at the top of the pyramid, leading to “possibilities for interpretation and meaning” (Hayles, 2017, p. 28).

Considering the description of the wearable devices I have offered above, as well as the socio-technical environment in which they are embedded, they can be considered technical cognizers in the sense described by Hayles. We could also identify, in their architecture, a similar layering of material processes topped by modes of awareness, which result in possibilities for interpretation of meaning and, sometimes, even in decisions or choices. However, this does not mean that we can consider their technical cognition on par with the human one. This capability is enough to grant them a specific sort of agency, through which we can later identify the way in which they function alongside human cognizers in the cognitive assemblage.

## 5. Wearables, the body, and everyday life

The normal state of the able, functioning body is that of absence (Leder, 1990). If nothing is wrong, we are rarely aware of it. However, whenever something breaks down, be it an injury or chronic pain, for instance, the body, in the words of Drew Leder, makes its disappearance. In a sense, everyday life, for most able-bodied people, is thus a bodyless realm. We assume that, if nothing is wrong, everything is well. We don't question the everyday, the mundane, when it comes to bodily processes. I propose that fitness wearables tend to do just that, problematize the everyday, the mundane, the absent body, by giving a voice and a representation to un/nonconscious material processes happening "inside". People don't always "discover themselves through their tracking devices" (Vegter et al., 2021, p. 7), they uncover possibly problematic aspects of their functioning.

In a sense, what the wearable sensors and algorithms do is what French Sociologist Eva Illouz observes Freud's theory did for psychic life: "By linking perversion and normality and placing them on a continuum, Freud destabilized a key cultural code regulating the boundary between normality and pathology, a move that had momentous consequences for ordinary narratives of the self" (Illouz, 2008, p. 43). Thus, everyday life became "the object of hermeneutic suspicion" (Illouz, 2008, p. 46). I argue this is the same type of suspicion that wearable enable in their wearers. With a smart bracelet, ring, or smartwatch, everyday life enters the wearable clinic, where the power of the gaze is replaced by that of the algorithm. Mundane activities, relegated to the background, become infused with medical possibilities. Everything can be data-ified and become an event with potentially medical importance. As observed by Lupton, "the assemblage that is configured by self-tracking technologies supports a reflexive, self-monitoring awareness of the body, bringing the body to the fore in ways that challenge the idea of a nonreflexive, absent body" (Lupton, 2016). This can be challenging for some potential users, as that self-monitoring awareness can be extremely unsettling. One interviewee, for instance, mentions being afraid to begin monitoring her sleep.

*That's exactly why I'd hate monitoring my sleep... Or my everything for that matter. It would make me terribly anxious to see all the bad indicators. And spiralling then is just around the corner. On top of that, I wouldn't sleep worrying that I cannot sleep well enough.*

The same kind of attitude was also mentioned by a different interviewee, who stopped using a Fitbit bracelet after realizing that:

*I'd wake up in the middle of the night just to check my bracelet and the app to see how I was sleeping.*

Wearable-driven anxieties have also been a constant of my own personal experience during this research. While writing the last pages of this paper, late at night, I looked at my phone for notifications and saw a puzzling message from my Welltory app, that tracks heart rate variability<sup>4</sup>. It read *Holy Burnout, Batman!* Intrigued and anxious, I opened the app, checked the detailed metrics, and saw another puzzling message. My Focus score, described as *limited*, was 44%. Its description read *Your brain isn't fried, but not quite ready to shine at the end of the day either*. I got worried, sent a screenshot to my wife, and then decided to write this paragraph and try to get some sleep, hoping it would be coherent enough for publication and my brain would recover.

In a pre-wearable time, I would have known and felt being tired, but would have linked it to the stress and lack of sleep associated with intense but normal activity. Now, however, I can't help but wonder if there isn't something medically or at least seriously wrong with my health, because of this activity.

To address this relationship between the body, perception, and everyday life in the context of wearable use I want to introduce the concept of bodily awareness, a form of self-consciousness that enables us to be directly conscious of the bodily self. Jose Luis Bermudez wrote extensively on the topic and has managed to create a very useful taxonomy among the ways in which subjects are able to find out information about their bodies (Bermúdez, 2011). The first and most important is a distinction between what he calls *first-person* and *third-person forms of bodily awareness*. The former refers to conscious or non-conscious ways of finding out how are bodies are, that extend inward, from the inside, while the latter indicates ways of being aware of the body as an object, through our sense. Feeling thirsty, for instance, would fall under the first-person category, while seeing a bruise on the back of our arm in a mirror would fall into the other.

The concept is a great starting point for a discussion about activity trackers since they seem to serve the same function as some first-person forms of bodily awareness. Considering their specific capabilities and role, I have argued, following Hayles, that they are capable of some sort of

technical cognition. They can sense, through the sensors, various bodily material processes, then they compute, interpret, and transform into both descriptions and normative prescriptions.

## **6. Objective, neutral data**

The data wearables produce is neither simple nor neutral but have an “authoritarian dimension” (Krüger, 2018). They are moral judgments of our performance as healthy, obedient subjects of a certain regime, influencing users to behave in a certain normalized way (Lifková, 2019), as “good consumers and biocitizens” (Fotopoulou & O’Riordan, 2017, p. 54). The quantification of living they enable is often monetized, data produced by wearables being, for instance, considered by some insurance companies as underwriting criteria.<sup>5</sup>

When mentioning, in the beginning, the description of the WHOOP tracker, the last part addressed the optimization of performance. These two concepts merit a much closer look, as they are embedded in a much wider discussion about the self in the contemporary society. Today, we are all supposed to become entrepreneurs, not just in business but also in daily life and, in Ulrich Brockling’s words, this “entrepreneurial self is a form of subjectification” (Bröckling, 2015). As such, it never stops, and this form of self we are working on can never be attained. It is more of a process than a state. We can only strive for it and constantly improve ourselves using all sorts of tools, data, and devices such as the trackers, but also more subtle techniques of the self (Foucault, 1997), such as those advocated through the (psycho-)therapeutical discourse and self-help literature (Illouz, 2008).

While the wearables’ continuous growth and penetration<sup>6</sup> is powered by a marketing discourse that implies undisputable science disguised as almighty algorithms, in practice most of them end up interpreting data in ambiguous ways and crafting confusing recommendations as well as normative judgments. Most of the time, results from tracking are compared. You are always on a scale where you can usually do better, and you end up being compared to unknown statistical averages, fellow users, or people from similar demographics. Everything is scored, and the goal of the user is to improve and maintain the numbers. But by feeding the algorithms data, the new algorithmic definitions of normal or average might be constantly shifting, as well as the goals.

As mentioned above, the hermeneutical suspicion that wearables induce in everyday life often ends up problematizing an otherwise unproblematic space, begging questions either about normal versus pathological (Canguilhem, 2013) or about able or less than able (dis-able). Every graph can be interpreted in one of those keys since every graph is a comparison to a desirable (normal or healthy) output.

If door-closer, a very simple technical artefact, can be a highly moral actor (Johnson, 1988), then an activity tracker, part of an extended assemblage with cognitive abilities, is definitely at least on par with it and should also be analysed through this ethical dimension.

## **7. User Types and Patterns of Use**

Following the in-depth interviews, I have been able to identify three general patterns of wearable usage related to three broad categories of users. These can, however, in no way be considered representative for the entire population, given the extremely broad range of fitness wearables available and the numerous types of usage I haven't probably been able to witness or encounter during my fieldwork.

The categories that follow are nevertheless relevant following the research questions outlined in the beginning, especially when it comes to the ways in which wearable technology alters body awareness and changes our way of being in the world. They each describe people with different lifestyles and expectations when it comes to the wearable technology, and the intersection of humans and technological devices results, arguably, in different kinds of entities.

### **7.1. Regular Users**

Regular users rarely seem to have any precise expectations, and don't seem very attached to their devices or data either. Their initial patterns of usage arise out of curiosity, and for some of them decrease over time, as they lose interest.

For this category of users, wearables are a way to become more attuned to a specific socio-technical environment, which can be both an inconvenience and an advantage. Specific processes, occurring in the user and wearable milieu, are transformed into visual data and brought

to consciousness, often through haptics. In the words of one of the first wearable users in the sample:

*It was about me as a whole in relationship to the environment. The first watch that put me in touch with the phone and the messages was really something. I thought it was so cool that you could do this thing during a meeting, discreetly look at the watch and know if it's time to leave or do something else and, you know, not to reach for the phone. You know, that [...] seemed like the coolest thing at the time.*

Since the wearable watch or bracelet is directly positioned on the wrist, it is considered less conspicuous than the phone, and some important notifications can be viewed or sensed without attracting attention or without consulting a device that's much more clearly separated from the physical body. However, the specific type of environmental sensing described here relates to the very specific socio-technical system in which both smartwatches or bracelets, laptops and application exist. The wearable is not a way to turn the user into a more sentient being than before, in absolute terms, being simply an *extension* of the body, but it does contribute to constructing a different kind of surrounding (Thrift, 2014).

If this new surrounding or environment fascinates some as it unfolds upon a world of possibilities, it also seems to have the opposite effect on others. The connectivity allowed by the wearable technology is considered akin to a sort of sensory overload. Being flooded by notifications isn't framed or felt as being in touch, but unable to escape a sort of surveillance and an endless list of expectations and tasks.

*I wanted to get an Apple watch too. I thought it was very cool when it came out and when it was presented. But before I could buy it, someone from the office did it and after that another and another did. So, when I was in a team meeting, there were these people at the table and everyone was there with their watch, and text messages were coming in, things were happening, that was the moment when it seemed to me that it was way too invasive. [...] I liked the idea that I could have access to everything so quickly, but I realized that I wouldn't be able to stop myself from looking instantly when something came up and it would consume a lot of my time.*

In other instances, fitness wearables can also become a way to get more attuned to the bodily self. Wearable users, in this case, can go through a process of self-discovery in the beginning, learning about what the

device has to say about themselves, and very often confronting or trying to validate ambiguous interoception with wearable data.

This seems a common characteristic among all user types identified, but the regular users tend to stop here, and sometimes even give up on constant wearable use after some time. For the other categories identified, usage becomes more specific and self-monitoring more intense, since it is driven by an entirely different purpose.

In some cases, a medical trigger can place users in a completely different category, if the signals prove to be worthy of consideration. For instance, one of the interviewees had gifted an Apple Watch to her father, during the pandemic. He was sceptical and didn't wear it constantly, until it gave him a heart related alarm. He followed the prescription, went to a doctor, and it appears he was in urgent need of surgery and the alert had saved his life. After the incident he started taking regular ECGs and sending them to his cardiologist on a weekly basis.

On a similar note, another interviewee discovered a brain tumour after some concerning heart rate patterns and alarms from her Mi Fit Band.

*By the way, I found the brain tumour because I noticed the heart rate pattern. Ok now again, I am a geek and I have mathematical training. I noticed a difference between how my heart rate was when I was in Colombia, even in the middle of super intense physical activities like climbing 4000 meters, you know, and low oxygen and all that and intense physical activity, versus when I came back in Romania. [...] And the alerts I was getting about how "your heart rate is too high" outside the country versus in Romania. And that was the first sign. I hadn't received alerts over time, and it suddenly started giving them to me when I was in one place, not moving. I was stationary and not making any effort. So, without doing any physical effort, it said your heart rate is way too high for laying still. And too high was 120 bmp or more.*

She started paying a lot more attention to the alerts and the data, and tried to correlate them with the activities she was involved in, as well as the interactions she had prior to the alerts, to better understand herself and her body. In her own words, she became much more aware of her body and self, as embedded in a much larger socio-technical context.

In terms of body awareness, we have argued that wearables identify material processes that happen non-consciously, inside the body, in a way enhancing or modifying our own body awareness. In a sense, we might argue that we also become aware of these material processes through



the intermediary of the fitness wearables and apps, the information these provide contributing to or becoming some sort of third-person forms of bodily awareness. We might also argue that the wearables act in our stead, and if we tried an exercise of alien phenomenology (Bogost, 2012), perhaps to them these events would be first-person forms of bodily awareness.

## 7.2. Users with Medical Issues

For users with medical issues, fitness wearables are best described as personal medical devices, or PMDs (Lynch & Farrington, 2018), “devices that are attached to, worn by, interacted with, or carried by individuals for the purposes of generating biomedical data and/or carrying out medical interventions on the person concerned” (Farrington & Lynch, 2018, p. 3). This peculiar device category is, however, not as clear cut as it might sound despite the use of *medical*, as even authors researching the field recognize that the line between wellness and medicine is often not clearly separable (Farrington & Lynch, 2018, p. 7).

For these users, fitness wearables are used to decode bodily and interpret material processes that are thus brought to consciousness, ideally in a personalized context. However, personalization is something most fitness devices or applications lack, as they prescribe predefined courses of action or targets that are pre-set by the user and probably based on large population statistics or user averages. Ideally, the wearable should act as a personal medical device that could help the person manage their bodily processes and keep their body from dis-appearing and disrupting their everyday lives.

*I mean everyone tells me your body has found a balance, its balance is there. Let's not spoil any of this, because we don't know how to put it back together. And that's where the wearable comes into play, and that's kind of where this comes in as a helpful tool that helps me manage this very complicated relationship with my body.*

If for a regular user, novice to the wearable socio-technical world, the data, interpretation, and even the prescriptions might be approached with curiosity in the beginning, for someone with a strong incentive to monitor their health they can become very puzzling. As uncovered in other research about medical data gathering technologies, insights are not simply “found” in the devices, but need instead to be made sense

of, and this often happens with individuals engaging in “socio-material networks of biosensing” (Kragh-Furbo et al., 2018, p. 48) such as dedicated internet forums. For most wearables, the data shown are often simple, confusing, and based either on unknown samples of users or, presumably, on statistical averages<sup>7</sup>. They don’t produce certainty, but often provoke a “sense of vagueness that is worked on until it becomes either clarity or action, failure or indifference” (Nafus, 2014, p. 208).

To quote, as an example, one of the results I often receive during Welltory heart rate variability measurements: “your heart rate variability is likely high. This usually means that you’re in very good shape or that your body’s systems are knee-deep in recovery. But in some cases, it can also be a sign of extreme fatigue”. As a user interested in his own health, I am always puzzled by this kind of messages. Am I in good shape, or am I extremely fatigued? What should I do next? How do I make sense of this? Similarly, other apps and devices give equally or even more confusing results. For instance, a young respondent’s Apple Watch sometimes showed, in the sleep metrics screen, a higher number for the time being asleep than for the time spent in bed.

The more personalized the data and recommendations are, however, the more the user can make sense of it alone, and the more they can get the feeling that the device is tailored to their needs. This means, for instance, recommending a variable number of steps daily, instead of the usual number that you can set up by yourself, usually at 6000, 8000 or 10000 steps per day.

A female user of the Oura ring, a wearable device that aims to “provide women with valuable knowledge and clear, streamlined data about their bodies” thus compares what she gets from the device with the more generic kind of information she would receive from the previous fitness trackers she has owned:

*It’s also kind of an aggregate, it’s kind of, I feel and rely on the way it interprets these parameters that all the other wearables were giving me, and I didn’t know what to do with it. You know, you have the pulse, your heart rate, I don’t know what other thing, how many steps you have taken today. They were all data taken out of context, and I did not know whether today was good or not. I did 10000 steps today, but did I really have to? It’s an assumed thing that you should do it every day. But Oura interprets the data and if I’m exhausted it lowers the number I should do that day and tells me what to do!*

In this kind of dynamic, a different kind of body awareness is carefully developed over time. Attentive correlation of personalized data with outside events and internal states assessed through interoception results, at first, into a different kind of conscious behaviour, that starts drifting into the nonconscious in time and becomes a different kind of body awareness. Perhaps the difference might be best described as an awareness of the bodily equilibrium, or the balanced state of the body described above by the respondent. Events that might or start to alter it are dealt with immediately and controlled as much as possible.

An example of how it functions in practice comes from an interview with a Garmin user making the most out of their body battery indicator, a composite measurement apparently based on heart rate variability and some other internal metrics. He mentioned checking the body battery indicator right before the interview:

*Well, man, if I saw it and if it would tell me I was stressed, I would have postponed our talk. Told you I couldn't do it today; I have something else to take care of. So, let's do it in the weekend, or Monday, or next week. Because my time is precious, as much as yours. And I don't want to waste my time or yours and ruin your meeting. If I'm nervous I'll give you answers without really thinking about it. So, I would have skipped the interview, probably, because I would have considered it just another task to be done, and maybe I would have forced myself and put myself through it.*

Before having the watch, he mentions how he would try and push through the day and everything he had planned regardless of how tired or stressed out he felt. But having an app tailored to his self and personalized needs helped him organize his life and pay more attention to how he felt, especially since he could easily check it with the watch measurements.

### **7.3. Power Users**

The last category is what I have called power users, since these are people extremely interested in performance, bodily and health optimization, as well as self-measuring. They usually experiment with a lot of very specific fitness trackers and are trying to constantly fine tune their body and performance.

Fitness trackers assist them, more concretely, in two ways. The first, and most important, is to help them draw what I call a normative line when it comes to performance, effort, and health between optimal and

dangerous activity. Sometimes, the line is also drawn between optimal and not enough, but identifying when to stop makes for a much more interesting case study.

Power users also believe they are not familiar enough with the inner workings of their body to manage their health and performance on their own, especially when there are so many technological claims today regarding accurate data that can really help improve our lives in a measurable, scientific way.

Their stories are often built around a previous time when, without the assistance of a reliable fitness tracker, they were overexerting themselves without realizing it.

*As I say, I made myself a little bit ill and lost a lot of weight. Ended up in the emergency room at least once, accident emergency, once because I ran too far and started peeing blood and that kind of stuff. Like I was that kind of guy. I was just like no hydration. Just run, run, run, run, run, run. No technique. You know, just make yourself not very well.*

This is not an isolated experience, and it shows us how untrustworthy bodily awareness often is, in practice, for most people, and how difficult it is to know when you have crossed a serious line. It's only when the body disappears that you often become aware of the damage done.

*When I started triathlon, I switched to swimming. So, I needed swim metrics, they were important for me to learn progress. You know, I had a problem with my pulse. I was very tired, and I wanted to understand why. And I found Polar, it was very good, they transmit analog data and have a patented system for swimming. Now Garmin has it too, they caught up. I was interested in real time metrics, in the water, I wanted to know when I was getting tired so I could slow down. My problem was that I was actually doing sprints in the water, but I didn't realize it. I mean with the watch I realized that for me it was a sprint, but maybe for someone else it wasn't a sprint and that's why my body felt it as anaerobic effort. And the tracker helped me, by seeing my pulse, to realize... I thought I didn't know how to breathe. The problem was that I was making too much effort for my level of technique.*

Activity trackers such as the Whoop, however, promise to resolve the issue of deficient bodily awareness and “deliver actionable insights on how you can optimize your performance”. Just like Garmin with the

body battery metric mentioned above, WHOOP “analyses your key metrics like HRV and resting heart rate to determine a daily recovery score and shows you how specific lifestyle and training behaviours affect recovery”. The presentation of its metrics is designed around a discourse of optimization, as the ideal state in which you should be is, in this case, described as *optimal*.

We must be careful and not get fooled by the way wearable assemblages frame or stabilize the idea of an optimal state, since that doesn't just happen, it must be constantly performed. Without the wearable and the whole cognitive assemblage of which it is part – comprising anything from the materials of which the sensors are designed to the smartphones, the algorithms, the apps, the graphs, and the servers on which the data are stored as well as all of the other agents, human or non-human, having contributed to the research that led to their design – there could be no optimal state. For one's default state of awareness, optimal doesn't just not make any sense at all, it can't even exist.

So, what does, in practice, such a cognitive assemblage look like from the point of view of the human agent? The respondent below, a Brazilian jiu-jitsu coach, describes how he uses the WHOOP during a training session and adapts his movements to the tracker measurements.

*So, the display can like show me kind of max heart rate. So how hard high have I pushed it? And it'll show my current heart rate. And so, I'll kind of like go and have a look at that. The other thing it does is it kind of like has you know how hard have you been working per session? So, it kind of gets up to a point where it says optimal and then it goes past that and it goes overreaching. OK, based on your recovery. So, I look at my heart rate and I'll be like, OK, like my heart rate super high. And I know that last round was really tough. And maybe the thing has gone into optimal. So, like I know I'm at an optimal point and I might look at my max heart rate and I'm like, OK, well, that one was like 181 max heart rate. I'm going to slow down a bit on this next round. That's kind of how I use it. It's kind of like I use those metrics to kind of like go, OK, right. Well, and then, you know, at the end of the session, it doesn't really matter. Sometimes I'm a bit kind of like I'll look at it and I'll go. I could have pushed harder in that session.*

In his story there is a clear and constant focus on data, a visual artefact that can only be seen on the smartphone, a third main visible actor of the assemblage, next to the human and the tracker. Although he is aware of a round being *really tough*, his individual awareness is not enough to

decide the next move, without the visual support of the graphs. There is a constant going back and forth between intense physical activity and the devices, with punctuated adjustments, designed just to maintain that optimal point of performance.

The fine line between what's optimal and what results in too much strain on the body is always enacted with the help of the non-human actors of the cognitive assemblage and requires constant focus. In the words of Pickering (Pickering, 2017), there is a dance of agency involved.

The way the tracker is used in practice seems in this case to depict much more clearly the mediating role of the non-human part of the assemblage, as it allows the human to gain access to a different kind of third-person body awareness he then uses to adjust behaviour, after confronting it with first-person body awareness. The whole objective of this, for the coach above, is to constantly perform in that zone that wearables describe as being optimal.

## 8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have advanced the idea that cognitive assemblages comprising an activity tracker actually manage to fuse first- and third-person forms of body awareness, as they establish a kind of loop in between the two, in which it is the non-human cognizant (comprising the sensors' sensing capacity and the algorithmic capacity for measurement as well as the normative displays) that often takes the main role in informing subsequent action. This can be explained by a certain degree of trust (Kiran & Verbeek, 2010) being invested in the assemblage's accuracy and scientific objectivity, wherein sensors end up dethroning senses.

Moreover, the whole point of this cognitive assemblage is driven by a normative (Fox, 2017) desire to achieve an optimal state, something pervasive in today's neoliberal society. We are all supposed to become entrepreneurs, not just in business but also in daily life and, in Ulrich Brockling's words, this "entrepreneurial self is a form of subjectification" (Bröckling, 2015). As such, it never stops, and this form of self we are working on can never be attained. It is, thus, not a state of being, but a constant performance. We can only strive for it and constantly improve ourselves using all sorts of tools, data, and devices, but also more subtle techniques of the self (Foucault, 1997), such as those advocated through the (psycho-)therapeutical discourse and self-help literature (Illouz, 2008).

What fitness trackers bring to this self-optimization scene are not, as I have shown, stable, scientific, objective, and implicitly neutral recipes for success, but specific ontonorms – conceptions regarding people, bodies, activity, and performance, with a strong normative dimension.

Different trackers incorporate different ontonorms, afford different kinds of actions, and lead to different entanglements inside the cognitive assemblage between senses and sensors. The human plus wearable entity ends up being different, depending on the other agents in the assemblage and their ontonorms. And that difference doesn't just mean a different kind of externally oriented performance but, through the intricate enmeshment of the trackers functioning with body awareness, an internally oriented one as well.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> After the launch of Apple's latest watch, at the beginning of 2023, a few odd happenings among users made it to the news stations, as 99 dispatchers started getting distress calls initiated by Apple devices owned by skiers. A new feature, that was also rolled out to other competitor devices, such as Samsung's watches, allows the devices to detect a sudden fall of the wearer, and then send a distress signal. When early adopting skiers enabled the feature, the watches interpreted the falls as serious incidents and "acted accordingly" (Matt Richtel, "My Watch Thinks I'm Dead", *The New York Times*, 3 February 2023, sec. Health, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/03/health/apple-watch-911-emergency-call.html>).
- <sup>2</sup> Android Police. "Samsung Is Finally Putting the Galaxy Watch 5's Temperature Sensor to Use", 20 April 2023. <https://www.androidpolice.com/samsung-finally-putting-galaxy-watch-5-temperature-sensor-use/>.
- <sup>3</sup> "Samsung Is Finally Putting the Galaxy Watch 5's Temperature Sensor to Use", Android Police, 20 April 2023, <https://www.androidpolice.com/samsung-finally-putting-galaxy-watch-5-temperature-sensor-use/>.
- <sup>4</sup> Welltory.com
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.munichre.com/us-life/en/perspectives/wearables/wearables-the-future-is-now-wearables-for-insurance-risk-asses.html>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.idc.com/getdoc.jsp?containerId=prEUR148275121>
- <sup>7</sup> For instance, on my own Samsung Galaxy Watch, I receive daily a sleep score, which is compared, next to it, to a score people in a similar age range obtain. On the Mi Fit, subsequently Zepp life app, under my sleep score i receive a different kind of message, saying I have slept better than a certain percentage of users, thus linking my performance to that of an unknown number of users of the app, instead of comparing me to an unknown demographical group.



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# “FOR FRIENDSHIP AND PEACE:” SOCIALIST ROMANIA’S INTERNATIONAL PIONEER CAMPS IN THE AFTERMATH OF WAR (1949-1959)

Diana Georgescu

## Abstract

Situated at the intersection of studies of socialist internationalism and youth, this paper explores the origins and character of Romania’s international pioneer camps and youth exchanges in the immediate postwar decade, from 1949 through the late 1950s. It examines the role played by the Soviet model of socialist internationalism in the development of Romania’s camps and youth exchanges as well as the diplomatic, pedagogical, and medical aims international pioneer camps were expected to fulfill for Romania’s fledgling regime of popular democracy. The few existing works on the evolution of mass youth organizations and the reforms of education in Romania assume the existence of an all-powerful regime and party, who enforced these measures from above, having centralized state power and nationalized property and economic resources. Through an examination of the first international camps organized on the Black Sea Coast and in the Carpathian Mountains in Romania, this study nuances such views, suggesting that the newly created youth and children’s organizations – The Workers’ Youth Union and the Pioneer Organization – were precarious party structures, which lacked politically trustworthy and ideologically trained cadres as well as material and administrative resources to assume full control of the country’s youth in the immediate postwar years

**Keywords:** socialist/Soviet internationalism, cultural diplomacy, international pioneer camps, children and adolescents, Cold War

## Scholarship, Methodology and Research Aims

Socialist internationalism was a central aspect of state ideology and practice in the Eastern bloc and across the socialist world after the Second World War. Reflected in socialist pedagogy, this tenet was central

to the socialization of children and adolescents into the inextricably linked sentiments and values of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism. Socialist internationalism for youth took a variety of forms in the socialist world, ranging from major celebrations like the World Festival of Youth and Students (WFSY), which was organized every two years by the Soviet-dominated World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), to international pioneer camps bringing together early adolescents in self-managing child republics meant to cross national and ideological boundaries, humanitarian aid provided to refugee children, international sports, science and arts competitions and exchanges, and even pen pal correspondence or articles on foreign children and youth in children's and youth magazines.

Despite its centrality to the socialist project of youth upbringing and foreign policy, socialist internationalism has long been neglected as a topic of scholarly research because it clashed with the perception of the Eastern bloc as a world isolated behind barbed wire under Soviet domination, a world of immobility and homogeneity. A number of transformations in the social sciences more broadly and historical research in particular conspired to make socialist internationalism a topic of interest over the past two decades. This new interest has been driven by the turn to transnational and global histories, both of which aim to transgress methodological nationalism in the study of various historical phenomena and account for the circulation of people, goods, and ideas across national, imperial, and cultural borders.<sup>1</sup>

A second shift involved the growing interest in "soft power" or "cultural diplomacy" as an alternative to high politics and military confrontations in Cold War studies, particularly among historians. This historiographical trend first focused on East-West exchanges, questioning the notion that the "blocs" were monolithic and proving that the "Iron Curtain" was significantly more porous than previously acknowledged.<sup>2</sup> These studies were anticipated and coexisted with works on youth subcultures in the Eastern bloc that had long explored the circulation of musical trends and lifestyles across the Iron Curtain and thus the porosity of the border between East and West.<sup>3</sup> With the shift to research on cultural diplomacy came a renewed focus on exchange not only in sub- or counter-cultures, but also in the official culture of state socialist regimes as well as an increasing interest in how Western trends and lifestyles were adapted locally across Eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup>



Studies of cultural diplomacy tended to focus on the immediate postwar decades and the Soviet Union, but soon broadened to include “smaller” players in Eastern Europe and the poststalinist period.<sup>5</sup> These works fed into new and vibrant scholarly fields, including studies of exchanges within the so-called Second World and, more recently, exchanges between the Second and Third World.<sup>6</sup> One of the signs that this scholarly field is growing is the diversity of historical approaches, ranging from studies of socialist elites and their projects like Dragostinova’s *The Cold War from the Margins* to works on grassroots “citizen diplomacy” and everyday practices of socialist internationalism like Applebaum’s *Empire of Friends*.

On Romania in particular, research on international exchange and mobility has focused on encounters with the West, particularly in the sphere of youth subcultures and the period of liberalization of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>7</sup> Although not all studies explore the notions and practices of socialist internationalism, there are now more ambitious works on socialist Romania’s exchanges with the Global South in fields as diverse as culture, higher education, or medical expertise and Romania’s humanitarian projects during the Cold War.<sup>8</sup>

This paper will focus on the organization of international pioneer camps as a particular manifestation of socialist internationalism centered on youth exchanges in postwar Romania and the Soviet bloc. Unlike the World Festivals for Students and Youth, which make the subject of several studies on youth and socialist internationalism, international pioneer camps received significantly less attention.<sup>9</sup> The exception is the Soviet model camp at Artek, which has been explored by various short studies, ranging from Catriona Kelly’s analysis of the ways in which the Soviet Union deployed child diplomacy during its existence to Matthias Neumann’s article on youth exchanges between the United States and the Soviet Union in the poststalinist period.<sup>10</sup>

This paper shifts the focus to a small socialist state in Eastern bloc, exploring the origins and character of Romania’s international pioneer camps and youth exchanges in the immediate postwar decade, from 1949, the founding year of the Romanian Pioneer Organization, through the late 1950s. It examines the role played by the Soviet model and understandings of socialist internationalism in the development of Romania’s camps and youth exchanges as well as the diplomatic, pedagogical, and medical aims international pioneer camps were expected to fulfill for Romania’s fledgling regime of popular democracy. The few existing works on the postwar evolution of mass youth organizations and the reforms of education in

Romania assume the existence of an all-powerful regime and party, who enforced these measures from above, having centralized state power and nationalized property and economic resources.<sup>11</sup> This study nuances such views, suggesting that the newly created youth organizations like The Workers' Youth Union (Uniunea Tineretului Muncitoresc, UTM) and the Pioneer Organization, which the UTM ran through its Pioneer sections, were precarious party structures, which lacked politically trustworthy and ideologically trained cadres as well as material and administrative resources to either replicate the Soviet experiment or assume full control of the country's youth.

To address these research goals, this paper draws on the official youth and educational press of the 1940s and 1950s, examining the ideological representation of socialist internationalism, international pioneer camps, and the centrality of the Soviet model. The analysis focuses on content as well as strategies of authenticity of Soviet inspiration in journalistic writing, which included publishing articles in the form of letters and diary entries allegedly authored by adolescent pioneers who participated in international camps. The paper juxtaposes these journalistic sources against archival material from the party and youth organization collections, particularly reports of activity, which document the obstacles that UTM activists from the organization's "pioneer" and "international" sections encountered in their efforts to organize international pioneer camps at home and facilitate the participation of Romanian pioneers abroad in analogous camps organized in the Soviet Union and fraternal countries in the 1950s. Where available, the paper also relies on interviews with former pioneer participants in international camps.

### **The Soviet Model of Socialist Internationalism for Children and Youth**

The network of relations among pioneer organizations in Eastern Europe started developing in the immediate postwar years, a period dominated by political unrest, lack of qualified cadres, and economic difficulties. International pioneer camps were among the cultural measures meant to project the notion that the still vulnerable communist governments in Eastern Europe formed a united socialist front and testify to the superiority of the Soviet model of state provisions for the young.<sup>12</sup> In the aftermath of war, international camps were organized under the banner of peace,

understood as antifascism and – indicative of the deepening of Cold War tensions – as anti-imperialism. Camps were also popularized as particularly effective forms of internationalist education for children. As the vanguard of the communist party and its regime, children and teens were expected to develop strongly interconnected sentiments of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism.<sup>13</sup>

In the immediate post-war period, socialist patriotism was defined by opposition to bourgeois, conservative, reactionary, and imperialist nationalism, which had been disqualified by association with nazism and fascism before and during the war. One of the defining characteristics of socialist patriotism was its allegedly class-based character, i.e. its association with the proletariat. In this view, children were expected to feel unbounded love and loyalty for the working class and its political representative, the Romanian Workers' Party (Partidul Muncitoresc Roman, PMR) as well as for the progressive heroes in their country's past.<sup>14</sup> Defined in opposition to the reactionary xenophobia of bourgeois nationalism and derived from its rootedness in the proletariat, another major tenet of socialist patriotism was its compatibility with proletarian internationalism, broadly defined as friendship, cooperation, and solidarity with the world of proletariat, regardless of nationality.<sup>15</sup>

It was in this spirit that Romanian children and teens were encouraged, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, to cultivate friendship and solidarity with the children of other regimes of popular democracy in the Eastern bloc, particularly the Soviet Union, and the children of "fellow travelers," the proletariat in Western capitalist countries. Welcoming the organization of an international camp on the Black Sea coast in 1952, a journalist for the youth press insisted on the centrality of this pedagogical goal both in formal education and informal practices such as international camps. "[Pioneers]," she argued "are taught in schools to love the peoples fighting for the same holy cause of peace, the children from The Great Land of Socialism, the Soviet Union, to love children from countries of popular democracy. They are taught to love the children of the working class in capitalist countries, countries subjugated to American imperialism, children whose lives are full of tears."<sup>16</sup>

By comparison to late socialism, which inaugurated a discourse of national independence, international camps in the postwar decade distinguished themselves through what can be called "Soviet-centrism," the openly acknowledged and encouraged imitation of the Soviet model of internationalism for youth. The Romanian communists' indebtedness

to the Soviet model in the organization of international pioneer camps, epitomized by the Artek camp in the Crimean Peninsula, manifested in diverse ways. These ranged from the very notion that the camp constituted a self-managing collective to combining medical rehabilitation with ideological education, to encouraging campers to write letters of thanks to Stalin, to the fact that many rituals and interactions in Eastern European camps were carried out in Russian, which was meant to serve a sort of *lingua franca*, even when there were no Soviet pioneers present.

In the immediate post-war years, when pioneer organizations in Eastern Europe were busy learning from the Soviet experience, the model of internationalism offered by Artek, which opened its doors to pioneer groups from all Soviet Republics, but remained closed to all but a few foreign delegations and honorary guests, was that of “the friendship of the Soviet peoples.”<sup>17</sup> In his memoir, *Model Children: Inside the Republic of Red Scarves*, Paul Thorez, the son of Maurice Thorez, the secretary general of the French Communist Party, commented on the absence of a cosmopolitan atmosphere at Artek in the 1950s: “Artek wasn’t as cosmopolitan then [the 1950s] as it came to be afterwards because cosmopolitanism wasn’t in favour then. Foreigners did come to Artek, but really they barely trickled in. There were some tiny delegations from Czechoslovakia, Poland and China – those certain friends! – but only a handful of other, special cases. Boys and girls from the Soviet Union were in force, enjoying the charms of the Crimea.”<sup>18</sup> As scholars have pointed out, the climate of “increasing isolationism marked by overt ‘spy mania’ and suspicion of the outside world” characterizing the Soviet Union in the 1930s “increased in virulence after the Second World War,” accounting for the fact that the socialist internationalism for youth promoted by the Soviet Union was an ancillary form of Soviet patriotism.<sup>19</sup> English and Russian language propaganda brochures advertising Artek as the finest Soviet health resort for children in the mid-1950s featured groups of rosy cheeked pioneers from all over the Soviet Union, boasting that the camp welcomed children of seventy nationalities.<sup>20</sup> Much like pioneers from Union Republics, the occasional children delegations from China, Vietnam, Bulgaria, the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania were counted among the seventy nationalities that visited the camp, being assimilated into the big socialist family headed by the Soviet Union.

The Romanian press of the 1950s echoed these representations of Soviet-led socialist unity. On the celebration of thirty years since the

founding of Artek, for example, the youth press reproduced Soviet articles noting that “Artek’s most common guests are pioneers from the countries of popular democracy. They arrive in large groups, not only to rest, but also to see how Soviet pioneers live, study, and rest.” Socialist internationalism was often illustrated by images of groups of Soviet and Eastern European pioneers competing in sports contests or dancing their respective folk songs as a form of unity in diversity: “Romanian pioneers dance a jolly dance, Bulgarians sing ‘Ianka, partizanka, while a small Chinese pioneer performs ‘the sword dance.’”<sup>21</sup>

Articles by Romanian pioneers and journalists also presented Artek as a superior model of internationalist education for Romanian and Eastern European pioneers and their organizations throughout the 1950s. Titled “I Strive to Resemble the Dear Soviet Pioneers,” an article framed as a letter from an enthusiastic Romanian pioneer on return from a summer spent in Artek in 1951 evoked the Soviet camp as the paradigmatic learning experience and site of internationalist friendships: “In the wonderful Artek in the Soviet Union, we met our dear friends, the Soviet pioneers.... We learned so much there. They welcomed us with love and care, sharing their scarves and insignia with us. We often talked about school, we told them that we learn their language, the language of Lenin and Stalin, in school.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the press emphasized the inspirational Soviet model when it presented other Eastern European camps the Romanians attended such as the GDR camp on the shores of the Werbellinsee lake.<sup>23</sup> Much in the same way, an article suggestively titled “Bulgarian Pioneers To Have their Own Artek” described the ambitious preparations for a new international camp site in Bulgaria as a successful embrace of the Soviet model. The preparations included the erection of six groups of buildings to host the camp management and over a thousand pioneers in the “Golden Sands” on the shores of the Black Sea in the middle of a spacious park.<sup>24</sup>

### **Postwar International Camps: Between Ideological Representation and Lived Experience**

Despite the international camps’ lofty goal of strengthening the friendships among Eastern bloc pioneers, they also fulfilled a more practical goal in the postwar period. Both national and international pioneer camps designed after the Soviet model functioned simultaneously as medical rehabilitation centers and ideological schools for the children of cooperative peasants

and the working class, being staffed with nurses and cooks alongside teachers and pioneer instructors. The flagship Soviet camp at Artek was opened as a health resort for children in 1925 and continued to monitor children's minds and bodies through a carefully controlled regimen of sleep, food, and exercise throughout its existence.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, early press accounts of Romanian pioneer camps, focused as much on the virtues of collective life as they did on the food menus allegedly featuring five meals a day (including meat, fruit, and sweets), the daily intakes of calories and vitamins, and the ideal balance between rest and physical exercise, measuring the camps' success both in terms of the children's gratitude to the Workers' Party and the number of pounds gained in weight.<sup>26</sup> The climate of "clean air, serenity, beautiful natural surroundings, and parental surveillance" was meant to contribute as much as diet and exercise to the shaping of robust bodies and personalities.<sup>27</sup> Reminding its readers that children were nourished in mountain camps or "Black Sea resorts at Eforie, Vasile Roaită, Costinești and Techirghiol that had been previously enjoyed only by gluttonous boyars and their sons," *The Education Gazette* completed the image of the paternalist state with references to the ongoing process of state nationalization of assets portrayed in terms of an unprecedented democratization of space and resources under the new "people's democracy."<sup>28</sup>

While the press focused on the regime of popular democracy's unprecedented care for the young, party and youth organization records indicate that camp organization was seriously affected by the tensions and competition for resources, both symbolic and material, among various party and state factions. In particular, ideological and medical authorities disputed the extent to which vacation sites were expected to function as "colonie sanatorială" (sanatoria) devoted mainly to the medical rehabilitation of sick children or "tabere" (camps) expected to provide educational and ideological training. In the early 1950s, for example, the reports of the party's youth organization complained that the medical authorities running camps in places like Sinaia and Făget (Timiș) refused to accept their pioneer instructors on the managing committee or to follow their proposed camp program of ideological and sports activities: "Please clarify urgently," they asked their superiors, "if we are running a pioneer camp or a sanatorium in Făget. The comrades from the Ministry of Health said they cannot approve a schedule of camp activities because the children there are sick and asked that the Ministry should confirm in writing whether this is a camp or a sanatorium."<sup>29</sup> These disputes were

not just local misunderstandings, but the stage of negotiations between restructured state institutions like the ministries of education and health and emerging party structures like the UTM regarding their legitimate domains of influence (children's health vs children's ideological education) and the resources they were entitled to (medical rehabilitation or vacation sites) in order to carry out their mission.

Reflecting the diverse ideological and medical goals of international camps, the PMR assigned their organization to UTM, whose "Pioneer" and "International" sections collaborated with the ministries of education and health as well as the "Vacation Houses" (Case de odihnă) section of the Union Confederation (Confederația Generală a Muncii, CGM) to run the camps. Despite the emphasis on the success of pioneer exchanges in establishing an atmosphere of peace and friendship and representing the new regime of popular democracy abroad in the mainstream and youth press of the 1940s and 1950s, archival records and interviews suggest that the youth organization encountered numerous material, personnel, administrative, and ideological obstacles in ensuring a smooth camp experience for children and adults. International camps abroad in the Eastern bloc suffered from similar problems.

The Romanian Pioneer organization started its international relations with a modest exchange of forty pioneers with the Bulgarian Septemberists in 1949, its founding year, following the induction of the first pioneer groups into the organization, at a time when the organization counted only twenty to fifty thousand members aged nine to fifteen. According to the youth organization's report, Romanians received Bulgarian pioneers at a camp in Lipova, in Romania's Banat region. Press accounts of international and national camps were traditionally framed as letters from pioneer participants likely to give the account a sense of authenticity. On its first international camp, the party's youth press published a letter allegedly sent by a Romanian pioneer, the daughter of a worker from the Grivița factory, a site associated with the interwar history of workers' strikes and thus with a tradition of communist activism. While initially worried about how they would communicate, Romanian and Bulgarian pioneers soon realized, the pioneer's letter tells us, how much they already had in common: "We were walking the same right path of pioneers in the Soviet Union, being led by comrade Stalin's wisdom, he who is the pioneers' dearest friend."<sup>30</sup> Russian initially functioned as the main language of communication, symbolically emphasizing the importance of the Soviet center, giving way to the pioneers' native languages only later in their

encounter: “We could understand each other well from the very first day. We all knew, as much as we studied in school, Russian. So, we spoke Russian. Then we started learning each other’s languages during breaks and at night, when we were guarding the camp.”<sup>31</sup>

In their turn, the Romanians spent a month in the international camp in Varna, where they were meant to represent their country proudly and develop friendships with Bulgarian, Soviet, and Hungarian pioneers, who represented the postwar regimes of popular democracy, but also with French children, who gave Romanians a lesson in the struggles of living under a capitalist, imperialist regime.<sup>32</sup> Reflecting the immediate postwar atmosphere, the report noted the Bulgarian camp’s lack of organization, translators, and educational materials. A recent interview with the orphaned son of a stakhanovist miner from Valea Jiului, who participated in the 1949 exchange, indicates that the pioneers’ selection was primarily conditioned by their social background and need for support in addition to school performance: “I was selected because I had good results in school, but what weighed most was the fact that my father died when I was only twelve in a mine accident in Lupeni.... In 1949, Valea Jiului was well seen by the center for its hardworking, stakhanovist workers who were beating production records daily.”<sup>33</sup> While official reports insisted that pioneers learned the importance of “the struggle for peace,” the interview indicates that war games were pervasive among children whose whole camp experience was structured around war games. Pioneers remember spending every night guarding their tents, but being taken prisoners and marched to neighbouring camps with all their possessions by Bulgarian pioneers in the vicinity.<sup>34</sup>

The Romanian Pioneers’ international agenda became more ambitious in the 1950s, when it planned to invite delegations from the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Albania, the German Democratic Republic as well as France, Greece, and Italy to an international pioneer camp in the Carpathian Mountains designed to accommodate eight hundred pioneers in two subsequent sessions.<sup>35</sup> By the summer of 1951, records show that the youth organization hosted two modest international camps, one in the Carpathians and another in large tents in Mamaia, known as a spa resort on the Black Sea. In 1952, the Mamaia camp accommodated one hundred and eighty children, including pioneers from Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR. Enhancing the international(ist) atmosphere, the festive opening of the camp in Mamaia was attended by Czechoslovakian, Hungarian, Bulgarian



and French workers spending their vacations on the Black Sea. The camp program was established in collaboration with foreign adult instructors, including the decision of conducting all pioneer rituals in Russian.<sup>36</sup>

The Black Sea camp prioritized children's rest and relaxation, featuring a beach and swimming morning routine as well as music and dance programs by campfire at night. Much like official festivities and pioneer rituals, during which Romanian and foreign pioneers thanked the PMR and its leaders for their provisions and care for the young, these activities were often infused with ideological meaning. A journalist documenting camp life for the party's youth magazine, *Scânteia tineretului*, noted that during one of the pioneers' evening shows, "The most applauded number was the German song 'Yankees, go Home!' The strength with which the young pioneers of the German Democratic Republic sang this song shows the hatred that the German people feel for the American imperialists who want to plunge them in a new war."<sup>37</sup> The camp further engaged children in educational and sporting activities, providing educational activities in reading clubs or circles for naturalists, amateur artists, aeromodelism, sports and sanitary education.<sup>38</sup> Pioneers also participated in an intense sports competition under the name of Spartakiad, a term coined by the Soviets as an alternative to the Olympics. International camps further offered opportunities for light entertainment, engaging children in museum visits at the marine school museum in the port of Constanța or the Peleş Castle museum, excursions to Sinaia and the Stalin town in the Carpathians, visits of the capital city, and even ship cruises in response to high demand.

In their report for higher party structures, representatives of the youth organization argued that the camp was successful because it strengthened the friendship between Romanian and foreign pioneers and the attachment and respect for the workers' party and its youth organization. Pioneers, organizers argued, also learned new skills during the camp: although Bulgarian pioneers could not play volleyball on arrival, they defeated competing teams by the end of the camp.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the organizers emphasized the beneficial effect that the camp diet and mixture of rest and relaxation with engaging activities had on children's health and constitution: "We also had good results with strengthening the pioneers' bodies. On average, they put on over three kilos. There are some pioneers who put on five to six kilograms. For example, the Bulgarian pioneer, Slavka Mihailova was twenty-seven kilos on arrival and over thirty-three on departure..."<sup>40</sup>

At these early stages, however, reports show that international camps were plagued by significant personnel and administrative problems. Because the committee running the camp included members appointed by various ministries and organizations, ranging from the Ministry of Education and Health to the UTM and CGM, there was little sense of common purpose and responsibility, the UTM's report argued. Some of the teachers running the pioneer circles lacked the motivation to teach, showing evidence of bourgeois mentalities by seeing their camp participation as a vacation rather than a duty. Adult pioneer instructors lacked the ideological and practical skills needed for high level interactions with international guests. Pioneers themselves were also poorly selected, showing little sporting, artistic, or scientific inclination. The most significant problems, however, were blamed on the unions' defective administration of the camp. The administrative directors were sickly and ineffective, mismanaging food and fruit resources, which were then obtained with great difficulties from the unions' "Vacation houses" section. All these drawbacks led UTM representatives to conclude that "This poorly recruited, uneducated, and professionally and politically unprepared personnel caused the greatest difficulties."<sup>41</sup>

To redress these problems in the future, UTM activists proposed a number of changes. The first included finding a more suitable location for the international camp in a "more isolated place on the Black Sea coast," away from the dangerous lake lying behind the existing camp, the railway running between the *Canal* and the city-port of Constanța, and the military vehicles patrolling nearby beaches, an indication of the recent war experience and the continued presence of Russian troops on Romanian territory in the early 1950s.<sup>42</sup> UTM also proposed that the camp committee should be headed by a sole responsible UTM leader and should arrive at the camp ten days before the official start for a five-day training in "practical and theoretical aspects" of camping.<sup>43</sup> Pioneers of eleven to thirteen were to be recruited more strictly based on their skills and in significantly higher numbers than foreign pioneers, arriving at the camp for training ten days ahead. CGM's administrative personnel was to be appointed more responsibly and similarly arrive early for a five-day training period. The organizers also requested that the camp should receive all the necessary materials for sports and entertaining activities, ranging from games for children to books and magazines in all languages of the camp, geographical maps of all participating countries, musical instruments, and didactic material.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, the internationalist agenda of the UTM became more ambitious and the search for the best locations for international camps, which were meant to be in picturesque spots, but also secure, isolated and self-sufficient, continued. The UTM planned the organization of two international camps. The one at the Black Sea was meant to host fifty pioneers from Czechoslovakia, twenty-five each from Poland, Hungary, and China in addition to two hundred Romanian pioneers. The mountain camp was meant to host sixty Soviet pioneers, twenty-five each from Albania, Poland, East Germany, and Hungary in addition to two hundred and fifty Romanian pioneers.<sup>45</sup>

In 1954, the international camp in the Carpathian Mountains was organized on the grounds of the former Zăbala/Zabola estate in what was then the Autonomous Hungarian Region. The estate belonged to the Mikes family, a part of Székler nobility, but was plundered during the war and nationalized by the communist regime in 1949, when the family was expelled. The UTM organizers renovated the mansions (known as the old and new castles), built three barracks to serve as accommodation, and cleared the large gardens and artificial lake, using the latter for swimming and nautical sports.<sup>46</sup> They welcomed guests from beyond the Eastern bloc, including children from North Korea, Finland, Austria, and West Germany.

While the program was similar to that from previous years, children were engaged in more ideological activities, including the celebration of ten years since Romania's liberation by Soviet troops, nine years since the liberation of Korea and the commemoration of ten years since the assassination of Ernst Thälmann, the leader of the Communist Party of Germany.<sup>47</sup> Besides the increased ideological emphasis on a common, global communist history, the camp program continued to combine rest and entertainment with educational activities, folkloric music and dance performances, and sports competitions, including chess contests. Indicating the concerns that adult authorities still had regarding children's frail postwar bodies, the report indicates that pioneer instructors worked in cooperation with the camps' medical officials to establish the age-specific and individual capacity for physical exertion.

Much was made of the natural beauty and educational value of the surroundings. Children in the naturalists' circle, for example, collected and indexed dozens of plant and insect species in the area while the entire camp took several excursions. These were complemented by visits to the Peleş Castle, Doftana, the place where many of the communist leaders had been imprisoned before the war, and Bucharest, with an emphasis

on science museums like Antipa and new socialist institutions and urban structures that firmly located Romania's new regime of popular democracy in relation to the Soviet Union. These sites included the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August Stadium, which was built only a year before for the Fourth World Festival of Youth and Students held in Bucharest, and *Casa Scanteii*, the V. I. Stalin Printing Press, a monumental site built between 1952 and 1956 in the socialist realist style of the Moscow State University to host all printing presses and newsrooms.<sup>48</sup>

The official youth press welcomed the camp as an example of the new regime's care for the young, who were hosted in over three hundred-years old castles nationalized from former nobility, and socialist internationalism, projecting the image of enthusiastic teenagers engaged in friendly exchanges and socialist competitions in sports that only strengthened their friendship and cooperation.<sup>49</sup> Describing a volleyball match between the Finish and Romanian-Korean teams, the journalist noted that a Romanian player asked for one of his Korean colleagues to be replaced, an act which only encouraged the Korean player to outperform everyone. Commenting on the 1-1 score and enhancing the idea that socialist competition built a sense of collective belonging, the journalist concluded: "Who won? Friendship, as always." Language could similarly pose a barrier to communication and friendship as Romanian pioneers worried how they could welcome the Austrian and German teams when none of them spoke German. The solution came in the form of an Austrian guest who spoke Russian, a language Romanian pioneers were learning in school. Presented as the camp's alleged *lingua franca*, Russian also held symbolic value, underlining the fact that pioneer camps in the Eastern bloc followed the Soviet model of internationalism for youth.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, the article deployed a representational strategy of Soviet inspiration, the child writing letters to comfort worried parents, that they enjoyed life in the camp. The strategy was pioneered in the children's press in immediate postwar period, becoming common in the representation of local, national, or international camps throughout the socialist period. In the camp in Zăbala, a Romanian pioneer received a worried letter from her parents during lunch, and was chastised by her friends for not writing them sooner: "No matter how good their desert cake was, the pioneers left it on the plate to give their colleague a piece of their mind." Pioneers eventually made their friend write a letter reading "it's great in the camp, it couldn't be better" and signed it as a collective to relieve the parents' concerns.<sup>51</sup> The goal of this exercise was to prove that the

pioneer collective was a superior form of child socialization than the child's biological family, indicating that the nuclear family was a remnant of the past that could be overcome.

The official UTM report echoed the congratulatory picture in the official press, noting that Romanian pioneers were properly selected to show sporting and artistic talents and that all children learned to live in the collective.<sup>52</sup> Much like the article, the report argued for the educational value of the pioneer collective, noting that it exerted a disciplining influence on the unruly Austrian children in the camp. In contrast with the article, however, the report emphasized the continuing shortage of ideologically and pedagogically trained UTM cadres, noting that some adult instructors failed in their educational mission, resorting to physical punishment and demeaning comments in interactions with children or even stealing from colleagues. While many members of the managing committee were active and efficient, others, like the administrative director, "treated problems superficially and often delayed their resolution."<sup>53</sup> Organizers also had to deal with administrative problems like the lack of washing facilities and defective water pipes or personnel problems such as the unqualified cook and makeshift kitchen. One of the recommendations for higher ups in the party was to continue organizing the international camp at Zăbala rather than changing location annually, a practice which had prevented gradual improvement of camp facilities. Organizers also recommended that a bus should be assigned to the camp for easy travel and that an entertainment park should be developed on the estate grounds.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusions

Socialist Romania's organization of international pioneer camps in the aftermath of the Second World War followed the Soviet model, gradually integrating the country and its youth organizations in the network of cultural and educational exchanges within the Eastern bloc and across the Iron Curtain, with "fellow travelers," the left-leaning organizations in the capitalist West. Cast as laboratories of proletarian internationalism and world peace in the press, international camps reflected the tensions between the ambitious internationalist agendas of the UTM and the endemic shortages of ideologically trustworthy cadres, and material and administrative resources in the immediate postwar period. Despite these

teething problems, youth organizations in Eastern Europe continued and expanded their youth exchanges in the following decades.

By the 1960s, the youth and children's organizations of the communist parties in the Eastern bloc would perfect the task of showcasing socialist achievement, mobilizing major state resources in order to administer international pioneer camps that were located in extremely picturesque spots and featured modern facilities and specialized personnel. After a decade of mutual exchanges, international pioneer camps would become more standardized, featuring similar programs of political activities, sports competitions, artistic festivals, group visits to museums, major historical sites, the capital cities of the visited country, or sites of socialist progress and achievement such as local Pioneer Palaces, factories, or cooperative farms. Although highly monitored by adult delegation leaders, mediated by translators, and administered by specialized staff, pioneer camps would continue to be represented as experiments in collective living and self-management for children and youth.

NOTES

- 1 For an account of these trends as well as their possibilities and limitations, see Nancy L. Green, “The Trials of Transnationalism: It’s Not as Easy as It Looks” (Contemporary Issues in Historical Perspective), *The Journal of Modern History* 89 (2017): 851–874. C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connolly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *The American Historical Review* 111, 5 (2006): 1441-1464.
- 2 For a discussion of this literature, see the thematic issue edited by Theodora Dragostinova and Malgorzata Fidelis, “Beyond the Iron Curtain: Eastern Europe and the Global Cold War,” *Slavic Review* 77, 3 (2018). For early examples of this trend, see M. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (New York, 2012).
- 3 This is a particularly rich body of literature. Some important titles include Mark Fenemore, *Sex, Thugs, and Rock’n Roll: Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007). Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Juliane Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation. Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 4 See Alexei Yurchak, “The True Colors of Communism: King Crimson, Deep Purple, Pink Floyd,” *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 207-237. Juliane Fürst, *Flowers through Concrete: Explorations in Soviet Hippieland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
- 5 For the role “small” state cultural diplomacy played in the late Cold War, see Theodora Dragostinova, *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021)
- 6 For historiography on Second World encounters, see Rachel Applebaum, *Empire of Friends: Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Patryk Babiracki and Kenyon Zimmer, eds. *Cold War Crossings: International Travel and Exchange across the Soviet Bloc, 1940s–1960s* (Texas A&M University Press, 2014); Patryk Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power in Poland: Culture and the Making of Stalin’s New Empire, 1943-1957* (Chapel Hill, 2015). For scholarship on East-South exchanges during the Cold War, see for example, James Mark and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonisation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) and Kristin Roth-Ey, *Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular: Second-Third World Spaces in the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023).

- <sup>7</sup> Madigan Fichter, "Rock 'n' roll nation: Counterculture and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1975," *Nationalities papers* 39, 4 (2011): 567-585. See also see Adelina Ștefan, "The Lure of Capitalism: Foreign Tourists and the Shadow Economy in Socialist Romania in the 1960-1989" in *Tourism and Travel During the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences Across the Iron Curtain*, ed. Christian Noack and Sune Bechmann (London, 2020), 47-60.
- <sup>8</sup> See Bogdan Iacob, "A Babel in Bucharest: Third World Students in Romania, 1960s-1980s," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 63, 3-4 (2022): 669-690. Viviana Iacob, "Caragiale in Calcutta: Romanian-Indian Theatre Diplomacy during the Cold War," *Journal of Global Theater History* 2, 1 (2017): 37-46. Bogdan Iacob, "Paradoxes of Socialist Solidarity: Romanian and Czechoslovak Medical Teams in North Korea and Vietnam (1951-1962)," *Monde(s)* 20, 2 (2021): 117-140. Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, Irina Macovei, Adrian Neteđu, Carmen Olaru, "Les étudiants africains en Roumanie (1970-1990). De l'internationalisme militant à la commercialisation des études," *Psihologia Socială*, 34, 2 (2014): 117-128.
- <sup>9</sup> For monographs on the WFSY, see Pia Koivunen, *Performing Peace and Friendship: The World Youth Festivals and Soviet Cultural Diplomacy* (De Gruyter, 2022). See also Nick Rutter, "Look Left, Drive Right: Internationalisms at the 1968 World Youth Festival," *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, Anne Gorsuch and Diane Koenker, eds. (Bloomington, IN, 2012): 193-212.
- <sup>10</sup> Catriona Kelly, "Defending Children's Rights, 'In Defense of Peace:' Children and Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," In *Kritika* 9, 4 (2008): 711-746. Matthias Neumann, "Peace and Friendship:" Overcoming the Cold War in the Children's World of the Pioneer Camp Artek, *Diplomatic History* 46 (2022): 505-526.
- <sup>11</sup> For studies of the reforms of education, see Maria Someșan and Mircea Iosifescu, "Legile din 1948 pentru reforma învățământului," *Anul 1948 – Instituționalizarea comunismului*, ed Romulus Rusan, (Fundatia Academia Civică, 1998), 439-444. On Romanian youth organizations (including the Pioneers), see Adrian Coflâncă, "Repere pentru o istorie a Uniunii Tineretului Comunist/Towards a History of the Romanian Communist Youth," published as a contribution to the 2006 Presidential Report. Retrieved, April 2023 [https://www.academia.edu/5700937/Adrian\\_Cioflanca\\_Repere\\_pentru\\_o\\_istorie\\_a\\_Uniunii\\_Tineretului\\_Comunist](https://www.academia.edu/5700937/Adrian_Cioflanca_Repere_pentru_o_istorie_a_Uniunii_Tineretului_Comunist)
- <sup>12</sup> ANIC, Fond C.C. al P.C.R., Organizatorică, file 32/1950, "Proect de organizare a taberelor de pionieri pentru vara anului 1950," 27-30. See also Paul Gh. Popescu, "Activitatea pionierilor în vacanță," In *Gazeta Învățământului*, July 29, 1949, 1-2.
- <sup>13</sup> See, for example, Anatole Chircev & al., "Educarea elevilor în spiritul patriotismului socialist și al internaționalismului proletar" *Pedagogia pentru institutele pedagogice* (Editura Didactică și pedagogică, 1964), 265-279.



- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Lucreția Ilieș, "Viața fericită în tabăra internațională a pionierilor dela Mamaia," *Scânteia tineretului* no 1044, August 29, 1952, 3.
- 17 Paul Thorez, *Model Children: Inside the Republic of Red Scarves* (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1991), 29-30. Among the few honorary guests outside the Soviet Bloc, Thorez lists himself and Anita Presto, the daughter of the general secretary of the Brazilian Communist Party.
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- 19 Kelly, "Defending Children's Rights," 744.
- 20 See Valentina Lubimova, *Soviet Children at Summer Camp* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1955), 31-40, and Stanislav Furin and Y. Rybinsky, "What is Artek?," In *The Artek Pioneer Camp* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1975).
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# JEROME'S CORPUS OF LETTERS AND NETWORK ANALYSIS\*

Andra Jugănar

## Abstract

In recent decades, network analysis has gained significant popularity as a methodological approach among scholars. This paper focuses on the letter collection of Jerome of Stridon (ca. 347-420 AD) and employs network theory and specialized software for network analysis. The objective is twofold: to uncover statistical insights and to provide interpretations of different facets, including the actors' roles, the most influential figures within the network, and the patterns of letter usage. Additionally, the paper presents visual representations of the network.

**Keywords:** Jerome, letters, letter collection, network analysis, UCI.NET

In the past decades, two areas of research have triggered increasing attention from scholars. Substantial studies in epistolography, focusing on Late Antique letters and letter collections have been published, mostly in English. In addition, lately scholars have been applying to historical studies a variety of methods and tools belonging to network analysis. They have also developed new platforms and pieces of software which allow one to collect data related to letters. The present paper finds itself at the confluence of these two disciplines. In its first part, I will present some theoretical considerations on the use of network theory in (late antique) epistolography. In the second part, I will present the letter collection of Jerome (ca. 347-420 AD), as it has been transmitted to us, and I will explain the results provided by the use of the aforementioned methodology.

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## 1. Late antique epistolography and network analysis

The term “network” has become more and more often used by historians in studies trying to explain relations among people and communities. Among its various approaches, one can observe a special interest for social networks. Without doubts, the multidisciplinary approach, consisting in using both quantitative tools of structural analysis (in other words, notions and algorithms of Mathematics) and qualitative methods of historical studies has provided promising results.

It is worth presenting the most representative publications. In 1997, Margaret Mullet initiated the study of the practice of letter writing in Byzantium with the help of network analysis. For the 135 letters of the Metropolitan Theophylact of Ohrid, she establishes “order zones” of relations, she classifies typologies of relations, and she provides visualizations.<sup>1</sup> Almost a decade later, Adam Shor analyzed the social network of Bishop Theodoret of Cyrus, relying on his letter collection.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Daniel Knox applied network analysis to the letter collection of Bishop Ennodius of Pavia in his Master thesis as well as in a series of articles.<sup>3</sup> In 2020, *A Companion to Byzantine Epistolography*, edited by Alexander Riehle, includes a comprehensive study of Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, the leading expert on network analysis applied to historical studies, on “Letters and Network Analysis”.<sup>4</sup> Johannes Preiser-Kapeller is also the author of numerous other articles in which he explains at large various approaches of network theory, methods, and tools to different research problems of historical studies, such as commerce, episcopal networks, or climate changes, to quote just a few.<sup>5</sup> Mikael Papadimitriou is in the process of developing an impressive project on mapping the social network of the famous rhetorician Libanius, based on his immense corpus of 1544 letters.<sup>6</sup> The present author has also published preliminary results provided by network analysis applied to the letters of the three Cappadocian Fathers.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars have shown that network analysis in historical studies reveal not only the types and strength of relations between individuals, but it can also assess how these ties evolve and what role each actor plays within the network. As Johannes Preiser-Kapeller explains: “One central aim of network analysis is the identification of these structures of social relations which emerge from the sum of interactions and connections between individuals within a group or society and at the same time influence the scope of the actions of everyone entangled in such relations.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, what network analysis does is to collect “categories, intensity, frequency and dynamics of interactions and relations between individuals in a way which allows for further mathematical analysis.”<sup>9</sup>

The rationale for adopting this approach is well explained in the introduction provided by Borgatti et al., in their work titled *Understanding Social Networks*. According to the authors, social networks offer a conceptual framework for analyzing the interrelationships among the elements of a social system. They refer to these elements as “actors” or “nodes”.<sup>10</sup>

### **Methodology**

In this section, I will explain the methodology used for the current research. In the following analysis, I will use the so-called “adjacency matrix” in order to formalize the existence of a connection between two actors. Thus, actors are the vertices of this matrix. Each node possesses certain attributes. The connections between the actors, called “ties,” “links,” or “edges,” also possess attributes. In this context, the strength of a tie characterizes the number of letters exchanged between two actors. The depiction of a collection of nodes and ties is commonly known as a graph. Given that the terms vertices, nodes, and edges are not particularly suitable when discussing networks in which individual persons or communities are involved, scholars employ a unique terminology compared to other situations of network analysis. Thus, the term “actors” is preferred instead of vertices. Since the present study revolves around human subjects and adopts social network methodologies, I will consistently use the terms “actors” and “ties” throughout. The actors of the network under scrutiny represent either individuals, or groups of people (communities) encountered in the correspondence of Jerome. The ties represent epistolary or social interactions between the actors. In general, ties can represent relationships between actors of a network.

Two other parameters characterize social situations. *Attribute data* pertain to the: “attitudes, opinions and behavior of agents [actors] so far as these are regarded as the properties, qualities or characteristics that belong to them as individuals or groups.” *Relational data* codify relationships, contacts, and interactions between actors and are represented by ties.<sup>11</sup>

All data is collected in matrices, from which graphs are drawn. The graphs are not only used for visualizing networks, but also for implementing mathematical operations on them, from graph theory and matrix algebra.

Social network analysis, in fact, first developed within the research field of sociology and scholars have used increasingly difficult mathematical operations for the analysis of large-scale networks.<sup>12</sup> In the following, I will present some basic tools, which I am using for the analysis of the letter collection of Jerome.

For this particular case, from the various approaches for network delimitation, I will be using the “ego-network.” More precisely, I am surveying Jerome’s collection of letters, gathering in a database data about the individuals or communities mentioned there (either addressees, or referred to – which I call “third parties”), about the chronology (whenever a chronological delimitation is possible), and about the localities (whenever there is evidence for them). The so-called “first order zone” includes the addressees of the letters, whereas the third parties form the so-called “second order zone.” More approaches for the analysis of “ego-networks” exist.<sup>13</sup>

According to Borgatti’s categorization and to the systematization of Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, these phenomena can be classified into four distinct types. The first one refers to “similarities”. This category encompasses instances where two nodes share common attributes, such as behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, locations, or group memberships. For example, some actors of Jerome’s network share the interest in asceticism. The second category, of “social relations,” includes connections based on social ties, such as kinship relations, friendships, and emotional bonds such as “liking,” “disliking,” or “love,” as well as connections based on cognitive awareness, such as “knowing someone.” For example, some addressees of Jerome belong to the same families. Some others created ties of friendship. Next, the category of “interactions” comprises “behavior-based ties” that occur within the context of social relations. Borgatti characterizes these interactions as “discrete and separate events that may occur frequently but then stop.” He gives as examples conversations or conflicts. These are not going to be part of the present study, because of the limit of space. Finally, the category of “flows” refers to situations in which actors exchange or transfer of resources or information. It also includes transferring influence.<sup>14</sup> In the context of this study, this situation is exemplified by a situation in which an actor recommends another actor.

The context of interactions enables one to consider the so-called “temporality of ties” and the dynamics of a network. Relationships between actors can be established, maintained, strengthened, changed, or terminated. Sources may capture the moment when an individual enters

or exits a network. However, most commonly used network analysis tools tend to focus on static models. Nonetheless, it is still possible to model temporal dynamics by assessing networks at different chronological intervals, using key moments or the so-called “time slices” that mark the development of the so-called “ego” network.<sup>15</sup> Due to the limitations of this paper, I will use a static model, referring only to two key-moments in Jerome’s existence.

Despite the limitations due to the lack of complete information available in the surviving sources (as is the case in this particular study, in which one has to mention from the beginning that it is impossible to state that the letters of Jerome capture indeed all the relations established and maintained by him throughout his life), the relational data that one is able to collect remains significant and relevant.<sup>16</sup> Typically, collections of letters were passed down through one or more “editorial works” – as it will be explained further in this paper – sometimes initiated by the author himself. This indicates the author’s discernment in selecting and preserving ties that he deemed significant.<sup>17</sup>

After collecting the data, I used a free piece of software, UCI.NET, since it offers enough tools for conducting a structural analysis of the data. In order to proceed, I used as basis the systematization presented by Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, who refers to three main levels of analysis for the data collected. First, he mentions to “the level of the single nodes.” At this level, several measurements are employed. The most significant is the “degree” of a node, which quantifies the number of direct connections it has to other nodes. If the network is “directed”, meaning that the direction of the connections is taken into consideration (for example, if a tie exists from actor A to actor B, it marks actor A sending a letter to actor B), then two other parameters can be computed. The “indegree” (or “inner degree”) of a node A measures the number of ties linking other actors to actor A. In the context of this study, it represents the number of letters received by actor A. Similarly, the “outdegree” (or outer degree) of a node A represents the number of ties linking actor A to other actors in the network. In other words, in the present study, this measure represents the number of letters that actor A sent to other actors in the network. In the present study, the indegree of the “ego” of the network represents the number of letters received by Jerome. The outdegree of the “ego” represents the number of letters sent by Jerome. The “relative centrality” of a node determines its position along paths connecting otherwise unconnected nodes. The measure called “betweenness” represents the potential for

intermediation. The “eigenvector” measures a node’s “centrality” based on its connections to highly “central” nodes. This means that even less well-connected nodes can have “indirect centrality.” In the present study, this measure characterizes the actors that are connected to “important” actors in the network. Second, “the level of group of nodes” focuses on analyzing relationships between groups of actors. “Dyads”, which are groups of two nodes, can be categorized as “null” if the two actors do not establish a connection. If, on the contrary, there is a connection between them, the tie is characterized as either “directed” or “asymmetric” if there is an interaction from one node to the other, but not necessarily the other way around (for example, Jerome sends a letter to Florentius), or as “symmetric,” if the interaction is reciprocated (for example, Jerome and Augustine exchange letters). Dyads are classified as “un-weighted” (codified with the value 0 if there is no tie between the actors, or with any positive value otherwise) or “weighted” (representing the quantity of an interaction, such as the number of letters exchanged between the two actors of a dyad). Scholars also analyze “triads,” which are sets of three nodes. The concept of “triadic closure” suggests that if actor A is friend with both actor B and actor C, actors B and C can become friends, due to the actions of actor A. The third level is “the level of the entire network.” At this level, the analysis considers the entire network as a whole unit. The “size” of the network represents the number of nodes that comprise it. In the case of Jerome, the “size” represents all the actors involved in his correspondence, including the letter carriers (where data is available) and the actors referred to in the letters as direct acquaintance of Jerome. The “diameter” of the network measures the maximum distance between any two actors, indicating the number of links needed to establish a path between them. The “average distance” or “path” length represents the typical distance between two actors. The “density” of the network indicates the ratio of actual links present in the network compared to all possible links.<sup>18</sup> A higher density indicates a higher level of cohesion within the network.<sup>19</sup>

To create the graphical representation of the network, I used the “affiliation matrix” which I constructed based on the data collected from the letters. This matrix is a square matrix, meaning that it has equal numbers of rows and columns. Each axis of it contains the names of individuals or communities involved in Jerome’s letters. The matrix encodes the affiliations shared among actors and does not measure the qualities of the actors.<sup>20</sup> As the ties between actors are not reciprocated, the graph

representing the network is oriented, meaning that the direction of a tie from one actor to another is significant.

Another way of codifying the ties established in the network is the “edgelist”. An edgelist is a collection of pairs of nodes of a network which are connected. Edgelists are especially useful for quantifying the “weight” of a tie. In the context of this study, the weight of a tie represents a number reflecting how strong a connection is between the actors linked by that tie.

Therefore, after introducing the “affiliation matrix” in UCI.NET<sup>21</sup>, I also generated edgelists to codify ties. Afterwards, I used the Netdraw tool to generate graphical representations of Jerome’s network. I also used the other tools of the application to compute various values of the network.

It is significant to note that in the generated graphs, the length of a tie between actors does not represent a physical distance between them. To enhance clarity in the graphical representation, the position and depiction of graph components can be adjusted using the Netdraw function of UCI.NET. Since some letters do not specify their place of origin, it is not always possible to determine the physical distance between letter senders and addressees, or between addressees and actors mentioned in a letter. Therefore, the physical location of actors is not included in the representation.

Furthermore, the graphs do not depict the chronological span in which the letters were written. Instead, specific graphs can be created for critical years to visualize the temporal evolution of relationships between actors. Due to the limitations of this paper, I will use as a chronological point of reference the year 390, when Jerome had already established himself in Bethlehem.

Regarding the concept of “distance,” it refers to the number of ties between two actors, as explained previously. As the number of ties increases, the distance also increases. However, the length of ties in the graph representation does not hold any interpretational significance.

One should emphasize that all the graphs are “single mode” graphs, similar to the affiliation matrices. They visualize a single type of data, namely actors and ties, without comparing their shared qualities.

## **2. The Letter Collection of Jerome and Network Analysis**

Jerome’s letters are, as Stefan Rebenich characterizes them, “the finest of Christian antiquity.”<sup>22</sup> Andrew Cain even terms this collection of letters,

compared to the other collections of Late Antiquity, as “a luminary among luminaries.”<sup>23</sup>

A close examination of the works of Jérôme Labourt, Andrew Cain, and Charles Christopher Mierow<sup>24</sup>, allows one to establish some chronological details of the letters in Jerome’s collection. The letter collection of Eusebius Hieronymus of Stridon (as this was his complete name) provides enough details about his life, with the exception of his childhood. He was born in Stridon around 347 to a non-aristocratic family. After being educated in his home town, he went to Rome to study. It was there that he was baptized (Pope Liberius may have baptized him) and that he met Rufinus of Aquileia for the first time. Around 367, he and Bonosus, a friend from his childhood, left Rome. Their destinations were Treves (in Gaul) and the Rhine region. It was in Treves that Jerome became acquainted with the monks from Egypt. He also read and copied commentaries of Hilary of Poitiers. Upon returning to Stridon, Jerome got to know a group of ascetics, led by Bishop Valerian. According to the letters, he also had connections with the priest Chromatius, archdeacon Jovinus, and deacon Eusebius (who received from him his *Ep.* 7<sup>25</sup>). The deacon Julian, the addressee of *Ep.* 6, became spiritual father of Jerome’s sister. Heliodorus, Bishop of Altinum is the addressee of *Ep.* 14.

Scholars doubt whether *Ep.* 1, was written in Aquileia or in Antioch, which, together with the desert of Chalkis, became the destination of his first journey towards the East. As he confesses, he had to leave Aquileia suddenly, but he does not explain the reasons. Letters from 2 to 9 and from 11 to 17 were in fact written in Antioch or in the desert of Chalkis, where he lived as a hermit for a while. After that, in 379, he went to Constantinople. In the same year, he may have become a priest.

Dating *Ep.* 10 is difficult. If it does not belong to the series of *Ep.* 2-9 and 11-17, another hypothesis is that it was produced after 379, when Jerome was already in Constantinople. Scholars divide *Ep.* 18 into two distinct letters, commonly referred to as *Ep.* 18A and 18B. He might have written both of them in Constantinople. It was there that he met the Cappadocian Fathers still alive at that time (Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, as Basil of Caesarea had already passed away from September 378).

Another chronological point of reference in Jerome’s life and epistolary activity is the year 382. It was then that he travelled for the second time to Rome, where he remained for three years. From this short period, he wrote *Ep.* 19-45. This time, he was accompanied by the Bishops Paulinus and Epiphanius. Pope Damasus appointed him as a secretary and



commissioned him with work on a Latin translation of the Scriptures. Thus, he started an intense philological work on the Bible. At the same time, he became one of the most assiduous supporters of asceticism. In parallel, he started to provide spiritual guidance to a group of noble Roman women interested in asceticism, with whom he kept his connections for the rest of his life. These ladies further influenced the course of his life, as it will be shown in the following lines. Some of the names mostly mentioned are Marcella, Asella (Marcella's sister), Paula, Eustochium, Blessila (Paula's daughters), and Laeta. In 384, Pope Damasus passed away, and thus Jerome remained without a protector. At the same time, he found himself criticized and blamed not only for illicit relations with the aristocrat ladies, but also for the death of Blessila, due to the harsh asceticism he encouraged her to undertake. In these conditions, in the fall of 385, Jerome left Rome for good, embarking himself for the last time in his life on a journey towards the East. Soon, Paula and one of her daughters, Eustochium, took the same route. Jerome reunited with Paula and Eustochium and in 386 (another reference year for the chronology of Jerome's life and epistolary collection) they founded together the monastery in Bethlehem. From this place he wrote the last letters of the collection, *Ep.* 46-154. One of the most striking transformations of Jerome's past relations is the one with Rufinus, at that time leader of a monastic community on the Mount of Olives. Since Rufinus became his fierce enemy, he had to depart to the West for good. It was also after 386 that Jerome finished his translations of the Scriptures, biblical commentaries and other writings. The precise moment of his death is not known and scholars propose either the year 419 or 420.<sup>26</sup>

In one of the works produced during his stay in Bethlehem, *De viris illustribus* (written in 393), Jerome made a catalog of notable Christian writers and their works. The last of the "illustrious men" presented was no one else than himself. This is not the only instance in which he presents himself as praiseworthy. In another writing, *The Apology against Rufinus*, he describes himself as no less than "philosophus, rhetor, grammaticus, dialecticus, hebraeus, graecus, latinus, trilinguis."<sup>27</sup> Thanks to this final chapter, we possess a nearly complete list of his works published before *De viris illustribus*. Among these, he mentions two collections of his own letters. One collection, titled "Ad Marcellam epistularum liber", included a selection of the letters addressed to Marcella, the Roman noble lady. The other collection, titled "Epistularum ad diversos liber", contained letters written after 382. Scholars agree that Jerome mentioned his own letters

in order to make them well known and that he was the first editor of his own epistolary collection.

Jerome's letters started to be examined in the fifteenth century. After Migne's *Patrologia Latina* (which contains the letters in volume 22) another significant edition was the one published by I. Hilberg in the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Volumes 54, 55, and 56). In 1963, a comprehensive edition, consisting of eight volumes, was published by Jérôme Labourt.<sup>28</sup> More recently, in 2003, Niel Adkin published a critical edition and commentary of "Libellus de virginitate servanda", which is the title Jerome gave to *Ep.* 22.<sup>29</sup> Andrew Cain published two critical editions and commentaries: one on Jerome's epitaph for Paula, titled "Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae", the title of *Ep.* 108 (2013)<sup>30</sup>, and another on a letter to Nepotian, focusing on the monastic clergy, *Ep.* 52 (2013).

Based on the results provided by scholars, Jerome's collection of letters, which comprises 154 pieces (or, in fact, 155, if one divides *Ep.* 18 into *Ep.* 18A and *Ep.* 18B) consists of 123 existing authentic letters authored by Jerome. While some of them examined the rhythm, the style, and the rhetorical devices, some others focused on his references from the Bible and classical literature.<sup>31</sup> Other researchers explored the religious content.

Jerome used letters in order to display, through rhetorical devices, his scholarly skills, especially his mastering of the Greek and Hebrew. He often got involved in controversies and proved to be a challenging character.

In the entire corpus of letters, out of the total 154 (or 155) items, 152 (or 153) are considered authentic. Scholars have shown that *Ep.* 150 was written later and *Ep.* 148 and 149 are inauthentic. Besides, Jerome is not the author of all letters, since 32 pieces have a different sender. Only 16 of these have Jerome as an addressee, which fact proves that Jerome felt the need to include in his own epistolary collection letters exchanged by other persons. In addition, Jerome translated from Greek to Latin some letters which he copied (especially those of Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria).

The following analysis will focus on *Ep.* 1-17, 18A, 18B, 19-79, 81-91, 97, 99, 101-110, 112-147, and 151-154, for the reasons mentioned above. The addressees of these letters are 83 individuals or communities.

As far as the typology of letters is concerned, I will follow the typology proposed by Charles Christophe Mierow.<sup>32</sup> He started with the "little books, or "pamphlets," or, as Jerome himself termed them, "libelli." These are *Ep.* 14, which is an exhortation to the ascetic life, the well-known *Ep.* 22 and *Ep.* 130 (both being exhortations to virginity), *Ep.* 52 (an exhortation about the duties of the clergy), *Ep.* 53 (concerning learning), *Ep.* 57 (in

which he explains the best method of translating), *Ep.* 58 (in which he explains how a priest should live).

Another type of letters includes those that delve into moral and ethical inquiries. Examples of these include *Ep.* 54 and 123 (on widowhood), *Ep.* 107 and 128 (both dealing with how a mother should bring up and educate her daughter), *Ep.* 117 (having a double addressee, a mother and daughter, discussing widowhood, virginity, and the avoidance of scandal and temptation), as well as *Ep.* 122 and 147 (both focusing on penitence). Monastic life is the subject of *Ep.* 145.

A significant part of Jerome's letter collection revolves around matters of scriptural interpretation. They all let him pass as an authority in matters of biblical questions, especially since they reply to former inquiries addressed to him. The letters from this category are *Ep.* 18A and 18B (on the book of Isaiah), *Ep.* 20 (discussing the word "hosanna"), *Ep.* 21 (on the parable of the prodigal son, presented by the Gospel of Luke 15:11-32), *Ep.* 25 (explaining the ten names used by the Hebrews to refer to God), *Ep.* 26 and 29 (explaining certain Hebrew terms), *Ep.* 30 (regarding the Hebrew letters inserted in Psalm 118), *Ep.* 36 (an answer to several scriptural questions), *Ep.* 55 (addressing three questions on the New Testament), *Ep.* 65 (a commentary on Psalm 65), and *Ep.* 140 (an exposition of Psalm 89).

Another category comprises letters in which Jerome tackles doctrinal matters and refutes what he considers as being heterodox beliefs. These are *Ep.* 15 and 16 (discussing the dispute over three claimants to the bishopric of Antioch and the nature of the three *hypostases* in God), *Ep.* 41 (arguing against the Montanists), *Ep.* 42 (opposing Novatian), *Ep.* 48 (against Jovinian), *Ep.* 61 (defending himself of charges of Origenism), *Ep.* 84 (defining and justifying his own stance on Origen and his texts), *Ep.* 85 (responding to questions on free will and the holiness of children of believers), *Ep.* 109 (countering Vigilantius' arguments), *Ep.* 126 (addressing a query on the origin of the soul), and *Ep.* 133 (discussing Pelagius' teachings).

Jerome also composed a number of epitaphic and consolatory letters upon the deaths of his friends. These are *Ep.* 23 (regarding the passing of Lea), *Ep.* 39 (concerning Blesilla), *Ep.* 60 (on Nepotian), *Ep.* 66 (on Paulina), *Ep.* 75 (on Lucinus' passing), *Ep.* 77 (on Fabiola), *Ep.* 79 (on Nebridius), *Ep.* 108 (on the death of Paula, his closest friend), *Ep.* 118 (on Julian's wife and daughters), and *Ep.* 127 (on the passing of Marcella).

Lastly, the collection includes several personal notes from Jerome. These are *Ep.* 8, 9, 11, and 12 (expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of

correspondence from the addressees), *Ep.* 13 (urging reconciliation with his aunt), *Ep.* 31 and 34 (on received gifts), *Ep.* 45 (a farewell letter), and *Ep.* 71 (praising the virtues of his addressee and encouraging him to visit the Holy Land).

The following image is a visualization of the entire network of Jerome's letters.



Figure 1

The following image is a visualization of the same network according to the degree of ties, as resulted from UCI.NET.

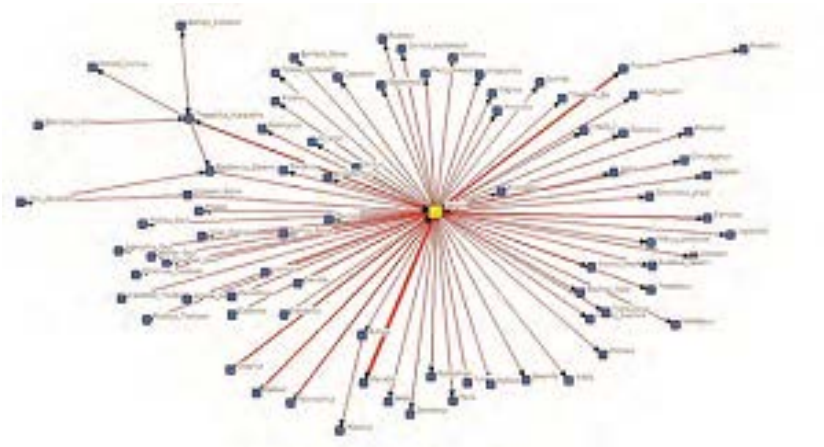


Figure 2

The following table, generated with the help of UNI.NET, shows the hierarchy of the addressees of Jerome's letters, according to the value of the indegree. This represents the number of letters they received from all possible addressees.

<b>Marcella</b>	19
<b>Augustine</b>	9
<b>Damasus</b>	7
Pammachius	6
<u>Theophilus of</u>	
Alexandria	6
Oceanus	4
Riparius	4
<u>Eustochium</u>	3
Paula	3
<u>Paulinus of Nola</u>	3
<u>Rufinus</u>	2

Figure 3

The following table, also generated in UCI.NET, represents the hierarchy of the outdegrees of the actors in Jerome's network. It is remarkable that Augustine is an actor who sends most letters, besides Jerome himself.

Sender	Out Deg
Jerome	132
Augustine	9
Theophilus_Alexandria	6
Damasus	2
Epiphanius_Salamis	2
Innocent_Rome	2
Rufinus	1
Pammachius	1
John_Jerusalem	1
Oceanus	1
Bishops_Palestine	1
Dionysius_Lydda	1
Anastasius_Rome	1

Figure 4

The following table, generated with the same application, shows the hierarchy of the indegree of the actors in the network. According to the data, it is not Jerome who receives most letters in the network, but Marcella. When correlating this result with the previous data, one can realize that the only letters received by Marcella and recorded by Jerome himself in his collection are the ones sent by himself to her. This fact is surprising, given the influence that Marcella had among the Roman noble ascetically-inclined ladies who became Jerome's spiritual daughters.

Recipient	In Deg
Marcella	19
Jerome	17
Augustine	9
Theophilus_Alexandria	8
Damasus	7
Pammachius	6
Oceanus	4
Riparius	4
Eustochium	3
Paula	3
Paulinus_Nola	3
Epiphanius_Salamis	2
Rufinus	2
John_Jerusalem	2
Florentius	2
Heliodoros	2
Principia	2
Evangelus	2
Boniface_Rome	2

Figure 5

Marcella, the rich pious Roman lady, who gathered around her in her household on the Aventine Hill an entire circle of ascetically-oriented ladies, is by far the most frequent addressee of Jerome.

On the other hand, it is significant to mention that around one third of the surviving letters from Jerome are, in fact, addressed to women. Among these too, Marcella is the most frequently mentioned name. This fact may be explained due to her influence within the ascetic aristocrat ladies, who became Jerome's spiritual daughters. As for the other female recipients, most of them are addressed only once, with none of them receiving more than three letters. However, Jerome mentions frequent corresponding with Paula and Eustochium, which fact suggests that some letters have been lost. The letters addressed to women that survived primarily focus on doctrinal matters and the interpretation of scriptures. The collection does not include a single letter in which any of these female addressees write to Jerome, which fact is an indication that Jerome was not interested in keeping letters from women.

The following image is a representation of the types of relations as they occur in the correspondence of Jerome. The multiple relations are also graphically represented. The categories that I took into consideration for this analysis were: acquaintance, administrative subordination, ecclesiastical adversity, ecclesiastical alliance, fellow monk, fellow presbyter, friendship, patronage, kinship, spiritual father, and teacher. As it has been explained before, the direction of the relations is significant. If friendship or kinship are reciprocated relations, patronage or spiritual father are not. Therefore, I marked a reciprocated relation from actor A to actor B as a link directed from A to B and as another link from B to A.



Figure 6

If one analyzes the hierarchy of the relations that were established in Jerome’s network, one can observe, as represented in the following graphic, that the friendship relations occur most. These were reciprocated, so the value represented in the table has to be divided by two. The value of kinship also has to be divided by two, since it is a reciprocated value. After doing all these calculations, one can observe that, in fact, spiritual fatherhood, which is not a reciprocated relation, occupies a very important role in Jerome’s network. Another significant relation is that of ecclesiastical adversity. An explanation of this fact is the highly polemical character of Jerome, as revealed by many of his letters.

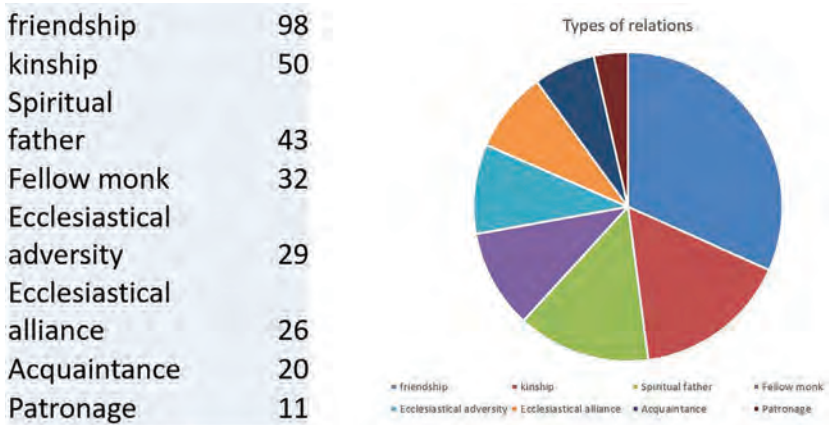


Figure 7

It is significant to see the values of betweenness in the network of Jerome. As the following figure shows, Theophilus of Alexandria and Epiphanius of Salamis have the highest values in the network. The table also confirms the potential of Rufinus and Augustine for intermediacy.

	Betweenness
<u>Theophilus_Alexandria</u>	181
Epiphanius_Salamis	85
Rufinus	11
Augustine	10
John_Jerusalem	1

Figure 8



Since the letters addressed to women occupy a significant place in the network of Jerome, it is worth analyzing this particular correspondence as a subnetwork of Jerome's entire network. The following image (figure 9) is a representation of the classification of letters addressed to women.

Various scholars published studies shedding light on Jerome's relationships with women and their works provide valuable insights into this topic. Among the notable publications are Barbara Feichtinger's *Apostolae apostolorum: Frauenaskese als Befreiung und Zwang bei Hieronymus* (1995), published by P. Lang.<sup>33</sup> This work explores the concept of women's asceticism as a form of liberation. Christa Krumeich's dissertation titled *Hieronymus und die christlichen feminae clarissimae* (1993), conducted at Bonn University<sup>34</sup>, focuses on Jerome and the renowned Christian women of his time. J. N. D. Kelly's monograph, titled *Jerome. His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (1975), provides a comprehensive examination of Jerome's life, writings, and the controversies he was involved in. It touches upon his relationships with women as well.<sup>35</sup> Jo Ann McNamara's article, "Cornelia's Daughter: Paula and Eustochium" (1984)<sup>36</sup> delves into the lives of Paula and Eustochium, highlighting their connection with Jerome and the significance of their genealogy. Elizabeth Clark's collection of essays and translations titled *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends* (1979) offers valuable insights into Jerome's thoughts on various topics, including his views on his relations with women.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, if one wishes to explore Jerome's writings on female piety, some other works can be consulted. Patrick Laurence's *Jérôme et le nouveau modèle féminin. La conversion à la 'vie parfaite'* (1997)<sup>38</sup> analyzes Jerome's perspective on the new ideal of Christian womanhood and the concept of living a perfect life with the help of asceticism.

In addition, Jerome's writings on women in his letters, as well as his polemical and exegetical works, have been thoroughly discussed by scholars. David Wiesen, in his book *St. Jerome as a Satirist: A Study in Christian Latin Thought and Letters* (1964),<sup>39</sup> explores Jerome's use of satire and its implications in Christian Latin thought, including his perspectives on women. Fannie LeMoine's article "Jerome's Gift to Women Readers" (1996)<sup>40</sup> focuses on the impact of Jerome's writings on female readership. Patricia Cox-Miller's article "The Blazing Body: Ascetic Desire in Jerome's Letter to Eustochium" (1993)<sup>41</sup> examines the theme of ascetic desire in Jerome's letter to Eustochium.

These publications provide a wealth of information for those interested in understanding Jerome's relationships with women and his writings on female piety.

Jerome engaged in correspondence with several noble Roman women, as mentioned above, and a collection of 33 preserved letters reveals his interactions with 10 distinguished ladies. The recipients of these letters are:

1. Marcella: Jerome wrote to Marcella *Ep.* 23-29, 32, 34, 37, 38, 40-44, 46, 59, and 97. Additionally, Pammachius, a senator from the gens Furia and Marcella's cousin, is mentioned in the latter letter.
2. Asella: Jerome addressed a letter to Asella, *Ep.* 45.
3. Paula: Jerome corresponded with Paula in *Ep.* 30, 33, and 39.
4. Eustochium: *Ep.* 22, 31, and 108 were dedicated to Eustochium.
5. Principia: Jerome exchanged *Ep.* 65 and 127 with Principia.
6. Furia: Jerome wrote to Furia in *Ep.* 54.
7. Fabiola: *Ep.* 64 was sent by Jerome to Fabiola.
8. Salvina: Jerome sent to Salvina *Ep.* 79.
9. Laeta: Jerome addressed *Ep.* 107 to Laeta.
10. Demetrias: Jerome wrote *Ep.* 130 to Demetrias.

These preserved letters offer valuable insights into Jerome's communication and relationships with these Roman noble women.

The following image represents the hierarchy of women addressed by Jerome, according to the number of letters they receive from him. One can observe that the Roman noble ladies receive most letters. This group is, moreover, comparable to the group of women from Gaul, also directed by Jerome.

Marcella	19
<u>Eustochium</u>	3
Paula	3
Principia	2
Virgins_Aemona	1
<u>Castorina</u>	1
Asella	1
Serenilla	1
Furia	1
Fabiola	1
Theodora	1
Salvina	1
Laeta	1
Mother_Gaul	1
<u>Daughter_Gaul</u>	1
Hedibia_Gaul	1
<u>Algasia_Gaul</u>	1
Ageruchia_Gaul	1
Anapsychia	1
<u>Demetrius</u>	1

Figure 9

The following image shows the graphical representation of the network of women from Rome connected Jerome to Jerome. The colors and the thickness of the ties represent the strength of the ties between actors. As it can be observed, Jerome had most of his letters sent to Marcella, but Paula and Eustochium were also among his favorite correspondants.

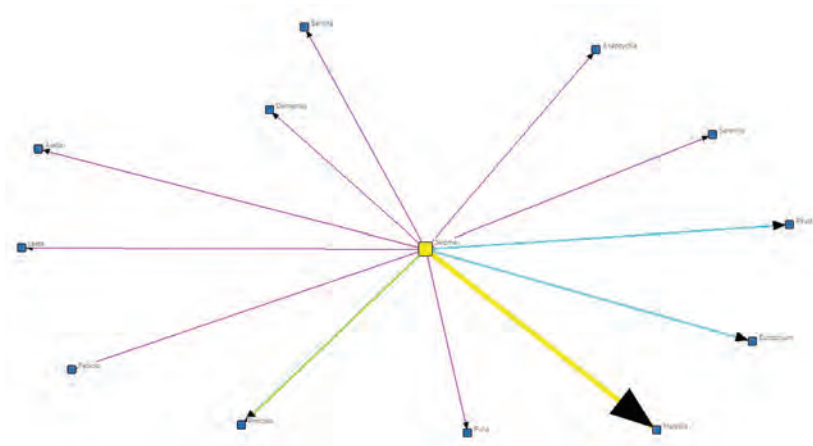


Figure 10

## Conclusions

Analyzing the correspondence of Jerome with the help of the network tools and the visualization of the networks of all actors or of part of the actors provides several conclusions. Jerome made use of letters not just as a simple communication tool, but also as a propagandistic tool. He used individual letters and letter-collections to gain a status of an expert on the Bible and asceticism. The women included in the “subnetwork” of Jerome contributed to this image. Besides, this subnetwork also shows Jerome was able to promote himself among these actors as a translator, textual critic, and interpreter of the Bible, since he had both the philological skills and the spiritual authority to approach its text in the original languages, not only Greek, but especially Hebrew.

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# THE TYRANNY OF SCHOOLS: NATURE AND NATION IN THE SCHOOLS OF TRANSYLVANIA AND THE ROMANIAN KINGDOM, 1870-1914\*<sup>1</sup>

Cosmin Koszor-Codrea

## Abstract

This research investigates the development of the nature study movement in the secondary schools of Transylvania and the Romanian Kingdom between 1870 and 1914. Building on the scholarship dealing with the rise of the “biological perspective” in Germany, the paper deals with the roots of the Romanian nature preservation movement and its relationship with the political and economic projects of nation-building that developed in the dualist Austrian-Hungarian Empire. It analyses how methodological changes in the teaching of natural history and the introduction of teaching aids such as nature excursions, botanical school gardens, and celebrations of birds and trees, influenced the development of a nationalist, utilitarian, anthropocentric and racial approach toward the natural environment.

**Keywords:** History of science, environmental history, nationalism, botanical school gardens, bird and tree day, biological method

## Introduction

Seven years after the controversial Hungarian school reform of Minister Albert Apponyi (1846-1933) implemented its forced Magyarization law in 1906, Victor Stanciu (1884-1964), a natural history teacher, gathered the Romanian secondary school children from Arad at the local Orthodox Church. It was Sunday morning in April during the blossoming spring of 1913. The young boys and girls, all dressed in festive costumes, already

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knew that a long and tiring day awaited them. After the religious service, they were taken to the local school in order to equip themselves with food supplies, paper lanterns, heavy shovels, and with their own seedling trees. They were taken on a short trip to the surrounding green meadows, where they had to recall the main ideas they had imbibed in school and church. Here the students of the fourth and second grades read poems about Romanian national history, and about birds, and other nature-related stories written by iconic authors such as Mihai Eminescu (1850-1899) and Ion Creangă (1837-1899). The peak of the event came when the children were required to make the so-called “solemn vow”, namely to promise that they will spare the life of birds and trees. Next, each of them subscribed to a list of precepts according to which they were obliged not to chase or kill birds, nor to damage their nests, and committing them to stopping others from seeking to cause them harm. After planting their own mulberry trees, willows and lindens, they finally had a break and knew that the annual edition of the “Celebration of Birds and Trees” was almost over.<sup>2</sup>

Events such as the “Celebration of Birds and Trees” were an inclusive part of the development of the new attitudes towards the natural environment that were practised in the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary as well as of the highly contested educational reform programmes enforced by the Hungarian administration in its multi-ethnic territories such as Transylvania. As numerous scholars of the history of secondary education have shown, throughout its several school laws, the Hungarian state shifted from a multi-ethnic autonomous education system (act 38/1868) to the introduction of mandatory lessons in the Hungarian language (act 18/1879). The educational reforms soon culminated in the full state control of secondary schools, instituted by the introduction of Apponyi’s law (act 27/1907), which made all teachers into state servants as their salaries were provided by the government. Teachers working in confessional, popular and communal schools were guaranteed a minimum salary that was provided through the state aid system.<sup>3</sup> To receive this state aid, Romanian schools had to comply with the state politics of forced Magyarization and bring their own contribution to the Hungarian nation-building agenda. However, the Magyarization of the teaching programme also brought several uncontested benefits such as the modernization of school infrastructure and their premises, the increase of literacy, and the improvement of school hygienic conditions and teaching equipment.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, turning to the teaching of natural history in the secondary schools of Transylvania, several pedagogues also introduced

the German reforms that were part of the so-called “Heimatkunde”, which overlapped with what in the United States was called the nature study movement.<sup>5</sup> Environmental historian Lynn Nyhart showed that, during the 1890s, German natural history teachers following Friederich Junge’s work (1832-1905) shifted from the old taxonomic classification of nature to the so-called “biological perspective”, which focused on the “relationships among organisms, their physical environment, and their geographic and ecological place in the world.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Nyhart explained that field trip excursions became part of the curriculum in order for pupils “to learn about nature in nature” while at the same time, other teaching aids such as terrariums and aquariums were introduced.<sup>7</sup> The “staging of nature” in secondary schools was soon doubled by various teaching aids such as herbariums, zoological models, and wallcharts that showed the range of biological habitats in the students’ surrounding environment.<sup>8</sup>

If these factors have received a fair amount of attention, lesser known to the scholarship is how the nature study movement played out in multi-ethnic interimperial territories such as Transylvania, where Hungarian, Saxon, Romanian, Roma and Jewish coexisted and contested racial hierarchies of power.<sup>9</sup> Here the introduction of botanical school gardens, the celebration of birds and trees, nature excursions in the Carpathian Mountains, and school manuals of natural history discussing racial taxonomies were all part of the redefinition of national belonging put forward mostly by Hungarian, Saxon and Romanian elite cultural and scientific associations.<sup>10</sup> Adopting the school reforms enacted by the Hungarian Ministry of Religion and Public Education and coupled with the changes in the teachings of natural history, the Romanian teachers appropriated these, for their own benefits by building on their own national consciousness that facilitated the rediscovery of the natural environment in Romanian national terms. Comparatively speaking, similar developments are to be traced in the Romanian Kingdom, where natural history teachers tried to keep up with their Western peers, adopting to a certain extent similar teaching methods. Closely related to these changes, all these school reforms eventually paved the way to what it soon became after the First World War the Romanian nature preservation movement.

### **“Teaching methods not books”**

The teaching of natural history in the Romanian schools in Transylvania dates back to the late eighteenth century. The Austrian Empress Maria

Theresa (1717-1780) through the act of *Ratio Educationis totius re literariae per regnum hungariae et provincias* from 1777, enacted that the study of nature in secondary schools was to be divided according to the three kingdoms of zoology, botany and mineralogy. Natural history was, at the time, mainly focused on the classification system shaped by the Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1708). For instance, when it came to the teaching of zoology, for two hours per week, children were introduced to an anthropocentric view of nature and instructed in the classification of animals into classes, genera, species, and their usefulness and harmfulness to the economy. Obligated to memorize the species' Latin and popular names, the courses culminated with the hierarchical study of human racial classification, while relating all these to the wisdom and power of the Creator.<sup>11</sup>

However, in the 1830s a shift in teaching methods was made by the publication of August Lüben's (1804-1874) method, *Leitfaden für den Unterricht in der Naturgeschichte in Volksschulen* [*Guide for teaching natural history in primary schools*], which advocated for visual education of nature and for taking children outside the classroom in the natural environment. His method, alongside other emerging pedagogical aids such as aquariums, terrariums and school gardens, stressed on the observation first of the natural objects pertaining to the homeland of each school, with a focus on the most common species known by students (e.g., the horse, common flowers, salt) and the relationship between the three natural kingdoms. It also insisted on the idea that lectures should start from simple facts and develop into complex descriptions. Although Lüben's inductive method brought several benefits such as outdoor natural explorations, children did not escape the subject of systematics and the hierarchical racial classifications of human diversity that placed the white European on top of the so-called chain of beings.<sup>12</sup>

Much discussed in Hungarian pedagogical periodicals up until the interwar period, Lüben's method was eventually adopted in the secondary schools of the Hungarian Kingdom. With few exceptions such as the Saxon Evangelic Gymnasium from Kronstadt (now Braşov), most of these secondary schools were dedicated for boys. Central to this debate was the famous Hungarian pedagogue and reformer of popular schools Pál Gönczy (1817-1892). A former teacher and member of the Hungarian Natural Science Society, in 1867 he was appointed as departmental advisor to the Ministry of Religion and Public Education by József Eötvös (1813-1871), then was promoted to ministerial adviser in 1874, and again



to state secretary in 1888. From these positions, Gönczy contributed to the modernization of the public-school system through the uniformization of the school buildings and their premises. In one of his works published in 1870, *Népiskolai épülettervek [Building plans for the public school]* he stipulated the hygienic requirements for classrooms such as lighting and furniture, ventilation and heating system, as well as the school building plot that consisted of a schoolyard for physical exercise, a teacher's farmyard, a garden, and a horticultural practice area.<sup>13</sup> In terms of natural history teaching aids, as early as 1852, he translated Lüben's guide for the teaching of botany. By the 1870s, however, he was the main advocate for visual education by promoting botanical natural excursions, the introduction of wallcharts for the study of mammals, relief maps of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, atlases and convex globes.<sup>14</sup>

The "Lüben-Gönczy method", as it was later called by Hungarian teachers, was unevenly adopted throughout the Hungarian school system. For instance, until the end of the nineteenth century, Romanian Orthodox and Greek-Catholic confessional schools still enjoyed a certain autonomy to decide upon the teaching of natural history, while school reformers from Transylvania criticized their slow implementation of this method. Others such as Vasile Petri (1833-1905), a famous Romanian pedagogue and former teacher of the gymnasium from Naszód (now Năsăud), who had autonomy from ecclesiastical authorities, highlighted that "the study of botany without plants, of zoology without animals, [...], is leaving the students indifferent and is even disgusting them."<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the botanist Artemiu Publiu Alexi (1847-1896), a natural history teacher at the same Romanian gymnasium, pointed out to the poor administration of natural history teaching in all Romanian, Hungarian and Saxon schools of Transylvania, due to the "pyramid structure of education". After describing the failure of both Greek-Catholic and Orthodox school programmes and pointing to the so-called "parrot method", under which students have to learn every subject by heart, he militated for the introduction of models replicating the human skeleton, wallcharts, nature expeditions, natural history collections, botanical school gardens, and meteorological stations.<sup>16</sup> Trained in natural science at the universities of Vienna and Graz, once appointed teacher at the Gymnasium at Naszód, he started reorganizing the study of natural history by providing the school with all the necessary equipment that Pál Gönczy advocated for. (see image 1)

The success of the "Lüben-Gönczy" method was by no means assured by its theoretical implications, which subserved the governance of

nature to the state economy and put it into the service of religious and nation-building agendas as school children had to learn practical gardening and trading skills. Iuliu Moșil (1859-1947), one of Alexi's former students and a teacher of natural history in the cities of Slatina and Târgu Jiu, part of the Romanian Kingdom, began publishing pamphlets of practical guidance. He gave detailed instructions on the building of herbariums, terrariums, aquariums, insectariums, techniques for stuffing and mounting animals, and the conservation of museum collections, all of which were exposing the bodies of dead animals for the local boys' natural history courses. Following Lüben's method, Moșil published in 1897 *Științele naturale, mijloacele și metodele lor în școlile secundare* [*Natural science, their means, and methods in secondary schools*] in which he expressed the high relevance of schools in making "people truly useful to the state". By this, he meant that the practical and economically useful knowledge gained by students in class, once at home, would be passed over to their families. Likewise, besides the religious education gained in schools, "the teaching of natural science, conducted with tact and skill is a powerful means of injecting the love of the homeland, the love for the Romanian land."<sup>17</sup> Paradoxically, the same text that described the conservation of dead animals also advised teachers to showcase moral examples from the life of animals and their social habits. By doing so, it was believed that the young boys would become "more interested in animals and show their love and spare them from torture."<sup>18</sup> Moral lessons aside, storytelling books from nature-inspired locations encouraged the exploration of nature in any possible setting by undertaking hiking trips, visits to migrating zoological museums, botanical gardens, natural history museums, in addition to commercial locations such as vegetable markets, public markets selling fish, birds, flowers, poultry and game, and seaports.<sup>19</sup>

If the advocates of the "Lüben-Gönczy" reforms accused others of teaching schoolchildren "the parrot method", by the 1890s a new generation of natural history teachers turned against them for preaching empty words, for promoting dead animals in classrooms and teaching the boring science of systematics. The key figure in this new approach to understanding the natural environment was the Prussian pedagogue Friedrich Junge, the head of the girls' school in the Schleswig-Holstein's city of Kiel. His idea of *Lebensgemeinschaft* (i.e. biotic community) was put forward in his 1885 book *Die Naturgeschichte in der Volksschule: Der Dorfteich als Lebensgemeinschaft* [*Natural History in the Secondary School: The Village Pond as a Biotic Community*]. Historian Lynn Nyhart

has shown that Junge put much emphasis on the “ability of organisms to maintain themselves in relation to their surroundings.” In doing so, “instead of organizing the teaching of natural history around taxonomic categories, Junge proposed organizing it around the *Lebensgemeinschaften*, or biological communities, groups of organisms that lived in a particular chemico-physical setting and were dependent on that and on one another for their survival.”<sup>20</sup> As the title of his book shows, the “community of life” was to be found in the village pond, and in other places in the proximity of children’s classrooms, where they could benefit from “hands-on” training and find examples of the interdependence between species and their environment. By distancing itself from systematics and anatomy, “the biological” method advocated for the study of life as a whole, while also subscribing to Humboldt’s famous phrase that “the richness of science no longer lies in the abundance of facts but linkage.”<sup>21</sup>

In Transylvania, one of the first Romanian school teachers to incorporate Junge’s method in his courses was the botanist based at the Sibiu Orthodox Theological Institute, Daniile P. Barcianu (1847-1903). After studying natural history in Vienna, Bonn, and Leipzig, Bracianu became a teacher and archdiocese inspector of primary schools, while being also involved in the popularization of Darwinism from a religious standpoint.<sup>22</sup> As early as 1881, in his published school manual *Elemente de istorie naturală pentru școalele populare* [*Elements of Natural History for Popular Schools*], discussing the mole’s underground environment, he addressed the peasant-assumed superstitions and called upon the villagers to have mercy toward the mole and to no longer kill them, by showing their usefulness to the field economy.<sup>23</sup> In 1891, he published another article, specifically updating the pedagogical literature with Junge’s teaching plan and explaining, “life communities could also be found in the field, in the forest, in the floodplain, in the orchard, on the seashore, in the sea, in the city, in the park, in a flower shop, in an aquarium, into the whole earth.”<sup>24</sup> In 1891 he printed a methodological handbook, *Istoria naturală în școalele populare* [*Natural History in Popular Schools*], which gave recommendations on the division of teaching material by relating these to Junge’s method.<sup>25</sup> Another example was based on the underground “life community” observed while working in the garden, namely the close linkages between the roots of plants, the insects, the larvae, the mole cricket, and the mole.<sup>26</sup>

The success of Junge’s biological method pertains also to the fact that, according to his views, it could easily “justify materialistic, pantheistic, [or]

Darwinist [...] world views, but also a deistic one."<sup>27</sup> Henceforth, natural history teachers from all over the ideological and spiritual spectrum took their cue in adopting it, as was the case of the Romanian Kingdom. This was possible through the implementation of the programmes of school reform around the turn of the twentieth century, that aimed at the modernization of both rural and urban schools, as envisioned by the education minister Spiru Haret (1851-1912).<sup>28</sup>

One of the first to adopt Junge's method was the Moldavian parasitologist, freethinker and Darwinian popularizer Nicolae Leon (1862-1931). A former student of Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), Leon published in 1891 the handbook *Călăuza Zoologului* [*The Zoologist's Guide*] that reached a second edition in 1905 and received an award from the Romanian Academy. The handbook's aim was to help amateur naturalists and high school students to observe the local flora and fauna in their natural surroundings. Following Junge's idea of the living community, Leon's guide also encouraged students to explore nature by undertaking excursions and observing the natural habitats provided by ponds, plains, forests, as well as the nocturnal animal life. Leon's shift to the biological method appears clearly in his emphasis: "to study animals from a biological point of view, that is, [to study] their relationship to each other and to their environment, their alimentation habits and the way that they reproduce."<sup>29</sup> In the 1905 edition, Leon illustrated his argument by adding pictures of dioramas and made it clear that "a lake is a microcosm, an association of plants and animals, which live together according to the law of conservation, constrained by physical and chemical influences, dependent on one another, on the soil they live on, and on the [biological] group as whole."<sup>30</sup>

After the public intervention of geological authorities and members of the Romanian Academy such as Ion Simionescu (1873-1944) in 1900, a new series of articles and school-guiding textbooks proposed that both the urban and rural population should be made accustomed to the biological method. This, Simionescu believed, would increase their interest and love for the natural environment and at the same time for their own nation by taking more trips in nature.<sup>31</sup> However, in his 1909 lecture delivered at the pedagogical training school in Iași, he rightly pointed out that these views were also improved by the work of the German pedagogue Otto Schmeil (1860-1943), who simplified everything by reducing Junge's law to simple biological phrases such as "all predatory animals have sharp teeth".<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, for Simionescu natural history teachers were to be

made responsible for building up all teaching aids and school collections without state funds. Moreover, when it came to conducting natural excursions, places that “strengthen children’s spirit of revolt against social injustices” should be avoided.<sup>33</sup>

A rural school reformer and teacher at the normal school in Galați, Culea Apostol (1882-1949), adopted a different line of thinking. In his textbook published in 1910, *Învățământul despre natură în școala primară* [*Education about Nature in Primary School*] he gave a full account of the methods that should be used for the introduction of Junge’s biological perspective. One of his first concerns was the decentralization of the Romanian education system that had to provide separate teaching programmes specific to a school’s geographical region and natural setting. He claimed that the descriptive and morphological method still filled the children’s minds with dead images, while due to the scarce use of the experimental method, “the school gives so many parrots, automatic humans with a bag full of empty words and incapable of an initiative of their own.”<sup>34</sup> Given the status of education, he recommended that urban schoolchildren should be taken from time to time to the rural environment where nature reveals itself:

Nature speaks to [urban children] only through books and paper, through the skeletons of dead animals, or it is not discussed at all. [...] Instead of [real] things, [only] faces; instead of realities, [only] formulas to listen to and to repeat the talks; and where he sees reality, he sees it through metal bars, the lion in the zoological garden, the meadow in the botanical garden, the flowers and fruit trees in gardens with barbed wire fences, everything enclosed with a metal grid, everything shouting: do not touch! Do not step your foot! On the contrary, for rural children, the whole [nature] is open and free.<sup>35</sup>

Culea Apostol further addressed the anthropocentric view of natural history teaching methods, the emerging nature conservation movement and the religious views in relation to nonhuman species. For instance, after discussing Darwin’s research he gave such examples like “the bird is singing not for the pleasure of human beings, but for the pleasure of other birds of the opposite sex.” In a similar vein, he stressed that “the biggest enemy of animals is the human. He is the one oppressing and killing them, either for food and other necessities, either to suppress his competitors or to satisfy his inherited instincts to see living beings killed

by his own hand.”<sup>36</sup> Referring also to the Darwinian struggle for survival, he pointed that humans, who viewed themselves as the “kings of nature”, “destroyed, developed, moved, and modified life according to their own needs. Numerous species of plants and animals have been cramped in a tiny corner, to make space for [humans], several have died or been extinguished by humans or by the species favored by him.” He went on to explain that according to this “master of nature”, “a great part of plant breeding, the protection of certain animals, were not made in relation to the physical necessities, but for the aesthetical pleasure of his soul.”<sup>37</sup> When it came to the Romanian peasants, he made it clear that their superstitious views should be changed through the education of their own children, but first these religiously acquired superstitions should be clearly identified:

The peasant has his own classification [system], made after the usefulness and harmfulness that [animals] bring, according to their beauty and ugliness, and according to how God has divided them into good and bad beings. On the one side, there are the good blessed animals, the animals of God, birds of the sky, the birds of heaven, and on the other side the cursed ones: beasts, savage animals, and filthy ones. For some [animals], he has complete love and recognition, [...] some he respects with piety for the services they brought to God, Virgin Mary or other saints. The peasant thinks that good beings should be kept because that is the way of God, while the damned ones should be destroyed.<sup>38</sup>

Culea Apostol’s guidebook brought several recommendations for the implementation of the biological method of teaching natural history in the Romanian Kingdom; however, his work was in line with the growing literature on the utilitarian protection of nature for the use of state economy.

## **Exploring the nation in nature**

As early as 1853, Simeon Ulpianu (?-1863), a young Romanian student from the Transylvanian Greek-Catholic theological gymnasium of Balázsfalva (now Blaj), participant in the 1848 Revolution and future teacher at the pedagogical school in Hátzeg (now Hațeg), published a poem after a summer hike among the rocky peaks of the Retezat Mountains. The poem was dedicated, in gendered biological terms, to the “Romanian brothers in blood”, while both expressing a call for the “conservation of the nation”

around the Carpathians and the Danube, as well as redefining nature as a place of escapism and national contemplation.

Because of the beauty of nature/ I climb to the azure mountains/ Where the air is purer where the snow is on the ridge/ To the azure with rocky peaks / Delighted by those patriots /That have escaped from the ugly houses and bigoted people.<sup>39</sup>

This act of what Eric Kaufmann and Oliver Zimmer have called the “naturalization of the nation”<sup>40</sup> was by no means the first. On 27 July 1839, a French teacher working at Saint Sava College in Bucharest, Jean Alexandre Vaillant (1804-1886), while struggling through a harsh summer blizzard, had reached the Omu Peak in Bucegi Mountains. Together with a friend on horseback and two peasant mountain guides from Comarnic, their twofold aim was to explore the natural landscape of the Carpathians and to undertake a symbolic political act by planting a tricolor flag on the Caraiman Peak. However, their plan was ruined by the dark clouds that forced them to descend, one by one, holding tight to the flagstaff, when one of the peasants called Stoica Vodă, baldly asked himself “What could be the point of waving a flag on Caraiman?”<sup>41</sup>

If the above-mentioned cases were small in number, the second part of the nineteenth century witnessed a growing interest in the exploration of the natural environment, especially the high mountain areas. Famous among upper-class activities, it soon led to the appearance of the Saxon, Hungarian and Romanian alpine associations, which developed around the Transylvanian Carpathian Mountains and most of which used the Romanian peasants and shepherds as their guides.<sup>42</sup> However, in the secondary school setting, among the first attempts to undertake nature excursions date back to 1864. Various teachers from Transylvania gathered at a pedagogical conference held in Hermannstadt (now Sibiu), and they stressed the importance of hygienic and health issues for their students while recommending excursions in nature during their summer vacations, to collect flowers and plants that were related to the school botanical knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

In line with the Hungarian school reforms modelled after the Lűben-Gőnczy method, teachers followed up by recommending scientific excursions in nature. A concrete plan was proposed by Ioan Popea (1839-1903), a teacher of Romanian language at the boys’ gymnasium of Kronstadt (now Braşov) and editor of the magazine *School and Family*. In one of his lectures, delivered at the local school in 1877, he emphasized the importance of children’s obedience to the school, to laws, to orders,

and to religion. In his view, the young boys had an important role as “the future of the nation; hence the youth should be prepared to be the strongest foundation on which the edifice of Romanian nationality will be built.” To achieve this goal, he recommended that the study of scientific books should be reinforced by excursions across meadows, forests, valleys, and especially hikes in order to discover the romantic scenery of Piatra Craiului and Bucegi Mountains. He lamented that, although the Carpathian Mountains were equals in their beauty to the Alps of Switzerland, it was with “embarrassment” that he had to admit the Transylvanian Mountains were “mostly visited by foreigners (*i.e.* Saxons and Hungarians mountaineers), [...], that it was only *they* who found pleasure to delight their sight with the images of these great peaks.”<sup>44</sup> Popea insisted that schoolchildren must start to learn to admire and love the natural beauties of the mountain landscapes, and further to relate these to their homeland. By doing so, national identity was overlaid with a true sense of the surrounding natural environment and to work towards nourishing future generations of healthy and hardworking Romanians. In his own words:

Far from the Romanian student should be this kind of indifference, this coldness towards nature. Far should be this stupid and unmoving spirit, this spineless soul. Dear young students, we should leave those sore losers alone, weak and crippled, leave those made tired and scabby by the passing of time, who spend their free time sitting and sleeping – we should leave these people to spend their time in the corrupt air of cities and to swallow the street dust. You sweet, studious youth, you must have a lively sense for nature and its beauties. For you there should be no higher pleasure than to spend your free time in the fresh air, perfumed by blossomed orchards. You should not be ashamed to sleep on a grass bed, under the stars, in a beautiful glade, at the murmur of crystalline mountain water, near superb rocky cliffs, that lose their peaks in the clouds, and where you will hear from time to time, a *doina* played from a *caval*, from a bagpipe, or a *bucium*, that heavenly pure Romanian song, in which the whole soul of a people is translated through the powerful [sound] and through the sweet and tender notes.<sup>45</sup>

If excursions in nature could provide children with national identity feelings, the “book of nature” also gave direct contact with teaching materials for the study of botany, zoology, and mineralogy, which teachers believed would lead students to a moral and religious life. Hence,



advocates of “intuitive studies” through schools in the open air, such as Andrei Bârseanu (1858-1922), a teacher at the Romanian commercial high school at Kronstadt and director of ASTRA (The Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and the Culture of the Romanian People), insisted in 1887 that schoolchildren should be liberated from “the choking air of the classroom”. Once outside, amidst living nature, teachers should guide students towards direct observations of fauna and flora, and encourage them to ask questions such as “Do you know the name of that bird and how its eggs are? [...] What is the name of that mountain, and in what part of our region is it located?” After several questions focusing on the homeland, the final question was related to the Creator of the biological material. In his elitist tone, Bârseanu further advocated for excursions in the open air that would involve both to the urban and rural children, because even the latter should “be accustomed from an early age not to see nature as a cow good for milking, but to see nature as our great teacher and adviser.”<sup>46</sup>

Returning to the Greek-Catholic gymnasium at Balázsfalva, one of the best-organized Romanian secondary schools in Transylvania in terms of teaching facilities, here nature excursions were a common activity for students and a precious resource for equipping the oldest Romanian natural history museum in the Hungarian Kingdom. When the young botanist and future nature conservationist Alexandru Borza (1887-1971) took the position of natural history teacher in 1911, he started to organize scientific excursions in the surrounding urban and natural sites. He learned to do so from his former teacher, the botanist, archaeologist and animal protectionist Béla Cserni (1842-1916) from the Roman Catholic Gymnasium at Gyulafehérvár (now Alba Iulia).<sup>47</sup>

In the same year of 1911, after a short research trip to the botanical garden of Breslau (now Wrocław), Borza received the visit of the famous German botanist Ferdinand Pax (1858-1942), and guided him to the Retezat and Parâng Mountains and to Turda Gorge, as part of Pax’s botanical research on the vegetation of the Carpathians.<sup>48</sup> During the summer vacation of 1912, Borza together with three other teachers and 37 students went on a six-day journey in the Banat region. Passing through several cities such as Deva, Arad and Temesvár, they finally reached Stájerlakanina (now Anina). After visits at the local metal and coal industry, they continued the trip on the Danube towards Ada-Kaleh Island, all the while observing the limestone of the Carpathians, the Roman relics and the Hungarian regulation of the Danube.<sup>49</sup> On their way back, they

stopped at the bath resort of Herkulesfürdő (now Băile Herculane), where they hiked on the Domogled Mountain up to the “White Cross”, making observations on the rare flora and pine trees that grows on the cliffs, and enjoyed the scenic view over Cerna Valley.<sup>50</sup>

In the Romanian Kingdom, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, teachers also recommended that excursions in nature should be related to the natural history course. Likewise, in the summer vacation of 1906, Dumitru M. Cădere (1874-1941), a teacher at the “Vasile Lupu” school in Iași, organized a seven-day excursion with 26 students from the National College around Neamțului Mountains, reaching as far as the Ceahlău peak. The aim of the excursion was to bring students closer both to nature and their homeland through performative actions such as direct observations of Orthodox churches and historical monuments, the singing of national songs, each of them receiving roles, while also making anti-Semitic observations about the Jewish community they encountered. In terms of natural history material, they gathered no more than 52 plants, 10 minerals, took some geological sketches, and made 20 photographs.<sup>51</sup>

Another example of a secondary school scientific excursion was initiated in Bucharest by Ion P. Licherdopol (1842-1908), a Darwinian malacologist, bird protectionist, and natural history teacher at the Bucharest commercial school. According to Licherdopol, the school had a long tradition of scientific excursions during the summer vacation. During the summer of 1899, Licherdopol together with 38 schoolchildren, undertook a long international excursion from Bucharest to Budapest via Orșova and returned to Bucharest through Transylvania *via* Predeal. Along the way, they made observations related to the environment and the historic Roman sites surrounding the Danube, and visited the most important museums in Budapest.<sup>52</sup> All these scientific excursions contributed in many ways to discovering both the natural environment and the Romanian homeland, which was described in the literary and historic texts. Teachers such as C. Ionescu from “Vasile Lupu” College in Iași sent several coleopteran species to the University of Iași to be identified, and explained that on “scientific excursions [...] besides their instructive [importance], the young have the opportunity to develop a national feeling by knowing the land we live on. The blood and the energy of our life are forces given by the plains of our country, the forests, and every other [natural] treasure.”<sup>53</sup>

## Botanical school gardens in the service of the state economy

The Hungarian school law 38/1868 enacted by the liberal minister József Eötvös, aiming at the modernization of the public-school system, adopted Pál Gönczy's method of visual training in natural history. According to article 55, the law also stipulated that natural history should be related to agriculture and industry, while article 83 mentioned that each school should have a garden of at least two acres, where the apprentices would receive practical instruction in the cultivation of the soil, fruits, and grapes.<sup>54</sup> This meant not only bringing new teaching techniques to natural history, such as school gardens, but also integrating children as a free labour force into the Hungarian economy. Teachers believed that the move would further influence the rural peasants' way of doing agriculture by taking example from their children.

The key figure of the school garden movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, who gave a new approach to its aims and organization, and made possible its global spread, was the Silesian pedagogue Erasmus Schwab (1813-1917). After finishing his law studies at the University of Olomouc and Vienna, Schwab soon became a school inspector, supervising the implementation of the Austrian 1869 school law and taking field research trips in Hungary. His main ideas were laid out in the pamphlet, *Der Volksschulgarten: ein Beitrag zur Lösung der Aufgabe unserer Volkserziehung* [*The Public School Garden: A Contribution to the Solution of the Task of our Popular Education*] published in 1870. His plan came together after inspecting a rural secondary school and was based on the recent urban park that the people of Olomouc built after the city's destruction by war. Its text reached a third edition, while changing its name from "Public School Garden" to simply "School Garden". The change he acknowledged was due to the idea that the "[garden] belongs not merely to every public school, but to every school — for the deafmutes, for the feeble-minded, for orphans; to every polytechnic school (*Realschule*), to every gymnasium and every normal school [...] also to every kindergarten."<sup>55</sup>

Before being translated into English in 1879, his pamphlet received institutional support from the Hungarian Ministry of Instruction, who sent it to all school inspectors, while the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture delivered it to its agricultural societies and teaching institutes.<sup>56</sup> In his pamphlet, Schwab emphasized that the existing network of two thousand Swedish botanical school gardens had already been reorganized after his

plans. However, the most important gardens were those first built between 1874-1875 in Austria and Germany. At the impulse of the emerging nature study movement, school gardens spread in Switzerland, France, Belgium, Holland and Russia, reaching by the end of the nineteenth century as far as the United States.<sup>57</sup> Its success was assured by the answers it gave to the emerging nation building aim of dominating nature, while offering at the same time an economic, scientific, aesthetical, instructive, national, civic, and religious education to children.

During the 1870s, across the Hungarian Kingdom, pedagogues such as Kalmár Ferenc (1828-1888) and János Ebsenspanger (1845-1903), while discussing Froebel and Gönczy's plan for the school garden, quickly recommended Schwab's work and related it to the local cotton industry.<sup>58</sup> Soon the Hungarian Agricultural Minister encouraged the flourishing of school gardens, offering financial support to every school that built one. In Transylvania, in August each year teachers attended an eight-day training course held at the Saxon Agricultural School established in Mediasch (now Medias) in 1871. Here the newly appointed teacher August Salfeld (1835-1904), who had recently moved from Göttingen, while referring to Schwab's work, explained that "a well-equipped school garden can and must be the place where children will feel happy; it will make our children friends of nature and better people." Salfeld's plan was further coupled with Dimitrei Comşa's (1846-1931) horticulture pamphlets on the use of rural school gardens in Transylvania. Both texts supported the cultivation of various plant species that were useful for the economy in order to demonstrate the general principles of land exploitation methods, to introduce the peasants to agricultural science, and to spread the use of better tools.<sup>59</sup>

The work in the school garden was divided along gender lines, the boys dealing with horticulture and the girls with flowers and vegetables for domestic industry, while Salfeld also advised teachers on how gardens would keep their students in check.<sup>60</sup> Also seen as a form of rural plant breeding laboratory, he insisted that through school gardens children would "become economists if from an early age they are introduced to cleanliness, order, and diligence, acquiring in the same time the spirit for speculation; thus we can awaken in children the wish for the practical uses of life [...] in doing so the national economy will progress."<sup>61</sup>

The Romanian schools in Transylvania also kept pace with the new scientific trend, as Artemiu Publiu Alexi established in 1875 a botanical school garden at the gymnasium at Naszód. Starting with 35 plant species,

over the following years it benefitted from donations of mountain flora collected by the Romanian botanist Florian Porcius (1816-1906) and an extra 120 seeds received from the Hungarian August Kanitz (1843-1906), who was the director of the scientific botanical garden at Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca). In 1883, Alexi attached to the high school premises a meteorological station where measurements of wind, climate and humidity were taken three times a day and sent to the Budapest central meteorological and geomagnetic observatory.<sup>62</sup>

Although Alexi's garden was a short-lived project, the natural history teacher from the Greek-Catholic seminar at Balázsfalva, Alexandru Uilăcan (1846-1927), transformed, in 1881, the monastery horticulture garden into a botanical school garden. Using a geometrical plan, the work started with ginkgo biloba, shrubs, ornamental flowers, a section dedicated to pomology, and a mulberry tree section for the feeding of silkworms used in the textile industry. Passing through several modifications, in 1899 a plant bed was arranged in an elliptical form, dedicated to the memory of Empress Elisabeth (1837-1898) who was assassinated by the Italian anarchist Luigi Lucheni (1873-1910). At one end of the elliptical bed a black mulberry was planted, and at the other was a weeping beech. On each side, there were six ash trees and six maple trees, which were soon protected by the law (No 21.527/1900), enacted by the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture. Shrubs forming the number "1900" were planted and other groups of medicinal, technological, and venomous plants were established. Ambrosiu Chețianu (1868-1934) the newly appointed natural history teacher also reduced the number of ornamental plants and increased the vegetation pertaining to the surrounding region. Colourful clapboards replaced the zinc labels, on which the scientific Latin and Romanian popular names of the plants were written, while on the etiquettes of venomous plants, the motif of a skull was drawn for better recognition.<sup>63</sup>

However, the most significant modifications to the botanical school garden at Balázsfalva were brought in from 1911 onwards, when Alexandru Borza took charge of it. After finishing his theological studies in 1908 in Budapest, he stayed in the city and enrolled in the natural science department at the Faculty of Philosophy and graduated in 1911. In parallel, he also subscribed to a five months internship to the Secondary School Teacher Training Institute where the initiator of free education Pályi Sándor (1859-1929) introduced him to the "biological method envisaged by [Otto] Schmeil, the author of the much acclaimed [school] textbooks." He not only developed this method as a teacher in Blaj,

but in his own words, he passed it over “to a [new] generation of future professors attending the summer courses [...] as well as to a teacher at the pedagogical seminar in Cluj.”<sup>64</sup>

Of crucial importance for the future development of Borza’s career, this was a time when the Hungarian Minister of Agriculture, Ignác Darányi (1849-1927), together with the forester engineer and nature preservationist Károly Kaán (1867-1940) worked on the “Hungarian census of natural monuments”. The impetus was given in 1907 on the occasion of the eighth International Congress of Agriculture, held in Vienna, when Hugo Conwentz (1855-1922) laid out his working plan regarding the state intervention for the protection of natural monuments. At their initiative, the Ministry of Education and Religion distributed to all its subordinated educational institutions the first edition of Kaán’s 1909 pamphlet *A természeti emlékek fentartása [The Preservation of Natural Monuments]*, which dealt with the preservation of the natural environment in Hungarian national terms.<sup>65</sup>

In the meantime, Borza carried on with his doctoral research on the systematics of *Cerastium* plant species under the supervision of Szabó Zoltán (1882-1944) and Mágócsy-Dietz Sándor (1855-1945) and eventually defended his doctoral dissertation in 1913. Receiving a fellowship from Bucharest, he further specialized for a short period in the botanical gardens of Breslau and Berlin. Once returned to Balázsfalva he continued his work as a substitute teacher and started the reorganization of the systematic section of the botanical school garden. During the school year of 1912/1913, together with his students, he established in the garden a natural geographic and ecological plantation called “Our Forest”, which was comprised of all wood and herbaceous species of the oak and hornbeam forests found in the Târnava Valley. He then cultivated medicinal plants for the making of tinctures and oils that were brought from the Kolozsvár medicinal station. (see image 2)

Moreover, the botanical school garden at Balázsfalva exchanged on a yearly basis seeds with scientific botanical gardens in Budapest, Breslau, and Berlin. Borza introduced his students not only to the scouting movement, but also by 1916 was working with schoolchildren to establish several biological-ecological groups, namely those studying the aquatic vegetation of the garden’s lakes, over which the students of the fourth grade had built a bridge. By the side of the lake, two hills were raised. On one, the vegetation of the Transylvanian plains was reproduced (*Salvia Transilvanica*, *Centaurea Ruthenica*), while on its higher counterpart the

mountain and subalpine flora of the Apuseni Mountains (*Syringe losikaea*, *Telekia speciose*, *Allium Obliquum*, *Saponaria Bellidifolia*) were grown. Beside the geobotanical groups of Mediterranean plants (*Ficus Carica*, *Nerium Oleander*, *Agave Americana*, *Ruta Suaveolens*), a small terrarium was organized in which students took care of turtles. The botanical school garden in Blaj was truly unique in Transylvania, having from 1917 onward the benefit of an open-air amphitheater where botanical lectures were held during good weather (see images 3 and 4).<sup>66</sup> After the political upheaval of the First World War, Borza was appointed director of the former Hungarian Botanical garden in Cluj and made use of the knowledge he gained there in order to build the Romanian infrastructure for the preservation of natural monuments. What started as a Hungarian project of the Magyarization of both nature and ethnic minorities turned, by the interwar period, into the Romanian national attempt towards nature conservation.

### **Protecting the economy through the “Celebration of Birds and Trees”**

Another practice brought by successive changes in the teaching methods of natural history in secondary schools, and by the growing national and economic interest in the preservation of nature in Hungary, was the introduction of the “Celebration of Birds and Trees” in 1906. As one of the most important Hungarian nature preservationists Károly Kaán realized, Hungary had a long legislative history for the preservation of trees and birds. Most of these measures were in line with what Raf de Bont has recently called the “utilitarian tradition of bird protection” that was specific to the emerging nation states of the Central European region.<sup>67</sup> For instance, article 2 of the Hungarian Forest Act XXXI/1879 stipulated the protection of those forests and mountain regions which, if destroyed, would endanger the fertility of the lowlands or the safety of roads through natural calamities. Although the Hunting Act XX/1883 completely banned the shooting of the chamois, capercaillie, and all singing birds, it did permit the hunting of a long list of migratory birds and so-called “predatory or destructive animals” on private property such as vineyards and orchards. The Act XII/1894, dealing with agriculture and field police, divided the fauna into “useful” and “harmful” categories. Soon after the International Convention for the Protection of Birds held in Paris in 1902, where the Hungarian ornithologist and politician Ottó Herman (1835-1914) was a

key organizer, Agriculture Minister Ignác Darányi adopted Herman's economic centered view of bird protection through the Act I/1906.<sup>68</sup>

All these measures were brought to the public agenda by naturalists, foresters and hunters, members of Hungarian societies for the protection of animals. These societies included the Magyar Országos Állatvédő Egyesület [Hungarian National Association for the Protection of Animals], first established in 1883, and from 1893 the Magyar Ornithológiai Központ [Hungarian Ornithological Centre], which printed the journal *Aquila*. Among the abovementioned advocates was the ornithologist István Chernel (1862-1922), who published his enormous two-volume treatise *Magyarország madarai különös tekintettel gazdasági jelentőségükre* [*Birds of Hungary with Special Reference to Their Economic Importance*] in 1899 and was the first to organize the "Celebration of Birds and Trees" in 1902. In the meantime, his close friend Ottó Herman published in 1901 the first edition of his popular book *A madarak hasznáról és káráról* [*On the Benefits and Harms of Birds*], which reached 20,000 copies and was illustrated by Titusz Csörgey (1875-1961). After the Celebration of Trees and Birds had been introduced to America in 1894,<sup>69</sup> the Minister of Religion and Public Education, Albert Apponyi, while enacting the infamous forced Magyarization law in 1906, also obliged each school to organize, during May or June, a day for the protection of birds and trees.<sup>70</sup> Soon after, responding to pressure from the *Országos Állatvédő Egyesület* [National Animal Protection Association], the most important Hungarian newspaper of the time announced the appearance of *Gyermek Naptár* [*Children's Calendar*], which contained stories and advice on the economic importance of birds and trees. At the same time, other newspapers showed that in 1912, 7,000 schools from all over the Hungarian Kingdom organized the required celebration. (see image 5)

In Transylvania, the Greek-Catholic pedagogical magazine *Foia Scolastică* [*The Scholastic Paper*] called upon all the Romanian school senates to introduce the birds and trees celebration into their curriculum. The aim was to make schoolchildren aware of the "ethical and economic importance of birds and trees," while by doing so teachers "will cultivate both their moral and religious spirit." Moreover, each school was obliged to send a report to the National Animal Protection Association in Budapest describing the activities that were organized.<sup>71</sup> In line with the Hungarian school measures, the Romanian natural history teacher and future nature preservationist Victor Stanciu, published in 1913 his working programme titled *Serbarea arborilor și a pășerilor* [*Birds and Trees Celebration*]. In his



view, the celebration was extremely important, as the aim was to “awaken in children the love for birds, trees and all the living beings in nature.” Moreover, he was trying to counteract the existing Romanian literature, which portrayed children as aggressive towards non-human species,<sup>72</sup> and to implement the Hungarian anthropocentric and economic view of conservation:

If we want our fellow people not to kill birds by destroying their nests, shooting them, killing their chicks, and breaking their eggs, we need to learn [to protect them] from an early stage of life. We should teach children to love birds and trees and to learn their usefulness for people. This is the meaning of the birds and trees celebration, and it is good that the institution for animal protection takes into consideration also the education of the general masses in schools.<sup>73</sup>

The rationale behind the celebration, Stanciu explained, was the simple fact of the forests’ strong influence on the climate; they kept in check the winds, controlled the warmth of the earth, and regulated the summer rains. After pointing to the impact of deforestation on the climate and the general economy, he highlighted that “as insects are the biggest enemies of trees, so birds are the biggest enemies of insects; a single swallow feeds its young with 900 insects daily.”<sup>74</sup> Finally, Stanciu provided a list of birds, which were seen as “unpaid workers” due to their efforts for picking insects that were inhabiting the forests and gave examples of the activities for the celebration of birds and trees that other schools might be interested to adopt. Similar to the activities held in the schools from Arad described at the beginning of this paper, the Romanian schoolchildren from the schools of Braşov were gathered on 18 May 1915 on the Petriş Plateau to observe the surrounding mountain landscapes. After the church deacon gave his well-known prayer to God, the school director followed with a speech on the economic importance of the celebration and their duty to defend the country during the war. The peak of the event was reached when all the gathered students gave their solemn oath, which bound them not to harm the avifauna, and to stop others from torturing birds and destroying their nests. Afterwards, students from different grades sang Romanian national poems related to fauna and flora, while ending the celebration late in the evening.<sup>75</sup> Together with the “Celebration of the Carpathians” which mobilised schoolchildren to help soldiers fighting during the First World War,<sup>76</sup> the “Celebration of Trees and Birds” not

only aimed to teach children how to love nature from a anthropocentric perspective, but it also brought them in line with the national, economic and religious views imposed by each nation building agenda.

## **Conclusions**

To sum up, discussions pertaining to the methods used to teach natural history, especially the introduction of Junge's biological method, brought several changes to the ways in which Hungarian, Saxon, and Romanian schoolteachers related and responded to the natural environment. These changes, however, were adopted along Hungarian education legislation that aimed at the Magyarization of its multi-ethnic territories, and which were in line with the utilitarian and anthropocentric view of nature preservation for the sake of the national economy. In this context, schoolchildren from Transylvania were taught to appreciate and protect the local fauna and flora through natural excursions and botanical school gardens, and further to build their identity upon myths bound to the landscape of the Carpathians Mountains in Romanian national terms. Although most of the Hungarian nature preservationists were hunters themselves, part of the blame fell on children who were perceived to be disrupting the natural environment and the economy by destroying birds' nests. This led to the introduction of the celebration of birds and trees in schools, where children were coerced to promise that they would not harm the avifauna. Of crucial importance, the Hungarian debates focusing on the protection of the natural monuments, which failed to be put into practice before the ending of the First World War, ultimately shaped the Romanian nature preservation movement of the interwar period.

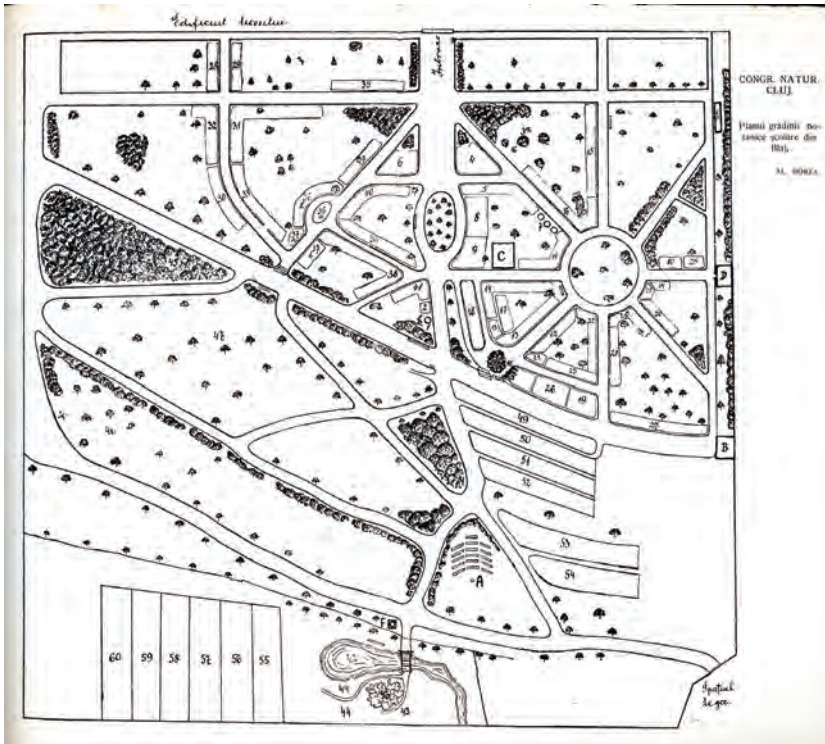
## ANNEXES



**Image 1.** Part of the natural science teaching collections from the Romanian Naszód/Nășăud Gymnasium comprising of animal wallcharts on the left wall, taxidermy collections, globes, insectariums, minerals and different species conserved in hermetic jars. Source: Virgil Șotropa and Nicolae Drăganu, *Istoria școalelor nășăudene* (Nășăud-Naszód: Tipografia G. Matheiu, 1913)



**Image 2.** Schoolchildren working in the botanical school garden of Balázsfalva/Blaj. Source: Ioan Popu-Câmpeanu and Alexandru Borza, *Grădina școlară a Liceului român unit de Băieți „Sf. Vasile cel Mare” din Blaj* (Blaj: Tipografia Seminarului, 1940)



**Image 3.** The plan of the botanical school garden from Balázsfalva/Blaj arranged by Alexandru Borza with several biological sections such as 42. The lake, 43. The cliffs of Apuseni Mountains, 45. “Our Forest” and A. The Open Air Amphitheatre. Source: Alexandru Borza and Emil Pop (eds.), *Întâiul Congres Național al Naturaliștilor din România* (Cluj: Editura Societatea de Științe, 1930)



**Image 4.** A botanical lecture held in open air at the botanical school garden from Balázsfalva/Blaj. Source: Alexandru Borza and Emil Pop (eds.), *Întâiul Congres Național al Naturaliștilor din România* (Cluj: Editura Societatea de Științe, 1930)



### Madarak és fák napja

A Simor-utcai községi elemi iskola udvarán a tavaszi hóvihár kidöntött egy szép lombos fát. Az iskola vezetősége új fát ültetett helyébe és ebbe az alkalomba kapcsolta be a szokásos madarak és fák ünnepét, melyet poétikus szertartással rendeztek. Gyászfátyollal takarták be a kidöntött fát, apró zászlókkal állták körül a gyermekek, egy asztalon pedig egy kis kosár-

ban madáréleget helyeztek el és az elültetendő palántákat. Itomhányi László igazgató megemlékezett a nap jelentőségéről, a gyermekek tavaszi dalt énekeltek, azután két kis fiu előhozta az elültetendő fát, mely nemzeti színű szalaggal volt díszítve. Lázár Kálmáné tanítónő ünnepi beszédet mondott, Molnár János tanító alkalmi magyarázatot tartott, egy kis leány éleseget szőtt a madaraknak. Ezután elültették a fát, a gyermekek egy-egy márek földet hordtak rá.



**Image 5.** Birds and trees day celebrated by the municipal elementary school from Budapest in 1913. The article mentions that after a spring snowstorm blew a deciduous tree, a mourning veil was dropped over the tree, while small flags were placed around it, and a small basket with birdseed and seedlings to be planted was placed on a table. Children finally sang a spring song, and then two little boys brought a tree to be planted, which was decorated with the Hungarian national-coloured ribbon. Source: <https://adt.arcanum.com>

## NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank the librarians of “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library from Cluj-Napoca for their help with several sources and access to the archives. Also I am extremely grateful to Simon Wilson for carefully proofreading this text and for all the precious comments that made me rethink the future of this research given by Răzvan Pârăianu, Diana Georgescu, George Andrei, Maria Bucur and Aliaksandra Valodzina.
- 2 The story is based on Victor Stanciu’s recommendation on how to organize the bird and tree day in Arad. See Victor Stanciu, *Serbarea arborilor și a păsărilor* (Arad: Tiparul tipografiei ort. Române, 1913) 21-22.
- 3 For more details on the educational school reforms in the Hungarian Kingdom see Joachim von Puttkamer, *Schulalltag und nationale integration in Ungarn Slowaken, Rumänen und Siebenbürger Sachsen in der Auseinandersetzung mit der Ungarischen Staatsidee 1867–1914* (München Oldenbourg, 2003); Paul Bruszanowski, *Învățământul confesional ortodox român din Transilvania între anii 1848-1918: între exigențele statului centralist și principiile autonomiei bisericăști* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2010); Ágoston Berecz, *The Politics of Early Language Teaching: Hungarian in the Primary Schools of the Late Dual Monarchy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013).
- 4 Mirela Popa-Andrei, “Legea școlară 38/1868 și efectele sale asupra evoluției învățământului confesional născădean” in *140 de ani de legislație minoritară în Europa Centrală și de Est*, Gidó Attila, Horváth István and Pál Judit (eds.) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Institutului pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale: Kriterion, 2010) 138; For more details on the Romanian benefits of the Hungarian school legislations see also Ágoston Berecz, *Ibid.*, 142-148.
- 5 Kevin C. Armitage, *The Nature Study Movement: The Forgotten Popularizer of America’s Conservation Ethic* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009).
- 6 Lynn K. Nyhart, *Modern Nature: The Rise of Biological Perspective in Germany* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2009) 22-23.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 175.
- 8 W. Degler, A. Juen, K. Klinger and M. Markert, “Staging nature in twentieth-century teacher education and classrooms”, *Paedagogica Historica* (2019): DOI:10.1080/00309230.2019.1675731
- 9 After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, Transylvania was incorporated into the Kingdom of Hungary as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For more research on the interimperiality Transylvania see Anca Pârăulescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).
- 10 For a comparative perspective of the contribution of the Saxon, Hungarian and Romanian scientific and cultural associations to regional studies



- (*Landeskunde/Honismeret*) and the building of national hierarchies see Borbála Zsuzsanna Török, *Exploring Transylvania: Geographies of Knowledge and Entangled Histories in a Multiethnic Province, 1790-1918* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2015).
- 11 Ambrosiu Chețianu, *Istoria naturală și muzeul de la școalele din Blaș* (Blaș: Tipografia Seminarului Achidecesan, 1902) VIII.
- 12 “Un nou metod de a preda istoria naturală în școalele elementare,” *Școla Română: Revistă pedagogică pentru interesele institutelor de învățământ la Români și pentru organele lor*, Anul V, Nr. 1 (1891): 3-4.
- 13 Zoltán Megyeri-Pálffi, “Az 1868. évi népiskolai törvény végrehajtása: a népiskolai épületek és a hajdúszoboszlói polgári fiúiskola,” *Régió kutatás Szemle* Vol. 1 (2019): 47-59.
- 14 Ferenc Vincze, *Gönczy Pál polgári népoktatást megalapozó életművének a Hajdú-Bihar Megyei Értéktárba történő felvételéhez* (Hajdúszoboszló, 2015) 1-18.
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# INTIMATE STORIES OF MIGRATION AND OTHER IMPORTANT DEPARTURES: A RESEARCH USING TOOLS OF NARRATIVE ANALYSIS\*

Alexandru Maftai

## Abstract

In this paper, I will analyse stories of migration experienced by some very close friends and relatives. As someone who has not experienced migration directly, except perhaps from the perspective of the person left behind, I try to compare and contrast these migration stories with intimate experiences of important departures that have marked my own life. This comparison will provide a fresh perspective on the study of migration, framing it within a broader class of actions that define and reconfigure an individual in relation to the external environment.

**Keywords:** belonging, border, communion, country, death, departure, dilemma, exterior, family, fear, foreigner, freedom, guilt, home, inside, interdiction, interior, intimate, loneliness, migration, narrative, oppression, outside, reconfiguration, separation, solitude, space, stranger, time, togetherness, window

August 1969. The sun has not yet risen over the sea, but the sky is beginning to brighten. The sand still bears some traces of footsteps that stopped before the calm sea. Someone gazing at the sea and the sky dreamed of leaving. Far away. In a small room in the village, where the early morning air has filled the place, my parents are making love. The warmth of their bodies and the coolness of the morning scent mingle in their noses. Their breathing gradually calms down. They fall asleep naked, holding each other - a picture of a primordial *togetherness*. This

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is the place and time where I came into being. Along with me, the *inside* came into being.

Inside something begins to grow. To have a life of its own. It grows bigger and bigger. Soon the inside becomes too small. The day when it has to come out approaches. It is the first *departure* and it is painful. The sensations of that first departure remain deeply imprinted in our subconscious. And the pain and fear and helplessness come back to us sometimes, too, like on that day when we felt on our skin what *outside* is. The departure that tore us from the *inside* and threw us *outside*. The cold and the fear and the anxiety. Once we were one with that inside. But that bond has been cut - literally and then, much later, also figuratively. And it would take us a while to realise that that inside belonged to someone other than us. We are confused: Who am I and Who is the other? Especially the other in whose inside, as we will find out later on, we once were: our mother.

But we have a consolation. The breast that we control with our mouth. It's the first memory of the mother. Ground zero of memories. When my mother died, the image of her young, beautiful breasts came back to me, like in a regression. The moment when we were one. I and her breast. She and I. Conjoined. She all around me, skin against skin, perfectly connected, *together*. A deep moment of bliss in *the fear* of being apart, of being *separated*.

We want to regain that inside in which we came into being. It is the sleep we fall into, interrupting the flow of time. It is the layette, the cot, the wicker basket, the blanket, the pram, the nursery, the-under-the-duvet, the small cabin under the table, the family home, the courtyard, the hut, the tent, the apartment, the block, the neighbourhood, the city, the country, ... I'll stop here. The country.

Going *outside*.

Inside is fine. Outside - not so good. But still, it's an attraction. There is something interesting outside. Something necessary. You have to leave the inside to go outside. Believing you'll return, only to hope then that you'll find another inside, out there, far away, to intertwine your life with.

In the study of stories, the space where the action takes place is of great importance. An essential categorisation of space is *interior* versus *exterior*, categories often used in opposition. The interior can function as a space providing protection, whereas the exterior is a space of danger, enticing exploration and conquest. It is this deep opposition that defines

humans and their relationship with the world. The outside represents the challenge to confront other people. To face otherness.

Sometimes the inside-outside opposition can take inverted meanings. The inside can be oppressive, while the outside can be liberating. Not being able to leave the country was considered oppressive during the communist regime in Romania. Going outside the country was liberating. In other words, *the fear* of leaving *the interior* of the native country was less of a concern compared to *the freedom* that *exterior* promised. *Separation* was more desirable than *belonging*.

*Together* and *separately*: another pair of complementary concepts that we have been experiencing since our birth. Existential psychiatrist Irvin Yalom<sup>1</sup> believes that the most important existential problems are related to death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness. Three of them - death, isolation, and freedom - have to do with separation.

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The second most painful departure of my life was the first day at the kindergarten. I cried and cried. I was with my younger brother and two other kids from our block of flats. They were also crying and couldn't stop. The kindergarten was a mere 15 minutes' walk from home. Nothing could stop us from crying. Neither the other children in the nursery, nor the breakfast waiting for us on the little tables, not even the toys. Nothing at all. We were inconsolable. When we had to sleep after lunch, we made our *escape*. So strong was our desire to return home that we decided we could brave that *outside*, in order to find again that *inside* where we felt comfortable and safe. We took advantage of the inattentiveness of the educators, who thought we were asleep, mustered our courage, and walked out of the nursery nicely, all four of us holding hands. We got away, but soon realized we didn't know our way back home. We wandered about for a while. Like in the parable of the blind. We turned back, overwhelmed with guilt. A kindergarten educator came out to look for us. We got a spanking from her and started crying again.

Being torn away from home and not being able to make it back home again saddened me deeply at the time. It was something that seemed beyond containment, a sadness with no cure, something irreversible and evil that I could not understand or control in any way.

*I'm going outside!*

At the beginning, *going outside* meant going around my block of flats. It was the penultimate building on the boulevard. On the other side of

the street was the field: it was outside Bucharest. I lived on the top, tenth floor. I'd go downstairs and knock on all the children's doors and call them outside. When the gang would gather, we'd run down the stairs and make an indescribable racket. The neighbours would open their doors to see what was going on, but we'd be already downstairs. This was *the going outside*. The enormous energy could no longer fit inside, so we'd go outside and let it out. We were conquering outer space, we were gaining momentum. We wouldn't let ourselves *back* in. Until our parents were yelling out the window:

*Move your asses in the house, it's night!*

When our parents were not at home we visited each other. My classmate called me over to show me the tape recorder his father had brought back from Egypt. It was made by Sharp and had VU meters with red LEDs. The compartment where the audio cassette went in opened slowly, operated by a hydraulic mechanism. It looked like something from another planet. He told me how his father had worked in Egypt for several months and saved money by sleeping under the open sky to buy this cassette player. We listened to a tape of the Electric Light Orchestra. It was my first indirect contact with foreign countries. A silver cassette player with red VU-meters symbolized an Egypt where a man worked and slept under the open sky for many months.

Our parents *forbade* us to cross the boulevard where there was a vacant lot where we played football anyway. The kids would run after the ball paying no attention to the passing cars. Once there was an accident. Of course, there were other places where we could play football, but the field across the boulevard was the best one. Every time I broke the ban on going across the boulevard, I felt *guilty*. It was an overwhelming feeling that I couldn't get rid of, no matter how hard I ran after the ball. When I returned from the forbidden place, a kind of peace came over me. The place around the block had become a comforting home compared to the escapades across the street in the forbidden place.

*The window* is a border between the outside and the inside. Even if you're inside, your *gaze* can wander out into the distance. A glance out of the window can mark the commencement of a journey. The longing for adventure. The thought that you might face others. Strangers.

When I got a bike, the concentric circles around my block of flats got considerably wider. We used to ride around the whole neighbourhood in a gang. I was mastering the space at breakneck speed, the bike and I were one, the minotaur on wheels, the wind blowing in my hair. I had the taste

of freedom. The world was much bigger than I could have imagined, even if I looked out of the windows of the tenth-floor apartment where I lived.

I got a pair of jeans, brought in by someone from abroad. Wranglers. They were a little small, but I wore them stoically until they didn't fit anymore. Then I peeled off the label and asked my Mom to sew it onto the next pair of pants I owned. That label ended up on countless pants.

Once I got a Commodore LCD electronic watch. No one in our block of flats had something like that. The jeans, the electronic watch, and the cowboy movies with shootouts from the TV were America. It was a representation based on the objects and images that came in from there right here. The TV screen was another kind of *window* to a more distant *outside*.

Philosopher Gaston Bachelard notes<sup>2</sup> that the spaces we live in are charged with the reveries and daydreams we have experienced in those places. In other words, the representation of space borrows from our subjective experiences. Space becomes a layered structure over time as it settles and changes slightly over the course of one's life.

Abroad, and its opposite, the homeland, are also defined by time. Mainly by time spent with other people. By the relationships with other people. The representation of time spent together is also spatial and narrative. Photographs, stories or films: these are the forms of our memory. Faces, expressions, conversations, atmospheres, sensations, tastes, smells.

Christmas and Easter holidays revolve around the concept of returning home, or redefining the notion of home in a different country. Christmas time, in particular, holds a special significance, one tied to childhood memories and, by extension, to one's country of origin. It represents a time spent with family, a time that flows differently.

Holidays are the time when the one who left comes back home. The emigrant returns. Even if the old home seems somehow foreign, it triggers memories, tastes, smells. Reveries, dreaming, stories from the past are activated. One doesn't see what lies in front of one's eyes. One only sees what it *used to be*. To a very small extent one sees what it is, what is left. It's the past that takes the form of a virtual reality, with layered recollections and sensations that feel tangible enough to grasp, yet one hesitates, fearing it may dissolve into thin air. It takes very little to trigger an overwhelming wave of emotions. Unstoppable. It's the umbilical cord that seems to magically grow back, and heal; one needs to cut it off with one's own hands this time, before departing once again.

Migration contains at least four different mental spaces: the place you left, the place you dreamed of going to, the place you actually arrived, and the place you remember leaving. Among all these spaces there are enormous tensions which often lead to inner rifts.

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My Uncle and godfather fled the country to Paris via Bulgaria in the early 1980s. He and my Aunt, my Mother's sister, had no children. My uncle wanted to leave together with my aunt, but she did not agree. She knew that if she left the country, my mother and the whole family would have problems with the Securitate, the secret police. She chose to stay. Then she found out that my uncle already had someone else in France. He remarried. She had to divorce him here. In absentia. After my uncle left, my aunt was inevitably visited by the Securitate.

Our runaway uncle got us a subscription to *Pif*, a popular French comic book. The stories of *Pif et Hercule*, *Rahan*, *Gai-Luron*, *Placid et Muzo*, *Les Rigolus et les Tristus* have long been a picture of foreignness in my mind. I recently found out that *Pif* magazine was getting behind the Iron Curtain only because it had a healthy, left-wing origin. So, one of my first images of foreignness was actually a communist magazine. Maybe that's why I never wanted to emigrate. It must have been effective propaganda that I was exposed to as a child since it worked.

It is strange that I, who never wanted to emigrate, am writing about it now. I am searching for analogies with other significant departures and separations in my life. It is the way actors and screenwriters work: using analogies in their own life to understand experiences they never had.

When my aunt was almost 90, she couldn't walk anymore. She lived in a nursing home. I used to take her out every week in a wheelchair to a park. There was often a flea market at the entrance. The items on sale there reminded her of her home she had left. She regretted not having children. She had heard from a mutual acquaintance that her ex-husband had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's and had died.

In the '80s she waited a few years for him to return, before she found out he had remarried. After Ceaușescu's regime fell, he returned to Romania. He even stopped by to see her. He picked up some old family heirlooms that he hadn't been able to get when he fled the country; they were still in my aunt's house. She didn't say a word, though in her heart she felt that it was terribly unfair. His runaway, his betrayal, his return and departure



- this time definitive, despite the fall of the oppressive regime - made my aunt cut her husband out of her heart. In her old age, she resented him.

She kept wondering, in a loop, if this disease, Alzheimer's, involved pain and if he died from that pain. Ironically, she couldn't remember things either. She would ask me to bring her a book from her home library, and after a few weeks, she was still at the beginning of the book. She would start to read a sentence, and if it happened to be a longer one, she couldn't finish it. She would forget how it started. She'd start over again. After a few months of reading, the book would be dismantled, the pages detached. She begged me not to throw it away, but to take it to the bindery. She knew a place somewhere.

I wonder if the stubbornness of my aunt's attachment to this country, to her house and objects, is something I inherited. She was very proud of the way she had decorated her house with old pieces of furniture that she had refurbished. As walking got increasingly difficult for her, my aunt could no longer leave the house. She could not go downstairs and back upstairs. I would go every few days and shop for her, pay the bills, spend time with her. She couldn't clean the house anymore. She would lie that she had someone come in for cleaning. One day she had a fall while she was alone at home. She couldn't get up. She could hardly get to the phone. I had a key and was able to get in. I picked her and put her in her bed and she tearfully begged me to leave her there, saying that she was waiting for her death there. I picked her up as if she were a baby and carried her to my place. She looked out the car window, her eyes wide open. She didn't recognize the city anymore. She hadn't been out of her house for years. She and the house had become one. They merged: the inside of the house and her increasingly weak body, like a spirit of the place. The space outside the house had become alien. There was only the ghostly space of the past that had no connection to the present.

Leaving her home, where she would never return, was the most painful departure for her. Inevitable and painful. More painful than refusing to leave the country. Perhaps as painful as her first departure, as a newborn, from her mother's womb. She was dreaming about her home. In the two years she was away from home, she dreamed of it. She dreamed she could walk through it again. That she could take a book from the library, sit in the armchair, read, go into the kitchen, make herself a cup of tea, go to the bedroom, worship the icons, get into bed, turn off the lamp, and go to sleep. In her bed. *Death can come now.*

Many months after she died, her house remained untouched, as it was on the day I had taken her from there. It was the third house I'd had to clear out. With each of the houses I've cleared out - my grandparents', my parents', and my aunt's - I've felt something breaking inside me. Like I was skinning thin strips of flesh from my own body. Tearing apart the house attached to your childhood memories is like dismantling your own body, your own inside, your own time. It is an encounter with the dissolution of your own intimate being, with *death* in its clearest form.

The house I live in now, built by my great-grandfather, also an emigrant, displaced by World War I from Macedonia, has collected relics from every house I have ever dismantled - my grandparents', my parents' and my aunt's. Their spirits seem to begin to live with me, too; they have become a part of my house now. It is a space where all the family spirits have gathered. In a comforting way. It is the *bosom* of the family, of a family extended beyond death, which includes the living, but also the dead. You wonder, like Roland Barthes<sup>3</sup>, what those who outlive you will do with all these objects imbued with a history that you are the only one to know. In the end, we can delude ourselves that *death* is also a form of migration, definitive for sure, to a place we know nothing about. As long as we live, we are looking at this dark window which reflects our ageing face, curious to find out more about what is beyond it.

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Starting high school was absolutely special for me. I was so eager to make new friends, to love, to learn interesting things, to get out of the nest as far as I could, to break away. To leave from *the inside*. To venture *outside* into the big world.

The No.1 High School of Informatics I went to was located at the other end of Bucharest. I had never been alone so far away from home before I took the entrance exam at this high school. The concentric circles around the cocoon of my house were getting wider and wider. The world outside was setting traps for me; increasingly attractive challenges were beckoning.

The Physics teacher I met in high school - let me call him Dirigu - was an important figure for me and my classmates.

Dirigu remembers me from back then like this: a restless guy who sat in the front row and stared him in the eye and raised his hand every class, asking all sorts of questions, some of them quite unexpected. Often inquisitive. If he didn't have an answer on the spot, Dirigu would promise

to come up with one for the next class. And come back he did. I was curious and eager to understand more, to have an interlocutor.

I met Andrei, who was in the class where Dirigu was the headmaster, as soon as I started school. I was looking for someone who could play an instrument, in order to start a band: my elementary-school band had broken up. So, Andrei and I met, played together and soon became best friends. We were interested in all kinds of music, from The Beatles to classical music. It was all Dirigu's doing. He organised vinyl record auditions in the physics laboratory: Vivaldi, Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Chopin. Classical music wasn't completely foreign to me. I had a bunch of records at home, too, but, thanks to Dirigu's auditions, my appetite grew exponentially. So, I went to my first symphony concert at the Athenaeum. I was overwhelmed by the music in all its glory. Andrei had recorded some of Chopin's Nocturnes from the radio. We listened to them on loop during the physics tutorials we were doing with Dirigu. The physics problems were quickly solved, much to Dirigu's dismay, as he didn't have time to finish his coffee while we did our homework. Our conversations invariably drifted to music and art. We had invented a concept we called *the sacred fire*. It was *the talent* you had to discover and cultivate, *the coin* you should not bury, but multiply. The desire to bring out the best in yourself. Those high school years meant a relentless quest to discover who we really were and what we wanted from the big world we were beginning to conquer.

Ten time zones behind, on the West Coast of United States, Dirigu connects to the video chat link I sent him and we manage to see each other on our computer screens. He exudes the same quiet, mellow spirit that gives you confidence. He doesn't look any older to me, even though it's been 35 years since I graduated from high school. He's just as unassuming, with the same subtle sense of humour - which, as I have been pleased to find, has an English version now. When he taught us in high school, he did not know a word of English.

Dirigu says that, as a child, he was a total victim of communist propaganda. Tears of genuine emotion ran down his cheeks when he received his pioneer's tie. He was a staunch atheist for much of his life. The years I was among his pupils were equally important for him, too. He told me that he relearned physics by teaching it to us. He had taken his physics books out of the library again and had gotten serious about them. It was his honesty that won us over. He was a respected and loved teacher. Friendships were formed between him and his pupils. He loved

his job and did it with passion. He was a sought-after teacher. When he wasn't in school, he tutored until the evening. He was the head of his own household. He brought money home. Too much, maybe. Because in the late '80s in Romania, you couldn't buy much with it. Darkness, hunger and cold had spread over the country.

It is autumn '89, and Dirigu's wife and his son go on a holiday to visit her relatives in America. The couple had discussed the possibility of fleeing the country, but Dirigu was reluctant. They said nothing to the child. On their return, the two "miss" the plane. They remain with the wife's relatives in America, with the intention of applying for political asylum. But they don't get to start the process. In Romania, the Ceaușescu regime is overthrown, giving the impression that the communist era has come to an end. The grounds for a political asylum claim disintegrate. His wife and child remain in America, in a grey area, while Dirigu is still in Romania, where hopes of freedom seem to be revived. For a brief period Dirigu even thought that his family should return. What could be worse than the deprivation and lies of the Communist era?

It turned out that post-December freedom would bring out much more evil. The euphoria was short-lived. The events in Târgu Mureș<sup>4</sup>, the elections<sup>5</sup> and the Minerriades<sup>6</sup> convinced Dirigu that nothing would change for the better in Romania, in his or his child's lifetime. A few years of family separation followed. His wife and child go through a long and tedious bureaucratic process to obtain American citizenship. The life of the physics teacher changes radically in Romania in the 1990s. After three years, he leaves for Canada for just a few days - he thinks - to go through formalities at the American embassy in Toronto. Once there, he learns he won't be able to go back home for another three years. He feels that he abandoned his students and parents in Romania, but also carries a huge guilt for not having been with his son in America in the years he needed him most.

After getting his visa, he leaves for the US. His wife has a job, he does not. He ends up being supported by her - a new situation for him. America is in recession, unemployment is high. His frail physique doesn't help him get even a non-qualified job. But physics helps. He enrolls for a MA in physics at the age of 45. "I went to college for the third time", Dirigu says humorously, "the first time as a student, the second time with you at the High School of Informatics, the third time in America." He was a model student. He became a university assistant right away, and after three more

years, he was finally hired full-time. At 52 he was teaching physics again, this time at the university.

Trying to outline Dirigu's inner journey, I asked him about the value system he had at the time, thinking that the migration experience he lived through might have changed him. I was surprised to realise the "original" democracy in Romania after '89 brought unexpected changes to him. In fact, the plot triggering moment of his story - what we call the *inciting incident* in screenwriting - was not even the departure of his wife and son. Instead, it was the collapse of the Ceaușescu regime, which not only added complexity to the visa acquisition process, but also forced him to confront his own human condition. The change of regime - or rather the failure of the change, to paraphrase Carabăț<sup>7</sup> - produced new reasons to migrate.

Talking about the Ceaușescu period, Dirigu remembers that discussions about politics were taboo at the time. We were in a kind of bubble. After '89, politics became the only topic of discussion, blocking out other important things. Before '89, everything bad was blamed on communism. But in the 1990s, Dirigu realised that evil was actually hidden inside people. The ability to make money and spend it on all sorts of things, something that previously existed only to a small extent, brought out the worst in people. The system of values began to degrade. The lie did not disappear. On the contrary, it proliferated. The fear of authority disappeared, society slowly turned into a mafia-like hierarchy.

The communist years left a shadow on Dirigu's conscience. "When the emperor was naked, I kept telling jokes", he candidly admits. On the other hand, if he had stood up for his true beliefs, he wouldn't have been able to teach anymore. He chose to make his school years special for us, his students - and for himself as well. He succeeded, without any doubt.

From the pioneer with tears in his eyes and a red tie around his neck - to the one who left Romania for good to start over in America at the age of 45, there was one more station Dirigu told me about. The fact that he discovered Orthodoxy.

The few years Dirigu spent alone, away from his family, in post-December Romania, were a period of profound personal change. The first revolution broadcasted live on TV was followed by years in which new press and TV trusts emerged. The media noise would reach unbearable levels - at least for what we were used to. The violence moves from the street to the TV, then back to the street in an increasingly monstrous loop. The show of human degradation is overwhelming. This is the moment Dirigu turns off the TV - literally and figuratively. And, as a

modest and intelligent man, he tells himself that he is probably no better than anyone else and tries to do something about his own weaknesses and flaws. He gives up tutoring and starts to educate himself and read. Not physics textbooks, but other books. *The Diary of Happiness*<sup>8</sup> brings him happiness, too. He begins to seek the company of faithful people, to notice that these people have the peace, reconciliation and right judgment he also dreams of. If there is a way to change the world, it starts with oneself. He joins a community of intellectuals and artists who are getting closer to the church; not to the institution itself, but rather to the Christian system of values and way of life. Though torn apart by his separation from his family who lived overseas, he finds spiritual support and manages to get through it peacefully. He begins to learn English. He takes some of his former students as lodgers into his apartment. Meetings take place with some of those who still long for the good times of their high school years. The discussions which started back then seem to find a continuation with topics related to religion, morality and the imperfection of human beings.

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Andrei's parents had opposing views in relation to the idea of leaving the country. His father, a brilliantly minded architect and staunch anti-communist, envisions a narrative for Andrei that includes leaving for the West. His mother, however, plans a concrete future for him here in the country, with very clear and predictable steps related to college and work.

Andrei stands between these two poles, undecided about his future. In retrospect, he confesses that back in high school it was impossible for him to picture himself at 30.

After graduating from university, Andrei is oriented towards the software area of the young Romanian computer industry. He works with his former university colleagues in a private company. They make databases to manage boxes of soap in a warehouse. A rather mundane task for a software engineer.

Adrian, one of Andrei's colleagues, wins the visa lottery<sup>9</sup> (a government program that allows people from other countries to obtain permanent residence and work in the US). Before leaving for the States, he has a farewell party with all his friends. There's drinking, dancing and karaoke. At the end of a song, Andrei shouts more jokingly than seriously into the microphone he's holding:

*"Adrian, don't leave us here, man, take us along with you!"*

A shout that must have sounded pretty touching to lucky Adrian, who was off to the States, leaving his friends behind. Shortly after settling in America, Adrian manages to bring almost all of his colleagues to New York. They all share an apartment and work at the same company. The feeling of provincialism they had working in Romania is replaced overnight by the feeling that they are at the centre of the computer world and that there are no obstacles to working on the most daring projects.

At work, the atmosphere was completely different from what they experienced in Romania. Andrei was stimulated by the work environment, by the boss who appreciated him and encouraged him to develop his skills and train, who even paid for him from the company budget to attend a conference on computer science. In this supportive environment, Andrei realized that *the sacred fire* he carries inside him may be related to science and programming.

Looking back, he remembers a time when, every day after work, he would go to a Barnes & Noble bookstore and read biographies of great scientists: Feynman, Einstein, Bohr and others. He read and cried. It was a mixture of self-loathing, anger, helplessness, ambition and a desire for his flame to burn bright - just as it probably had burned inside those great men he was reading about. He soon realised that he himself was his own only obstacle, but also the path to such fulfilment. He decided that things could not wait any longer and put everything else on hold - personal life, friends, fun - to devote himself to computer science and programming.

His co-workers smash the door every day at six pm sharp. Andrei sits alone in his empty office in front of a computer connected to the internet and studies for two hours. He sticks strictly to this schedule for some years. After another 7 years he gets a PhD in computer science and writes several books on programming, one of which soon becomes a reference in the field. He is invited to give lectures all over the world.

Andrei has long been convinced that everyone could leave Romania. As a result, he has tried to persuade many Romanians to do so. Until he realised that for some it was essential to stay. He realised that he is a man who likes solitude. "Departure and the joy of being alone go together", he says. "Whoever doesn't like solitude can't leave. Because abroad you are alone, no one thinks or feels like you do."

Going abroad and the pleasure of solitude - I wouldn't have thought to associate them.

By going abroad Andrei managed to overcome his weakness: the tendency to waste time. For him, the change of location led to treasuring time.

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I got to know Florin well after high school. Dirigu had also tutored him, and that's how he joined our group. When Dirigu's family had already left, and he was alone in the country, some of his former students visited him. The topics of discussion concentrated even more on religion, but we also talked a lot about theatre and cinema. I'd given up physics and gone into film-directing school.

Florin told me that he was interested in the fact that I was heading towards an artistic career. The entourage that was forming around me and our creative concerns attracted him in particular. Florin had an almost suffocating curiosity for everything I was learning or doing. He used to tease and challenge me. He was a passionate and lively conversation partner. He inspired me and had unique points of view. It wasn't unusual to find ourselves debating something until morning.

Florin immigrated to Canada in 1994. He and his wife settled in Toronto as programmers. Florin had learned English by recording the American TV show *Dallas* on audio cassettes and then listening to them in a loop. For him, America was the place from where humans had left Earth to conquer outer space. During the Communist years, popular TV shows like *Science and Imagination* or Carl Sagan's series used to be *the windows* to the world he wanted to reach.

Later in Florin's life, programming, mathematics and physics became *windows* through which he could witness a broader panorama of existence, encompassing the complexities of the human mind and intelligence. Once in Canada, he found what he expected, he coped with the demands, he was good at what he did and appreciated. But he admits he didn't know what to do with this appreciation. He only chose jobs he liked, was somewhat romantic in his decisions, wanted to start his own company, to be independent - financially, but also existentially. To him, work was an essential component of life, seamlessly intertwined with its entirety, rather than being a separate chapter confined to eight hours a day.

Some of his Romanian colleagues in the field managed to create a network of friends at work, relationships based solely on professional interest. He - less so. This was primarily due to his distinct approach and unique perspective towards his profession.



He did not seek the company of Romanians in Canada. On the contrary, he wanted to integrate among Canadians. "I wanted to be thrown into cold water", says Florin, "I thought that austerity away from home would force me to carry out my plans and then eventually to return."

What he missed was the directness of contact with people that he had back home. In front of anyone he wanted to pass the test of being considered a genuine and viable Canadian. His adjustment to the environment was poor.

Florin believes that life is a journey with a partner. At first, he thought this partner was his wife, then he thought he could extend the concept to a business partner or a circle of friends. He doesn't want to become famous, but rather to share this journey with someone. He recognises that *he cannot be alone*, that he is dependent on a relationship with someone. For him *loneliness* means *death*.

Florin made a series of risky decisions in his professional, financial and emotional life. These decisions, which taken individually did not seem catastrophic, taken together lead Florin to what he considers his failure. He says he took much bigger risks than others. He regrets pushing his wife into this migration adventure. She didn't want to leave Romania so badly, but was convinced by him in the end. Florin thinks he didn't have enough imagination to realise that he could have done something meaningful in Romania, too. But he needed something extreme, a major break like leaving the country in order to believe he could do important things.

The absence of the close circle of friends he had in Romania, who could have offered valuable insights into the risky choices he made in the long run, coupled with the reduction of his opponents to just one person (his wife) were factors that played a role in this series of unwise choices. He knows he is extremely persuasive in arguing his decisions, and this quality turned into a shortcoming when he had no opponents to match or a variety of opposing views. So the lack of a wider reference group with which to confront his judgement and decisions has diminished his likelihood of seeing his errors.

On the other hand, the imbalance that these erroneous decisions have created over time is the engine of an inner change - a self-revelation. Florin becomes aware of his weakness and begins a process of transformation that might not otherwise have been possible. "Only when you lose your balance do you realize who you really are" - he says. Leaving his homeland put him in a riskier situation, and he was more likely to lose his balance.

When I asked him to sum up in a few words the story of his emigration, Florin said that it is a story about progressive isolation, a retreat into himself and away from the world. He mentions the final scene of the film *Jacob*<sup>10</sup>. A miner decides to take on Christmas Eve a cable car designed to transport coal down the valley to get home faster. But the cable car stops halfway and he is left suspended high up in the metal bin. Realizing that the cable car won't restart until after the holidays and that he will freeze to death, the miner tries to reach by cable to the next pole to get down. He can't even get his feet to hold onto the frozen cable. He hangs on by his hands. One hand gives away, then slowly the other. A blood stain on the white snow marks the final scene Florin refers to. The terror of dying alone, the risky rescue attempt and the fall: these are three defining elements of Florin's narrative reference.

Unlike him, his two Canadian-born daughters are perfectly integrated. Their departure from their parents' home was a shock for Florin. He couldn't get used to the idea that at some point, children would fly the nest, that their lives would take a different direction. It's a totally different position from the one Florin's parents took when he left. They never made him feel guilty in any way about leaving for Canada. They were more generous with him than he managed to be with his daughters. They didn't give any indication that they felt abandoned.

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I had at least two moments when I thought about emigrating. The first was when my youngest daughter, Anastasia, who was born with a quite serious neurological malformation which many Romanian doctors ignored, could not be treated in Romania. We had to go to Israel, at our own expense, for an operation that we hoped would save her. We were lucky that we were earning very well at that time and we were able to raise, almost miraculously, the money for her surgery. Otherwise, we would probably have been forced to take extreme measures.

The second time was when, after the long period of protests that began in January 2017 and after the 2022 elections, when progressive forces seemed to be starting to pull Romania out of the communist dark ages. But then, the Liberals and Social Democrats joined hands once again to perpetuate a corrupt system, a catastrophic political management, the same mafia mess that has ruled the country for decades. For a person who has voted in every election since the 1990s for the progressive force that could have made Romania a better country, it was a great disappointment.

I realised that to stay in Romania was to remain captive to the will of a mass of people who decided each time (either by sheer numbers or by chameleon politics) that the way we should go is in the opposite direction. I am in the minority. Negligible. Invisible.

I was always the one who thought that *beyond* the horizon, somewhere *far away*, it could be the other way around, that is deep *inside*, towards the roots. That *beyond* can also be within yourself. There is as much to conquer *inside* as there is *outside*.

*Inward migration* - that's what I would call it.

But these thoughts were only to discover later that the roots have grown too deep in a place I can no longer change. That I am a captive to the place, one with it. Like my aunt who had become one with her home and asked me to leave her in her bed to await her death.

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It has been one year since my eldest daughter, Ștefania, departed for Denmark. We connect on video chat and talk about when she first thought about leaving the country.

She was at a bilingual high school. She knew French and English very well. She remembers a very smart classmate she had. The two of them felt somewhat isolated from the others. Although they spoke Romanian with their classmates, they seemed to be speaking an entirely different language from their peers. There was a profound lack of understanding and communication between her and her friend, on one side, and the rest of the class, on the other. She and her smart colleague were planning to leave the country, as they felt they would be wasted in a country that neither understood, nor valued them. For Ștefania, the relationship she had with the majority of her classmates extended its nature over the relationship with the whole country - a fairly close extrapolation of the truth.

Ștefania confesses that she took refuge in writing, which helped her escape to a different world, away from the banality and the derision around her. The sole classmate with whom she formed a bond during school promptly left the country after completing high school, first to pursue further studies and subsequently, upon completion, immigrated to Luxembourg. The thought of leaving the country is put on hold by Ștefania. She wonders why she didn't follow it.

I recall the moment when she first left our home for a longer period of time. It was during her second year at the film faculty when she embarked on an Erasmus exchange program to an art university in Ghent, Belgium,

where she resided for six months. Her mother encouraged the departure. Initially Ștefania was reluctant.

She talks about the new feeling she had once there: liberated and carefree. She no longer had to explain to her parents when she was leaving, where she was going and when she was coming back. At home, her parents worry, which she found excessive, made her anxious about going out with friends. Of course, Bucharest and Ghent at night are two completely different cities, and our worries in Romania had a basis. Discussing the subject further, I learn that, at the time, she didn't even know her hometown well and could not find even a famous tourist landmark: the People's House.

From what I have learnt from Ștefania, an inside-versus-outside relationship is quite clear. Before leaving the country, *home* is a safe place, while *the outside* is perceived, because of the restrictions imposed by the parents, as a dangerous, unknown place; she feels anguish about it. Going out without the parents' knowledge is accompanied by a feeling of *guilt*. When Ștefania leaves the country for the first time, the removal of parental care leads to liberation. The *outside* world is cleansed of feelings of anxiety, not least because the town is in a much more civilised country. She is exposed to a community of students from different countries and cultures. In Ghent, Ștefania falls in love with a Danish fellow student and spends the whole time with him. So she has a companion who protects her in this discovery of the world outside home, and she comes to associate her leaving from her home country with a sense of freedom and security, while her hometown mental image remains attached to the previous values.

The love story continues, and after the end of the Erasmus trip, the two plan to move together to Bucharest. He enrolls for a MA in Romania, she has one more year of undergraduate studies to complete. This is also the time when Ștefania moves out of her parents' home for good, into a rented place. For the next three years, the two live in several rented apartments, then their relationship comes to an impasse, they break up, and he moves back to Denmark.

Ștefania associated the failure of this relationship with the place where it happened. Talking about the various apartments where she lived with her boyfriend, she associates *the place* very strongly with *the events* that happened in her life while she lived there. The space thus borrows from the texture, the sensations and the outcome of the events it hosted.

Two years of pandemic follow, and the house she lives in, acquired through family inheritance, is her property, a personal place where good and bad things happen. That's how she defines home: a place where you come to terms with both. Moving from one tenancy to another, associating the place with events that happened there, leaving a place as an attempt to forget painful events - it's a phase that she left behind. She remembers that when she first moved out of her parents' house, the objects she took with her and the arrangement of the place where she was going to stay with her boyfriend were of great importance to her. But as she was forced to move to other places, she began to lose her attachment to objects and space. Long after she saw herself in her home, from which she thought she would not be leaving any time soon, her relationship with the space in which she lives becomes more alive, more dynamic, regains its importance.

There is another element that defines the space of Bucharest: the political context of the period between 2017-2022, which is marked by the attempts to erode the rule of law, to establish a mafia-like, communist state, starting with the famous Ordinance 13<sup>11</sup>, the street demonstrations that followed, the attack on the laws of justice, culminating in the demonstration of August 10th, when peaceful protesters were gassed, beaten and mistreated. This period ends with the pact between Liberals and Social Democrats that returned the country to the same unfortunate path.

After graduating from university, Ștefania finds work relatively quickly. She is an assistant director in the film and television industry. She joins the crew of a popular Romanian TV series that shoots eight months a year in the village of Fierbinți, about thirty kilometres from Bucharest. She discovers an even crueller reality in that village. It's a community of poor, unemployed, uneducated, hardened, lazy, corrupt people held captive by a harsh political mafia. It's a face of Romania Ștefania is seeing for the first time. The TV show that has been filming there for years seems to be the only positive thing happening in the locality, which everyone in the community is squeezing as desperately as they can. From the mayor who hunts for sponsorship, to the peasants in whose homes they film and those in whose homes they don't - and who prevent the production from running smoothly by any means necessary just to get something for themselves.

At first, Ștefania and other members of the film crew got involved in charitable actions targeting the most vulnerable in the village: children and animals. But she soon realises that perhaps her contribution should be on a different level, using her skills, knowledge and education. She gets

as actively involved as she can in civic life, which seems to be growing around the #rezist<sup>12</sup> group, hoping to contribute to progress of the society and the country.

Ștefania has photographed many of the protests I've mentioned, and on August 10th she came close to being beaten by police forces, helping a woman with a child in a cart to escape from the firecrackers and tear gas. It's the moment when she feels her own country shouts in her face aggressively: "I don't need you, mind your own business!" The brutality shown toward her good intentions causes her to break away from that entity called *country*. This entity contains the state, or a part of it that resists modernisation, but also a category of citizens who still adhere to the values of a typical communist proletarian dictatorship.

Three years after her boyfriend broke up with her and left her, Ștefania receives a birthday call from him. He sings happy birthday to her. The call makes her feel good. They resume their broken contact, and after a few weeks of Skype conversations, she thinks that the failure of their relationship is due to Bucharest and the ugly country she finds herself in and decides to go to his place in Denmark for a while. If their relationship ended badly in Bucharest, maybe it will be reborn in Copenhagen. Ștefania thinks it's no good where she is. Apart from her relatives and a few close friends, she loathes her fellow citizens. Although she has a secure and well-paid job, she wonders: what am I really doing with my life?

She resigns from her job and leaves the country for Copenhagen, initially for just three weeks, to live with the boyfriend she broke up with three years before. The three weeks turned into three months. Three times she got a return ticket, three times she "missed" her plane. The idea of going thousands of miles away from her lover was something that blocked her return. The estrangement she had experienced in her own country was slowly beginning to dissipate there with a foreigner, yet familiar, who loved her. Place doesn't matter. What matters is the human context.

Ștefania eventually returns home, but only to leave - she thinks - for good, back to Denmark. The house that had become hers here in Bucharest is left behind. She wonders how she can transport her paintings to Denmark. They were painted by her grandfather, whom she never knew. She doesn't know which things to take and which to leave behind. Her family is encouraging about her leaving, as if it is a natural step. Friends are a little more tearful. The last days before departure, she spends time with family and friends, a little more than usual, but not enough, she later

confesses: "I should have smelled or licked you more so I would have a scent and taste to come back to later."

There's a sadness in the air. Sadness about those who leave, with whom we promise to keep in touch after they've left. But we know we can't. The distance between those of us who stay and those who leave grows greater day by day. Even if the plane ride stops somewhere on this earth after a few hours of flying. The one who left continues to move away, always, unstoppable, with the slow speed of a tectonic shift. Sometimes one returns to the homeland, to the people left behind. One tries to make up for the time that has passed without loved ones back home. One tries to make it denser, to cram the months away from home into a couple of days at home. That's why homecoming can never be a relaxing holiday. Because one has to *recover* the lost time. But how do you do that? How to condense years into a few days? The distance travelled on the way back is physically the same as the distance travelled on the way forward, but the one coming back is paradoxically still far away. One can only get closer with superhuman efforts. For one has to reduce the distance accumulated over months and years, which sometimes is far greater than the actual distance between two countries.

Ștefania may have intuited some of this, though her departure was more a choreography of objects: which one to take with her, which to leave behind. The sign that this departure was going to be different from the others was that she took her dog with her. She was leaving her family behind, her friends, a profession she started to practice, her artistic dream, a house that belonged to her and a country she thought she could do nothing more to make it her own.

The first few months in Denmark were like a dream for Ștefania. She marvelled at the cleanliness of the streets, the beauty of the parks, the reliability of public transport, the kindness of the neighbours and the friendliness of the shopkeepers. She and her boyfriend renovated the apartment where he lived. They discovered Copenhagen's leafy surroundings while walking the dog.

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Blocks of flats. More blocks. Different kind of filth. Same feeling. Suburbs. Maybe luckier homeless people. Some speak Romanian, I think. The cold is the same. The train passes just outside the window. The smell of the train station, the urine and the track ballast. Of course, a different train station, a different track ballast and probably a different urine.

Danish. Nothing looks clean to me. The apartment in the block looks like cardboard. The windows are covered in a layer of soot and condensation. You can hear the Arab neighbours talking. Is this the promised land? The new life?

My eldest daughter, Ștefania, went to this place with her dog, paintings and luggage. More than a year ago. Even the dog doesn't seem the same. I recognize her, my daughter. But it seems to me that she's grown up, that she sees things differently. She's beginning to understand what it means to love a man. In a way I didn't expect. She's struggling alone with a chaos she doesn't understand. With the broken family of the lover she left her country for. After more than two years of trying to adjust in Romania. After being separated for three years - the two of them during the pandemics. They decided to resume their relationship because they realised that they actually loved each other and life was pointless away from each other. She adventured *outside* to find that precious *inside* she was longing for.

She has been learning Danish for almost a year. A nightmarish language to learn. She says she's beginning to understand what's being spoken around her. She understands too much sometimes. His family speaks Danish sometimes when they want to express their criticism of the young couple. And she does understand. Embarrassed, he reminds them that she understands Danish. That it would be polite if they spoke English, too. He seems a stranger in his family himself.

A dismembered Danish family. With traumatised, addicted, broken people who avoid telling the truth in the face. Each one with his or her own loneliness. Each talking about the other secretly. Lacking empathy for each other, skimming the surface of things, reacting inappropriately. They say Danes are the happiest people on the continent. His family seems totally unrepresentative.

My daughter is trying to bring his family together. They hadn't seen each other in years. She succeeded on a few occasions, on a holiday, around a table. It's something she probably learned from us, her parents. We used to do this, too, at least twice a year. We have had our own arguments, unresolved conflicts, misunderstandings or tensions. To an outsider our family dinners might have seemed as strange as she told us about his Danish family.

Trying to find or recreate patterns that come from the life one used to have in one's homeland. That is what you could call this phenomenon. The problem is different. It is about identity. It is about how you describe yourself in relation to others. You feel that your identity gradually collapses



as if people around you evolve into another dimension that is invisible to you. It is the feeling she had in high school about the majority of her peers.

In Denmark most of job advertisements are quick to mention that no one will be discriminated on the basis of nationality, sex, gender, religion, etc. Some advertisements even explicitly tell you not to put a photo on your CV - lest you should be unintentionally discriminated against. To me this looks more like an empty talk of hypocritical political correctness. Because, if you get to talk off the record with someone in charge of hiring at a Danish company, you can surprisingly find out that if you don't have a Danish name, there might be a big chance that your CV will not be read any further. But if, by some miracle, you know someone in a company, you might be called for an interview.

And this is how my daughter, who left Romania to escape the hiring bribes, the incompetence, the gross discrimination, the contempt for the educated, the misogyny, homophobia and racism - this is how she comes to realize, only a year after landing, with her dog, paintings and suitcases in the promised land and trying to find a job, that the world is essentially the same a few meridians to the west.

Of course, returning to this point would be seen as a defeat. Not only by the one who left the country, but perhaps also by some of those who were left behind. She betrayed and returned defeated by the foreigners. "No better there either, I told you." Here you at least have antibodies to the aggression that is hitting you like a garbage truck unloading its guts at the dump.

And this is how you are likely to remain suspended. Somewhere in the middle. Between *here* and *there*. But neither here, nor there. Nowhere. In the limbo.

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My great-grandparents were migrants, they fled the war more than a hundred years ago. My parents and relatives lived in a closed country from which you could hardly escape. My good friends left to be able to pursue their vocations and passions and got to know themselves better far away from where they were born. My teacher had some revelations here in the country while staying away from his family. I stayed in the country because my job as a filmmaker seemed tied to the language and culture of the country I first dreamed in. I tried to discover inside what others

found beyond the horizon. My daughter is looking for her own *inside* in the wider world, which seems to have become smaller.

These intimate stories of migration, which may one day end up in a screenplay or a book, turned out to be rich and extremely dense narrative material.

I have placed migration in the class of other important departures that we experience in our lives: birth, childhood explorations, adolescent searches, leaving home, starting or reuniting a family, old age and death.

All of these narratives, which seem to have important departures at their core, define a class of primordial spaces - inside versus outside or home versus abroad - which in turn configure pairs of concepts such as safety and challenge, belonging and separation, communion and solitude, renunciation and reconfiguration. The dilemma of migration, the search for self, the break from the community from which you emerged, the hope that the shock will break you out of your routine, the self-revelation away from home, the return and time synchronization, the subjective perception of space - these are recurring themes in these stories.

The values of each generation that goes on a migration adventure are always different, but the difficulties, obstacles and achievements are part of being human, of relating to the surrounding world and the continuous reconfiguration of the self in regard to others.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> in *Existential Psychotherapy*
- <sup>2</sup> in *The poetics of space*
- <sup>3</sup> in chapter XX of *Camera lucida, reflections on photography*
- <sup>4</sup> Violent inter-ethnic conflict between Romanians and Hungarians, resulting in loss of life and hundreds of injuries, which took place in March 1990 as a result of misinformation about the Hungarian takeover of Transylvania.
- <sup>5</sup> The first elections after the overthrow of the Ceaușescu regime in May 1990, when the political party that took over the country's leadership from the communist party, the National Salvation Front (NSF), won the election by a landslide over the historical parties
- <sup>6</sup> Violent events that took place in 1990 in Bucharest when Ion Iliescu, president of the country and leader of the NSF, brought several thousand miners from Valea Jiului to "restore order" in the capital where large street demonstrations were taking place against the return to power of the communists regrouped under the NSF.
- <sup>7</sup> Carabăț proposes a generative-transformational model of Propp's functions, and one of the ways to generate new functions is through the failure to perform the original action; see *Towards a poetics of the cinematographic script* p. 183.
- <sup>8</sup> The Diary of Romanian Orthodox monk Nicolae Steinhardt.
- <sup>9</sup> A U.S. government program since 1995 that allows approximately 55,000 people from other countries to obtain permanent residence and work in the U.S. each year.
- <sup>10</sup> A Romanian film inspired by the writings of Geo Bogza and directed by Mircea Danieliuc, released in 1988
- <sup>11</sup> An emergency ordinance secretly issued by the Social Democrat government in 2017 which decriminalized certain acts of corruption and abuse in office in the hope that the leader of this political party at the time, Liviu Dragnea, could escape from the trials he had for committing such acts.
- <sup>12</sup> a civic organization that was born during the protests against Ordinance 13.

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# BUILDING THE NATION IN STONE AND WOOD. RESTORATIONS AND WRITINGS ABOUT HISTORICAL MONUMENTS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IN ROMANIA\*

Cosmin Minea

## Abstract

The paper looks at restoration and preservation practices and at art history writings to explore attitudes and mentalities in the first decades of the twentieth century in Romania. It deciphers the creation of an architectural heritage and the meanings of writings about and restoring historical monuments in a young nation-state that expanded significantly after World War I. Some of the major restoration sites in Romania, around 1900, are analysed together with several of the architectural history writings of the interwar period that reveal a growing turn to nationalism in the Romanian cultural and political spheres.

**Keywords:** architectural heritage; historical monuments; restorations; interwar Romania; Romanian art history; Byzantine architecture; Andre Lecomte du Noüy; Virgil Vătăşianu; Coriolan Petreanu.

## Introduction

This paper explores some of the major debates, restoration sites, writings and ideas about historical monuments in Romania, between approx. 1890 and 1930. It is not meant to be an exhaustive history of monuments restoration and protection, but to uncover some of the multiple implications of writings about architectural monuments and their restorations. These relate to discussions about identity, the past and future

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of “the nation” and, indeed, to the national ideology, which has often centred on historical monuments. Therefore, this paper pays particular attention to how architectural styles and the history of buildings could inform and at the same time be influenced by ideas about the Romanian nation. The research will at the same time draw attention to the modern history of historical monuments and namely to the material modifications and symbolic transformations that “the age of nations” (to paraphrase Eric Hobsbawm) has brought to century-old buildings.

While the nineteenth century restoration of monuments in Romania has been the focus of several studies in the past decades<sup>1</sup>, the ones in the first decades of the twentieth century, even if perhaps equally significant, have been largely ignored. The best sources are still the first extensive art history works written in the interwar period, such as those by Gheorghe Balș.<sup>2</sup> From a theoretical perspective, this paper assumes that ideas about national identity and the concept of “the nation” essentially emerged in the modern period, even if they continued and reused older local or regional traditions, histories, heritage practices, identities, etc. As one of the most famous scholars of the modernist approach, Ernest Gellner noted “nationalism is not the awakening and assertion of these mythical, supposedly natural and given units. It is, on the contrary, the crystallization of new units, suitable for the conditions now prevailing, though admittedly using as their raw material the cultural, historical and other inheritances from the pre-nationalist world.”<sup>3</sup> Gellner’s metaphor “raw material” is a practical reality in the case of this research since former buildings were embellished, reconstructed or modified to create national monuments, and therefore represented a vivid illustration for the constructed nature of national symbols.

I further see nationalism as an intellectual and elitist project, serving as a tool for those in power to maintain their status and legitimacy, as John Breuilly or Eric Hobsbawm have argued.<sup>4</sup> The ways elites tried to impose top-down ideas on the general population also serves as a justification for paying increased attention to these elites. In the current project I leave aside questions of transmission and effect and concentrate solely on *how* ideas about historical monuments and Romanian nation have emerged.

Within the field of heritage studies, this paper has as theoretical basis the concept of *Critical Heritage Discourse* as defined by Laurajane Smith to explain the significance of creating a “heritage” and its relation to political ideologies, social hierarchies, gender relations, alternative or subaltern discourses.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, heritage practices are not just ways to preserve



monuments but processes of negotiating historical and cultural meanings and values. The decision of preserving or not certain constructions is a performative action that actively and continually affirms values, identities, discourses that are in turn subject to negotiations and changes. At the same time, identity must be understood as a fluid, ever-changing set of ideas about the past that are strictly related to the present and to a network of actors, including specialists, state institutions, local communities, enthusiasts, etc. Critical Heritage Discourse equally emphasizes the asymmetrical power-relations between those who are in control and create the official interpretations of the past and those who hold alternative or subaltern ideas. Smith calls an *Authorized Heritage Discourse* one that privileges monumentality, grand scale, time depth, expert judgment and ignores less grandiloquent, diverse, alternative, multicultural discourses. This paper will demonstrate the creation and use of an Authorized Heritage Discourse in Romania and its support for ideas about cultural uniformity, ethnic purity and national past.

## **1. The formation of notions about Romanian Architectural Heritage in the Nineteenth Century**

A first moment when historical monuments became an occasion for extensive discussions in the Romanian society was when the activity of the most important restorer of monuments in the country at the time, the Frenchman André Lecomte du Noüy (1844-1914), began to be strongly criticised. Between 1875 and 1904, he restored the most significant five monuments in Romania: the former monastery of Curtea de Argeş (1875-1886), the church of Trei Ierarhi in Iași (1881-1890), the Princely Church Saint Nicholas in Iași (1886-1904), the Metropolitan Church in Târgoviște (1885-1895), and Saint Dimitry Church in Craiova (1887-1896).  
**[Fig. 1]**



*Fig. 1*

His restorations modified the monuments and their surroundings according to French ideas about Byzantine architecture and the restoration of monuments, but Lecomte du Noüy also adjusted his practice in order to respond to requests from the Romanian authorities.<sup>6</sup> He worked in the manner of his master, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc but also in that of the European fashion of the time that accepted reconstructions and additions to create idealised versions of monuments.<sup>7</sup> The results were a set of almost new monuments that represented a revival of Byzantine and Orthodox art in Romania. While highly praised and well-connected at an official level, especially with the Royal House of Romania, Lecomte du Noüy was, between 1888 and 1890, the target of criticisms from several Romanian architects such as Ion Socolescu (1856-1924), Nicolae Gabrielescu (1854-1926) and George Sterian (1860-1936), who accused him of modifying and even destroying the monuments.<sup>8</sup>

The Romanian architects also accompanied their criticism with a much more emotional engagement towards the monuments. These were not seen any longer only as representing Romania but as an integral part of their personal identity. One of them argued, for example, that monuments were not just “material forms”, but they “remind us of the glorious deeds of the past, or of ‘the painful efforts suffered by our parents’.”<sup>9</sup> Concepts such as “nation”, “tradition”, “duty”, “ancestors”, “patrimony” were designed to raise emotions and first-person pronouns “We” and “Our” drew discursive boundaries between them and foreign artists. The historical monuments in Romania were suddenly presented not anymore as a tool for integration into a broader European culture but as a reason for reinforcing the national identity and differentiating it from what was seen

as “foreign”. Furthermore, monuments were described as part of personal identities for which one has a “duty” to preserve and respect them: “Let us conserve (...) the only traces of our past artistic culture that proves we were not born yesterday. We have the duty to continue the tradition and to grow the patrimony left by our ancestors.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the concept of “duty” to preserve monuments for one’s ancestors and equally for one’s and the nation’s future becomes central.

The increased interest over how the heritage is preserved in Romania also fuelled the first attempts at creatively interpreting this heritage for new creations and designs in what later has been termed the Neoromanian or National Romanian Architectural Style.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the criticisms against Lecomte du Nouÿ and the strong stance against his restorations became a birth certificate, almost a “lieux de memoire”, for a new generation of architects that argued for the national significance and care of historical monuments.

## **2. The continuation of the restoration tradition in the first decades of the twentieth century**

If Europeanisation was the main aim of cultural policies in nineteenth-century Romania, this drive was replaced with a more and more persistent inward search for national specificities in the early twentieth century. The search for unique “Romanian” characteristics of the heritage became more predominant, and so was the assertion of a Romanian culture defined in opposition to that of others. Societies, literary circles and various cultural figures promoted around 1900 an aggressive ethnic nationalism in the realm of arts. Among the most vocal against foreigners was the at the time young historian Nicolae Iorga, according to whom they “humiliate and subjugate us, tear our people apart.”<sup>12</sup>

In the realm of restoration practices, the Romanian architects also managed to establish a number of institutions, all new in Romania and founded on a claimed break with past restoration practices: the Commission together with the Law for Historical Monuments and the first School of Architecture in Romania in 1892, the journal *Analele arhitecturiei* in 1890. Until now the history of heritage protection in Romania followed a linear path: first, a foreign architect were brought in, who modified monuments; the local experts rose against and this led to more patriotic views and to practices more oriented towards preservation of existing old buildings.

However, and here comes perhaps the surprise that breaks the linear narrative, the way monuments were restored did not change with respect to the creative and intrusive methods of the late nineteenth century. Many prominent monuments suffered many modifications to end up as brand-new buildings. Architects harboured the same intentions, to recreate a supposedly once-existing or possible “original style” of the buildings by removing later additions, reconstruct parts or forms based on vague descriptions, reports or similarities with other monuments, polish old materials and reuse new ones. Significantly, Ion Mincu (1852-1912), considered otherwise the creator of the “national style” was the first to restore an important monument by using the same methods and ideas as the previously-criticised Frenchman André Lecomte du Noüy. He was asked in 1897 to restore the much-praised church of Stavropoleos in the centre of Bucharest, a monument considered the pinnacle of Brâncovenesc art.<sup>13</sup> Mincu disliked from the beginning the conservation state of the building, its materials and even its placement among tall, modern buildings.<sup>14</sup> He initially proposed its demolition and reconstruction in another place to finally restore it, between 1904 and 1908, by replacing and repainting the exterior frescoes and the sculpted decorations, adding a new tower, a new roof and addition of new church furniture on the inside.<sup>15</sup> **[Fig. 2]**



*Fig. 2*

At around the same time architect Constantin Băicoianu (1859-1929) was working at the church Saint George in Hârlău (restored between 1893 and 1904), Saint Nicholas - Popăuți (restored between 1898-1908) and Saint Nicholas in Dorohoi (restoration finished in 1904). They were all churches built in the last decades of the 15th century during the rule of one of the main figures in Romanian national history, Stephen the Great (reign 1457-1504). Băicoianu also modified the monuments in a similar fashion, likely with the view of emphasizing a common “Stephen the Great” style. He placed on the facades coloured ceramic tiles in the dominant brick-red colour and disks in geometric forms, he replaced the roof with a steeper one and changed the aspect of the towers. **[Fig. 3]**

Another architect and more prolific restorer of Romanian monuments was Nicolae Ghica-Budești (1869-1943), a French-educated architect who returned to Romania in 1901. At the restoration of the Princely Church (Biserica domnească) in Târgoviște he modified the decoration of the towers, enlarged the windows, and replaced the base of the small towers arguing that the masonry was of bad quality.<sup>16</sup> At the same time though, he was also careful not to remove some traces from the history of the monument that he deemed valuable or interesting, as in this case the cannon ball on the northern facade.<sup>17</sup>



*Fig. 3*

Perhaps the most visible modifications to a monument were made by Ghica-Budești at Albă Church in Baia, another 15th century monument attributed (according to local traditions but not to historical proofs) to Stephen the Great. Here, between 1907 and 1914, he remade all the damaged parts, he added a row of bricks under the roof and he left the bricks at the tower exposed in order to show, in his view, the difference in construction stages between the tower and the rest of the church.<sup>18</sup>

**[Fig. 4]** The result was almost an almost brand-new monument that is very similar to the church transformed by Constantin Băicoianu as previously described, but which also had as model contemporary restorations in Bukovina, a region which was at the time part of the Austrian territories in Austria-Hungary. The Commission even directly mentioned the works of the Austrian Commission of Historical Monuments at Saint John the New (Sfântul Ioan cel Nou) church from Suceava as a positive example.<sup>19</sup>



*Fig. 4*

One of the most extensive restoration sites – that led in practice to the creation of a new building – was at Cetățuia Monastery in Iași. While the church of the monastery did not suffer major modifications, architect Gheorghe Lupu (1882-1916) heavily restored the monks' cells

and the dining hall on the south side between 1910 and 1911. [Fig. 5] He justified at one point the various demolitions by saying that they were just additions from the time of the “Greek monks”.<sup>20</sup> He also explained that the entire building needed to be elevated as “a rational” thing to do because “no proof had been found of their initial aspect”.<sup>21</sup> He was therefore clearly focused on recreating a more beautiful building, without care for preservation or accurate reconstruction. The resulting restored building, with the two open balconies that recalls the traditional “foișor” of old boyar houses in Walachia, a feature that references, as also do the round arcades, contemporary Neoromanian buildings, while the red brick under the roof reminds of the restorations of Băicoianu and Ghica-Budești. The building was therefore more a statement in support of contemporary directions in Romanian architecture rather than a preservation attempt of an old monument and can be analysed as part of the history of the modern Romanian national style. Furthermore, in 1911, on the north side of the monastery a row of new buildings was added to serve as cells that expand on the architecture of those allegedly older ones, while bringing even more modern elements such as the large glass-windows and effectively creating a modern display of Romanian orthodox architecture. [Fig. 6]



*Fig. 5*



*Fig. 6*

The restorations were overall as intrusive as the previous ones of the French Lecomte du Noüy and had the same basic restoration methods: to uncover an initial, “original style”. What has changed was the ideology behind the restorations: the style to be uncovered was not a generic “Byzantine style” anymore, but one connected to the history of Romania and the figures of its voivodes. As we have seen, a “Stephen the Great style” was identified with the red brick decoration on the facade. The monuments chosen to be restored had clear significance for the history of the country and were among the most impressive artistically, as was the case with those restored by Lecomte du Noüy. In that case, monuments chosen to be restored, such as Curtea de Argeş or Trei Ierarhi, were significant in the first place from an artistic and architectural perspective.

### **3. The essential role of the Romanian Orthodox Church**

In the analysis of Romanian heritage or the beginning of art historiography, the Romanian Orthodox Church is the elephant in the room because almost all the historical monuments in the country were ecclesiastical ones and many of them were in the possession of the Orthodox Church.



Even if administrator of a historical patrimony, the church in Romania was a very young institution. It had historically been under the Patriarchy in Constantinople and only in 1885 it was recognised as independent, with the right to self-govern. At the same time the church was not only an institution but also a network of priests and monks, with various ranks and often in close connection to each other.

The growing interest in researching, restoring and promoting monuments was received with scepticism by various church representatives. Conflicts among restorers or researchers and priests or monks were not uncommon. When Lecomte du Noüy was working at Curtea de Argeş the local Bishop of Argeş, Ghenadie Petrescu (1836-1918), complained of a variety of matters, including the modifications brought to the church, the way artefacts were kept, the work schedule of the French restorer.<sup>22</sup> The bishop likely felt that his authority and institutional powers were threatened by the way the church was transformed through restorations. He would nevertheless later play a noticeable role in the transformation of the former monastery, by drawing a plan and noting the requirements for the future Episcopal Palace that was to be built near the church.

The scepticism of the church towards restorations was not unjustified but directly related to the symbolical significance of the restorations. Once restored, a church or monastery became a national possession, not meant to serve only the local community anymore, but a symbol of the whole “nation”. It became subject to certain preservation laws, to celebrations, studies, etc. At the same time, the restoration of monuments could have been seen as another strong move of the Gouvernement against the church after the loss of many former privileges, the most notable of which was the one inflicted through the 1863 secularization of the monastic estates that meant essentially the nationalisation of most of the land held by monasteries and churches.<sup>23</sup>

All these various tensions came to a head in 1892 in the Romanian Parliament during the discussions around the new Law for Historical Monuments. The debates in the Parliament directly opposed the second-in-rank member of the Orthodox Church, the Metropolitan of Moldavia, Iosif Naniescu (1818-1902), with the politician who presented the law, Grigore Tocilescu (1850-1909), then director of the Museum of Antiquities, one of the main connoisseurs of the country's cultural heritage and the most active archaeologist in Romania at the time.<sup>24</sup> The Metropolitan voiced fears and opinions widely shared by the church representatives. He argued that the church is the best place to conserve

historical artefacts; the priests had been compiling inventories of objects for a long time and thus there was no need for a special commission. He also argued that restorations undertaken so far by Lecomte du Noüy had been demolitions rather than real restorations and the local church was actually much more knowledgeable in repairing and conserving monuments.<sup>25</sup> Naniescu even criticised directly Tocilescu by saying that “the archaeologist wants to take everything from the church” and compared the situation of the church with someone having their personal belongings taken away.<sup>26</sup> He finally argued that a law and a Commission for Historical Monuments were not needed since the priests are much better at documenting and preserving monuments and artefacts.

Grigore Tocilescu responded with a long, vehement speech listing the many artefacts, manuscripts, and inscriptions that have been damaged or sold outside the country by priests.<sup>27</sup> He argued that “the canons of aesthetics and architecture are in this case over and above the canons of the church” and received applause from fellow senators when he praised the principles of secularism: “Today, along with the church, another, much brighter type of church came into being, namely the university, a forum of free thinking. The church will not stand in the way of free thinking at the end of our century.”<sup>28</sup> His promotion of secular educational and aesthetic value of the artefacts was also connected to his position as director of the only museum of antiquities in Romania, an institution that had as its main aim to collect artefacts taken from the monasteries and churches in Romania. These various tensions and often opposing voices of church officials were not subdued with the passing of the new law for historical monuments in 1892 but remained a rather permanent feature in the process of documenting, preserving and restoring the religious heritage.

#### **4. Attitudes Towards the Heritage of Transylvania after 1918**

Romania almost doubled its size and radically changed its ethnic composition after 1918 with the addition of the regions of Transylvania, Bukovina (formerly part of Austria-Hungary) and Bessarabia (formerly part of the Russian Empire). But how did studies about Romanian art and the restoration of monuments change after 1918? The paper will follow some of the most important writings about historical monuments in interwar Romania to assess the changing ideas about what was “Romanian” art.

After 1918, a first significant moment for the study of the historical monuments in Romania was the publication of the most comprehensive art history survey about the country. The work published in Paris in 1922, called *The Romanian Art. History of the Old Romanian Art* (L'Art Roumain. Histoire de l'Art Roumain Ancien) has 407 pages, richly illustrated, and was written in French by the historian Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940) and engineer Gheorghe Balș (1868-1934).<sup>29</sup> The volume included mainly analyses of the architecture of monuments, but also in-depth descriptions of frescoes, religious artefacts and some princely mansions. However, two significant aspects stand out. The work was published in Paris, in French and therefore addressed as much to a foreign audience as was to the Romanian elite. It was indeed meant to define an image of Romania outside the country, on the European scene, and it was also a way to integrate the local heritage into the European one. As Shona Kallestrup noted, in the 1920s "art historians also looked for ways of overcoming the intellectual 'chasm' between local traditions and Western canons", an attitude already present in the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

Another surprising focus (or rather lack of focus) of the book is that it excluded the heritage of Transylvania from its analysis, being split equally between descriptions of Wallachian and Moldavian heritage. Not only that by the time, in 1922, Romania included also Transylvania but the region had long been subject of descriptions, admirations and aspirations of many Romanians. As Vlad Țoca noted, a practical reason for this neglect was that the research for the book has mainly been written before the war.<sup>31</sup> However, two other reasons were likely in play that this paper will detail next: (1) the heritage of Transylvania was in the midst of a brief power-struggle between the Transylvanian elite and those in power in Bucharest; and (2) the heritage of ethnic Romanians from Transylvania did not fit at the time into a glorious narrative about the artistic production of Romanians, worthy to be presented outside the country. It was rather seen as a symbol of oppression and discrimination, the mark of a smaller "culture" rather than of a glorious nation.

In fact, if one follows the only publication of the Commission for Historical Monuments after the war, its quarterly Bulletin, but also the various writings of historians such as Iorga, the impression it has is that Romania's borders remained unchanged.<sup>32</sup> There are extensive studies about the main monuments of Wallachia and Moldavia, survey works or monographs, all focused on the two provinces. In practice, Transylvania

does not exist in the concerns of the members of the Commission based in Bucharest.

Transylvania was also ignored institutionally. In 1921 4 new branches or sections were established, for Transylvania, Bukovina, Banat and Bessarabia.<sup>33</sup> Much smaller in size, their funds were insufficient for any major activity, be it restorations, studies or research missions. Especially visible was the underfunding of the Transylvanian section of the Commission for Historical Monuments, the biggest of the new branches. For example, in 3 years, between 1926 and 1928, it had money only to complete restoration works at two Orthodox churches while smaller consolidations or reparations were done at other 8 churches and at Corvinilor or Hunyadi Castle.<sup>34</sup>

So why the initial neglect for the heritage of Transylvania, a region that was at least officially in the centre of the national aspirations of Romanians? A reason for this oversight was that even if Transylvania might have been loved, it was unknown to the francophone elite in Bucharest, which was much better acquainted with Western European art and architecture. The local Transylvanian intellectuals were much more knowledgeable, but the former Hungarian and German elite was overthrown from power, while the local Romanian leaders were not in the most favourable terms with those from Bucharest. In fact, as Irina Livezeanu and more recently Gábor Egry have shown, much of the Romanian elite of Transylvania has initially welcomed with reluctance the new transfer of power and the locals, such as Iuliu Maniu, sought a “provisional autonomy” or even a permanent one.<sup>35</sup> The 1923 Constitution, for example, was considered as reflecting centralisation policies, making the leaders of the former National Romanian Party of Transylvania to initially not recognise it.

Even if a good part of the Romanian Transylvanian elite eventually came to Bucharest and participated in the leadership of the country, the replacement of the former Hungarian and German ruling-elite was a slow affair.<sup>36</sup> The formation of a new class of Romanian-speaking bureaucrats and specialists simply took time and this was paralleled by enduring regionalist sentiments in Transylvania.<sup>37</sup> For example, complaints about the inefficiencies of the Bucharest administration were common. As one lawyer from Cluj remarked, “No one listened to our grievances and the promised improvements never happened; (...) on the contrary, we imported the oriental practice of *baçşiş* and harassment.”<sup>38</sup> This sort of tensions was a far-cry from the triumphant nationalist tone struck by official histories or discourses.

In this context, the members of the Commission for Historical Monuments in Bucharest saw their role as asserting the supremacy of Bucharest rather than promoting the cultural heritage of the newly acquired region. The choice of president of the Transylvanian Section of the Commission makes even more clear the attempts in Bucharest to impose itself. Over the entire history of its existence, from 1921 to 1941, its president was the historian Alexandru Lepădatu (1876-1950), disciple of Nicolae Iorga and one of the main specialists in the architectural monuments of Wallachia and Moldavia. Alexandru Lepădatu was Transylvanian by birth but studied in Iași at high-school and then moved to Bucharest around 1900 to pursue university studies. After the World War I he was therefore named president of the Transylvanian Section of the Commission and also professor of “Old History of the Romanians” at the newly reorganised University of Cluj where he set up the Institute for National History.

## **5. Writings about historical monuments in interwar Transylvania**

The Transylvanian section, even if with limited funds, focused its activity on mapping and promoting the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic monuments, considered to be the only ones produced by the ethnic Romanian community. The monuments were small, stone churches (earliest from the fifteenth century) and many more wooden churches (ranging from the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries), all situated in or at the margins of villages and being used by the local peasant population. Many of the monuments are works that elude established artistic categories. For example, the churches of Ribița, Criscior or Remetea (all from approx. early fifteenth century) have an architecture close to the Catholic or Reformed churches. The paintings inside have been seen however as closer to Byzantine ones even if the iconography is not entirely Orthodox.<sup>39</sup> This iconography features most prominently the three Hungarian Holy Kings, Saints Ladislau, Stephen and Emeric, which was a representation common to the fourteenth and fifteenth century in the Hungarian Kingdom. For the nobles of the Orthodox community, it was probably a mark of allegiance to the Hungarian rule. But the artists of the time also worked outside boundaries of nationality, religion, ethnicity, categories defined in the modern times at the beginning of art history as a research discipline.

The wooden churches are also very interesting and unique examples of folk art. The paintings inside might look naïve, but are certainly original. So is the case with other artistic productions associated with the churches, such as garments or glass icons.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, Romanians, the most numerous ethnic group, were mostly peasants, with a minority living in towns or being part of a middle class. And the notion of ethnic Romanians was based especially on religion and therefore was defined in relation to the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic monuments. The difference in religious rite was never really an issue with regard to the heritage. Greek-Catholics were fully assimilated as Romanians perhaps also because many of the communities' leaders were Greek-Catholic priests. The Greek-Catholic Church, officially known as the Romanian Church United with Rome, separated from the Orthodox Church in 1698, when it signed a union with the Catholic church, recognising the authority of the Pope but keeping its Orthodox rite. Known today mostly because it was outlawed by the Communist regime and subjected to harsh persecutions, it enjoyed at the time more rights than the Orthodox church. This meant it could build more important monuments and form a class of Romanian intellectuals. Most of the leaders in 1918 were themselves or came from families of Greek-Catholic priests.

The most significant moment for the discovery of the Romanian heritage was probably the appearance of several extensive studies between 1927 and 1931 by well-known art historians or researchers of Transylvanian heritage: Coriolan Petreanu (1893-1945), Virgil Vătăşianu (1902-1993), Atanasie Popa (1896-1982), Silviu Dragomir (1888-1962).<sup>41</sup> The first two were students of Josef Strzygowsky, professor of art history in Vienna, from whom they took inspiration in studying and promoting both wooden architecture and the artistic heritage considered "minor" until that time. They were also representative for almost all researchers of Transylvania, self-described as ethnic Romanians from the region, with studies in Vienna, Budapest, Chernivtsi, and who already had a history of promoting Romanian culture and heritage within Austria-Hungary. All these researchers were Transylvanian-born, with studies in Budapest or Vienna, while the more established researchers from Bucharest were generally not involved in studies about the region.

Romanian researchers on Transylvania harboured a sense of historic injustice towards Romanian art, marginalised by Hungarians and by studies about 'European' art, in which they strongly felt the Romanian heritage of Transylvania should be included. Their attitude was influenced by the

work and teachings of Strzygowski, who became famous by arguing for the significance of non-European heritage, especially Asian and Eastern European one, and who built a large base of followers, with many students from Eastern Europe among them.<sup>42</sup>

The studies on Transylvanian heritage are apparently positivistic in their approach of recording sources, describing buildings, noting local knowledge about the church, its natural setting. However, the nationalistic tone and aim is more than evident. Their declared aim was to prove the value of Romanian art, rooted in a long artistic tradition and with a high degree of originality. Vătășianu for example wrote in such terms as the following: "This ancient nest of the Dacian bravery, centre for the Roman civilization (...) we will prove that our architecture is not only a mixture of foreign influences but has ancient roots, fed by the same soil from which our people fed."<sup>43</sup>

Age-value was indeed an essential element and Petreanu went so far as to argue that some constructions seen on Trajan's column (a monument built in 113AD in Rome to commemorate the Empire's victory over Dacians) are proof that wooden buildings in Romania have their origins at least from that time.<sup>44</sup> Making claims without concrete proofs can often be seen in these writings, in spite of their apparent objectivity. For example, the same Petreanu noted: "Compared to the cumbersome German and Hungarian towers, the Romanian ones introduced finesse, gracefulness, elegance, a mysterious-romantic character, and these qualities cannot be found in the Saxon and Hungarian churches."<sup>45</sup> He expanded on the mysterious nature of the orthodox or Greek-catholic churches to argue for their value, especially when studying the 'Romanian soul':

Here, as everywhere in Transylvania, the wooden churches are the emanation of the people personality, of the folk soul. Their builders are simple peasants who are often unable to write; they are not city artisans. What they have created is all the more remarkable. All who have seen the Romanian wooden churches have admired the fully developed art, the silhouette, the proportions, the solidity of the artistic detail, the harmonious fusion with the environment, the gravity, mystery, power and grace of the whole. (...). The study of the art of wood building in Transylvania signifies not only an enrichment of our knowledge of this history of art, but also the proof of the Romanian folk-soul and of its artistic products.<sup>46</sup>

Petreanu did not go into specific details about for example what “the silhouette” or “the proportions” of the monuments exactly mean, creating a convenient ambiguity to speak about “Romanian” art. The same ambiguity, a mark also to be found at other authors in writings about Romanian monuments, also served him to draw multiple parallels between architectural elements of wooden churches (towers, window frames, doors, etc.) and Western artistic styles, chiefly Gothic and Baroque.<sup>47</sup>

Other writers simply based their dating on rumours and legends that made the monuments much older than they really were, such as Tit Bud, a Greek-Catholic priest, who claimed that Ieud Wooden Church is from 1364 or that the church in Apșa de Mijloc is from mid-fifteenth century, dates repeated later by others.<sup>48</sup> These authors were adamant supporters of the ancient Romanian identity in architecture and for them the Romanian churches were also a symbol of the persecution of Romanians, of their marginalisation by Germans and Hungarians. In their writings the feeling of resentment is transparent. As Vătășianu noted:

The churches belonged to Romanians and were built by them, in spite of what some Hungarians and Germans authors claim. The proofs are: a specific architectural type that does not appear in regions inhabited by Hungarians or Germans; the Slavonic inscriptions; the churches remained in the possession of the Romanian community even if the occupiers could have taken them.<sup>49</sup>

The resentment cultivated by ethnic Romanians educated and trained after all in Budapest and Vienna was due indeed to the overlooking of the Romanian heritage in the Habsburg publications and in the Hungarian ones. But they also internalised an inferiority complex that made them struggle to justify why the Romanian monuments were smaller, less important or in more isolated places.

Beside praising the Romanian identity, the authors saw the monuments also as symbols of poverty, of the dire conditions of Romanian community and as reflecting their persecutions, while admitting that the monuments lacked the value or monumentality of others. Often their discourse was one of grievance, of complaint, of self-pity. These writers asserted the innate value and merits of the Romanian heritage in Transylvania, but at the same time they were thinking in a framework in which the Western artistic canon still dictated what was beautiful and impressive. For example, Atanasie Popa noted: “Hidden between the trees, surrounded by an old



fence, darkened by the times, the little wooden church from Apahida stands modestly, away from the main road, without drawing attention."<sup>50</sup> In the case of the church from Ieud, he argues that it is a symbol of the past traumas of the Romanian community who consequently abandoned it.<sup>51</sup> Along the same lines, he noted about the church from Vad that it "is testament to a noble Romanian ambition and determination to survive the tough times, urging us not to give up and not to doubt our will and our faith."<sup>52</sup> The churches were valued therefore not for their artistic merit but because they embodied the Romanian spirit and because they were proof of the tragic fate of Romanians. They were monuments to a tragedy in a way not so different from the World War I monuments commemorating horrors, traumas or sacrifices.

These attitudes were in line with broader ideas about Romanian identity as that of people who survived hardships, invasions; whose heritage has been destroyed but not their ethnic spirit. On the other side of the Carpathians, in Wallachia and Moldavia, the elite had long internalised the view that the architectural heritage of their country was inferior and to a great extent not worthy of being preserved. For example, in one of the very first studies about Romanian architecture, the architect Dimitrie Berindei complained in 1860 that "we can say that the country seems without any arts."<sup>53</sup> Also, the Romanian painter and chair of art history at the School of Fine Arts in Iași, Paul Verussi, noted in 1875 that "The state of our national art is that until this moment, we don't have any art."<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the history of Romania has been written on both sides of the Carpathians as a sort of history of survival, camouflaged in national pride.

## Conclusions

The paper has sketched some of the multi-faceted meanings that historical monuments held in Romania in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. It analysed restoration and preservation practices, on writings of art history, attitudes and wider mentalities. Without the goal of representing an exhaustive history of heritage protection, restoration or art history writings, this research continues some of the recent efforts of disentangling how and why a Romanian architectural heritage and art history were created and written.

First ideas and definitions about historical monuments in Romania were formed in the late nineteenth century with important inputs from

foreign specialists. This paper has chiefly detailed the activity of the French restorer André Lecomte du Noüy who was the most important restorer in the country for several decades. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Romanian architects took over the restoration activity. Claiming a break with past practices, they instead continued them. What has indeed changed was the significance of monuments. They were not tools to present Romania as a European country and to integrate or relate it to the wider European culture anymore, but means to forge a distinct national identity, presented often in opposition to that of others. This trend has directly influenced writings in interwar Transylvania, which were focused on building, defining or explaining the Romanian cultural identity also accompanied by sentiments of resentment, self-pity and national pride. They were also in line with the wider nationalistic turn in Romania in the 1930s. Overall, the monuments played an essential role in the cultural politics of Romania and reveal broader attitudes as well as the evolution of preservation practices and of architectural styles.

## NOTES

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- <sup>22</sup> Report by two architects, active in Bucharest: Alexandru Orăscu (1817-1894) and Carol Kuchnowsky (unknown life years, active in Romania between 1860 and 1884). "Report by Orăscu and Kuchnowsky", April 7, 1980, *Restaurarea monumentelor istorice. Acte și rapoarte oficiale*, 99-100. Ghenadie Petrescu, "Letter from the Bishop of Argeș", March 4, 1980. *Restaurarea monumentelor istorice. Acte și rapoarte oficiale*, 97-98, 97. See more details about the criticisms of Ghenadie Petrescu in Alexandru Istrate,

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Credits: Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice, 1917-1945; Mvelam, Creative Commons Licence

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