

Gender representation across political regimes: a comparative analysis of Romanian films

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Abstract: *This paper examines how gender roles, power relations, and the relationship between the state and individual are illustrated in two Romanian films. Both “4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days” and “Child’s Pose” manage to recreate the historical context of the periods under discussion, communism and post-communism in Romania, while also highlighting the realities of oppressiveness and endemic corruption specific to each regime. This comparative study was conducted by using relevant theories, which were necessary in order to build the theoretical framework, and by coding the actions and dialogue extracted from the films under existing concepts from gender studies. Afterwards, a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis approach was helpful in revealing the complexity of current and previous unequal social arrangements, as portrayed in contemporary Romanian films. The main contribution of this research is that it sheds light on the evolution of gender roles, power relations, and the relationship between the state and individual through an analysis of social-realist films.*

Key words: gender roles • power relations • patriarchy • oppression • corruption

Introduction

This study was designed as a comparative case study. The two cases that the analysis was conducted on are the films: *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* and *Child’s Pose*. My decision to examine them was influenced by the fact that they were both critically acclaimed, being especially praised for their accurate portrayal of the two periods in question; a great opportunity to observe how gender roles, power relations, and the relationship between the state and the individual are revealed through cinematography. The notions of ideology, power, hierarchy and gender are all sociological variables that are relevant for an interpretation and explanation of a discourse, as Wodak argues (2001, p. 3). Each film manages to illustrate the oppressiveness of communism, or how corrupt Romania is during this transition period. Setting the historical context for the comparative analysis was fundamental in accurately interpreting the discourses, therefore concepts from gender studies are introduced after describing each particular regime and its specificities.

The first part of the paper tackles the sacrificial role of women across regimes, and how motherhood was and still is considered to be the most important female “duty”, as a result of societal values and asymmetrical power relations. The second part of the paper addresses different gender roles categories and how are they relevant for maintaining unequal social structures, as well as how there was a shift from an oppressive state to one which becomes an instrument for personal interests. The last part of the paper is dedicated to the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, which is applied to the films *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* and *Child’s Pose* in order to reveal how gender roles, power relations, and the relationship between the state and individual are illustrated in contemporary cinematography.

Child’s Pose (2013), a film directed by Calin Peter Netzer, could be viewed as an allegory about the “new Romania” (Dargis, 2014), a country where the transition to democracy exacerbated the already existent corruption, which is manifested through illicit traffic of influence, bribery and theft. With regards to *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* (2007), a film directed by Cristian Mungiu, the story takes place in 1987, basically 3 years before abortion was legal in Romania. The film portrays a woman’s reaction to the hegemonic discourse of the period, by presenting her efforts to fight against the predetermined role the oppressive communist regime has assigned her to play – the sacrificial role of the mother for the sanctity of the nation. Back then, women were treated as means to support the development of a prosperous and autarchic nation. The “ideal woman” had to sacrifice herself for economic purposes. Paradoxically, the fall of communism kept that image vivid, the self-sacrificial women still representing a common gender stereotype, although now her devotion and sacrifice is directed to her children. Both *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* and *Child’s Pose* successfully manage to convey the atmosphere and specificities of the two periods, as social-realist films, being internationally acclaimed and transformed into a channel through which foreigners got acquainted with some aspects of the regimes – communism and unconsolidated democracy - in Romania.

Methodology

For the comparative analysis I used the approach of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), proposed by Lazar (2005; 2007). This approach was really helpful because the data analyzed includes “contextualized instances of spoken and written

language, along with other forms of semiosis such as visual images, layout, gestures, and actions in texts and talk”, (Lazar, 2005, p. 13; Lazar, 2007, p. 151), while also being interdisciplinary in nature (Wodak, 2001, p. 64). Since the purpose of this paper was to examine how gender roles, asymmetrical power relations, and the relationship between the state and the individual are portrayed in two films, set during two distinct regimes, I decided to focus on analyzing the dialogue between the characters in conjunction with actions (as non-linguistic practices). I considered a CDA the best approach because it studies the relations between discourse, power, dominance and social inequality (van Dijk, 1993, p. 283). However, I did not opt for a conventional CDA, but for a feminist one.

There are several reasons which made me choose the Feminist CDA approach, as opposed to a conventional CDA. First, since my perspective is already a feminist one, why not be open about it and hide behind a conventional CDA? Even though I am not implying that all studies that deal with gender should be tackled from a feminist standpoint, I still consider that this option was better suited for my research. Second, the absence of self-naming made it difficult for people who were interested in CDA, from a feminist perspective, to come together in a shared forum (Lazar, 2005, pp. 3-4). Therefore, the feminist CDA can contribute to the creation of a community interested in developing a coherent feminist perspective on unequal social arrangements, especially since they are becoming increasingly more complex and hard to identify. Third, CDA already owes its development to feminist approaches in women’s studies in the 1980s (Lazar, 2005, p. 2), therefore, this represents a celebration and recognition of its important contribution. Furthermore, in terms of emancipator goals, there is already an undeniable overlap regarding feminism and CDA (Lazar, *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis* 2007, 144).

In developing my research I combined an *a priori* coding process with an inductive one that resulted in various concepts from gender studies. Afterwards, I reviewed the literature regarding the concepts and structured my theoretical framework accordingly, all the grand theories serving as a foundation for the interpretation of the discourses. The last step was to explain the recurrent film narratives by linking them to the theoretical background, while also illustrating which are the emergent leitmotifs and patterns with regards to gender roles, asymmetrical power relations, and the relationship between the state and the individual, during communist and post-communist Romania.

1. The sacrificial role of women across political regimes in Romania

Right after the death of Dej in 1964, Ceaușescu assumed the leadership of the Communist Party in Romania. During his first years of ruling, his policies were mildly liberal, but the beginning of the 1970s brought an important change with regards to how policies were designed (Negoita, 2011, p. 82), after his visit to People's Republic of China and North Korea. Soon enough Ceaușescu's autarchic ambitions and his project to reimburse the foreign debt led to a series of outrageous measures. In order to increase the labor force and thus expand the labor industry Ceaușescu's regime made heavy use of propaganda centered on promoting the image of women as workers for the Industrial sector. This developmental strategy was influenced by the protectionist economic nationalism. Bluntly put, women emancipation was primarily based on their participation in paid employment, something that supposedly will free them from being dependent on men or forced into marriage (Brunnbauer 2000, 152). On the other hand, after 1971 the preferred propaganda theme became the emancipation of women through motherhood and for the benefit of the nation.

The overlapping roles of worker and sacrificial mother resulted into what researchers called "the second shift" or "the double burden". This phenomenon was first summarized under this concept by Arlie Russell Hochschild and Anne Machung in *The Second Shift* (1989), and it refers to the burden is put on women to find a balance between housework and childcare, without being able to rely on support from their life partners or from the state (external help), as a result of how traditional gender roles are socially constructed and understood. This situation was even worse in Romania. Women had to not only be extremely dedicated to their job, but also raise multiple children, due to the fact that abortion and contraceptives measures were illegal. That was what showed authentic and unconditional devotion to the regime (Miroiu, 2010, p. 582) in a state where family was regarded as the "basic social cell" (Iordache, 2014, p. 8). Women's autonomy in family planning was possible only in certain instances: when they reached 45 years of age, when they already had 5 children, when they became pregnant as a result of rape, or when the pregnancy was too risky for their safety or for the child. Under this circumstance, women became caregivers and caretakers, "heroines of the private sphere", while educating the nation morally and having both a nurturing and a sacrificial role (Miroiu, 2010, p. 577; Andreescu, 2011, p. 661).

Even though the regime was further legitimizing its ruling through the use of a gender equality narrative, “this agenda was not feminist in intentions and meaning” (Miroiu, 2010, p. 580). Mihaela Miroiu, one of the most prominent feminist theorists in Romania, claims that, although the regime proclaimed a gender-egalitarian ideology (mainly for economic purposes), in reality it did not generate positive changes for women with regards to political representation or other individual rights (2010, p. 580). Furthermore, she adds that gender equality was just one piece of the ideology of equality puzzle, the official dogma even stating that women had the right to political participation and economic independence (2010, p. 581). In CDA, ideology is seen as being fundamental in establishing and maintaining asymmetrical power relations (Wodak, 2001, p. 10). On the other hand, in modern democracies liberty is considered to be an absolutely necessary condition for its functioning, due to the fact that it guarantees at least the equal access to opportunities and the freedom of choice, if not equality *de facto* (Hurubean 2013, 12). Therefore, a gender-egalitarian ideology is irrelevant without the freedom of choice. The constant interference of the state into the private realm totally compromises the existence of an individual autonomy, especially during oppressive regimes that auto proclaim themselves as gender-egalitarian.

Similarly, although Romania is currently a democracy, women still feel pressured to be mothers, subordinated to men and under intense patriarchal protection. Besides the particular values promoted during communism, today marriage becomes, especially in the rural area, an additional goal for women, something they have to achieve in order to fulfill their destiny and develop their true identity. A woman in her 30s and still unmarried is considered to be ‘less of a woman’ than the married one. Given this circumstances, women who rebel against this imposed social roles, or are sexually liberated, are automatically considered to be immoral human beings, their decision to not conform to the status quo and preponderant religious beliefs ultimately pushing them to the margins of the society. Furthermore, some of them are forced into prostitution by poverty and unemployment, especially the young ones (Brunnbauer 2000, 159); another reason for social exclusion in general, and even more in such a profoundly religious country¹. However, some authors (Brunnbauer, 2000, p.162) claim that the Orthodox Church in eastern European countries does not have a great influence

¹ In Romania 89% of people declare themselves as being religious, according to the global index of religiosity and atheism (2012).

on public matters. Although this might be true, given that so many people adhere to its values it still indirectly shapes traditional societal role models.

A feminist perspective on gender roles claims that gender is an ideological structure which divides people into two classes, men and women, men dominating and women being subordinated to them, based on sexual differences (Lazar, 2007, p. 146). A particular role of women, which was perpetuated even after the collapse of Ceaușescu's regime, can be summarized under the concept proposed by Hays (1996): 'intensive mothering'. This behavior is not so much related to a specific political regime, but to how gender roles are socially constructed in a patriarchy. This concept could also be linked to the role of the 'sacrificial mother', a narrative used during communism in Romania, the only difference being that currently the subject of total devotion is only the child, not the nation as well. Motherhood is no longer constructed as a 'patriotic act', an instrument to achieve an ultimate goal. Basically, 'intensive mothering' became one of the various manifestations of patriarchy, which reemerged after the dissolution of communism. When explaining the concept of 'intensive mothering' Hays (1996, p. 69) argues that "there is an underlying assumption that the child absolutely requires consistent nurture by a single primary caretaker and that the mother is the best person for the job." (1996, p. 8). This gender stereotype is accurately portrayed by the situation in which the female protagonist of the film "Child's Pose" finds herself, something we will touch upon during the comparative analysis.

2. Asymmetrical power relations under patriarchy

Right after the collapse of communism a revival of patriarchal values with regards to families occurred (Robila, 2004, p. 6). The reemergence of patriarchal values was further manifested through a change concerning the hegemonic discourse, a shift from the 'ideal woman' narrative - as worker and heroic mother- , to the traditional woman: daughter, mother and wife (Andreescu, 2011, p.673). Brunnbauer calls it "domestication"¹ (2000). Additionally, Wodak argues that the "dominant structures stabilize conventions and naturalize them", inequality being taken as a 'given' (2001, p. 3). As a consequence, the transition to a democratic regime in Romania did not have a significant positive impact with regards to gender equality due to the fact that people still have the tendency to

¹ Policies are designed in order to force women to play traditional social roles (Brunnbauer 2000, 154).

legitimate the negative discrimination and subordination of women by referring to either traditions or religion.

Patriarchal values in Romania were revitalized as soon as the communist regime collapsed. According to Reeves & Baden (2000, p. 3; p. 28), a systemic patriarchy is manifested through the institutionalization of male physical, social and economic power, all arrangements constraining women to make certain choices that ultimately diminish their chances to act autonomously. Additionally, Connell (1987), a sociologist better known for introducing the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (which we will further discuss later), describes the patriarchal state as a "center of ever berating set of power relations and political processes in which patriarchy is both constructed and contested" (p. 132). On the other hand, Butler (1990, p.5) rejects the notion of a universal patriarchy because gender oppression should be studied in the particular cultural context in which it resides, by also taking into consideration the historical and political background. She sheds light on the fact that this type of feminist theory is not suitable to analyze non-Western cultures, since notions of oppression have to be contextualized and should not just be explained as non-Western barbarism. Bluntly put, she argues against a manicheistic perspective on cultures, which frequently idealizes western cultures and demonizes all the rest.

On the other hand, also regarding patriarchal values, Brunnbauer (2000, p. 161) argues that they have not been eradicated during communism, especially since the emancipation of women was not focused on increasing their individuality and independence, but on placing their rights and duties into the public sphere, under the control of the state. Thus, he rejects the 'reemergence of patriarchy' thesis, proposed by Robila (2004). The dissolution of communism triggered a moral vacuum which also contributed to the straightening of old role models and values (Brunnbauer 2000, 161). Furthermore, the institutionalized constrains, which transcended regimes, as van Dijk points out (1999, p. 255), currently represent a major obstacle for gender equality.

In a patriarchy, power relations are constructed as asymmetrical. In late modern societies asymmetrical power relations can assume subtle forms, which make them harder to notice (Lazar, 2007, p. 142). Women are generally excluded from the control of resources and public matters, as well as being treated as second-class citizens because of the presumed biological differences which make them inferior to men. On the positive side, gender hierarchies are culturally influenced and therefore subject to change

(Reeves & Baden, 2000, p. 18) if approached correctly, particularly through an authentic institutionalization of gender equality, drawn upon international laws such as the CEDAW or the Treaties of the European Union. An important argument against gender inequality is the fact that “it represents a major barrier to human development, the modernization and democratization of a society, with important social costs” (Hurubean 2013, 4). Holter supports this idea and says that prosperity in Europe cannot be achieved without gender equality, which he calls „the main key” (2005, p. 125), gender becoming a fundamental element in economic and social development. Ultimately, gender equality is basically a human right, and should be treated as such.

The “appropriate” behavior for both men and women is determined by beliefs which are socially constructed through ideologies and commonly expressed through emerging stereotypes. Gender ideologies often straighten male power and the idea that women are somehow inferior by comparison (Reeves & Baden, 2000, p. 4), frequently becoming the subject of violence because of that. Since gender violence occurs in both public and private spheres, in the late 1960s a phrase was introduced: ‘the personal is political’. This phrase or concept, which appeared during the second-wave of feminism, was proposed in order to inspire women in being politically active, as well as representing a strategy to draw attention to the fact that violence and rape, even if are occurring within the private sphere, have to be addressed publicly. Equally important to mention is that women also deepen this inequalities by adopting certain models of socialization (Hurubean 2013, 10) which limit their development and accession to decision making and power structures in general. Moreover, in a patriarchal regime, women have the tendency to raise their sons as the future dominant males – the Alpha males of certain groups - to protect them from social exclusion. Therefore, women often become an accomplice in supporting and reproducing male hegemony through the education they provide to their sons (Bannon & Correia, 2006, p. 248).

3. Hegemonic masculinity, subordinated masculinity, and the ‚manly woman’

There is a clear distinction that needs to be made between sex and gender, the first being biological and fixed, and the second entirely culturally constructed and determined by ideas and practices about how to be a ‘proper’ male or female (Butler, 1990; Reeves & Baden, 2000; Beynon, 2002). Strictly regarding masculinity, Beynon (2002, p. 2) observes it as diverse, mobile, even as an unstable construction.

Traditionally, men are regarded as breadwinners – the great mark of patriarchal masculinity (Beynon, 2002, p. 14) -, the nucleus of the nuclear family, but this ideal is slightly different when applied to various cultural contexts.

The pressure to be “masculine”, as a socially accepted behavior, frequently drives men on a path of destructive behavior that involves alcoholism, drug addiction, and violence towards other men or women. These constant anxieties, to act according to the imposed standard, along with the fear of expressing feelings and emotions trigger frustration among men which can ultimately make them turn to violence. As an illustration, the vast majority of violent crimes are committed by boys or men, the conclusion being that crime is in fact a gendered phenomenon (Edwards 2006, 9). Men often resort to violence as a desperate act to reaffirm their masculinity when faced with unemployment or poverty. Crime becomes an alternative way of living when no other opportunities arise (Edwards 2006, 10), and domestic violence when men lack power at their workplace and want to mask this powerlessness by dominating at home (Beynon, 2002, p. 20). Beynon (2002, p. 15) further examines traditional masculinity and comes to the conclusion that what is needed is “male liberation” from predetermined gender roles.

There are three types of masculinity: hegemonic, dominant and subordinated (Paechter 2006, 4-5). Connell (1995, p. 77) defines hegemonic masculinity as „the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimating patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women”. The concept ‘cultural hegemony’ was first introduced by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, being described as a means to maintain the capitalist state and “manufacture consent” (Gramsci, 2010). Connell basically borrows the term ‘hegemony’ to reveal a similar situation where a certain behavior is based on consensus from a large majority, and reproduced through media and institutions which directly participate to its legitimization. This perspective on hegemony is also shared by van Dijk (1993, p. 255).

For Lazar (2007, p. 148) modern power (and hegemony) is precisely effective because of its cognitive nature, gender roles being internalized and transformed into everyday routine. Additionally, Groes-Green (2009, 288) claims that hegemonic masculinity should mostly be linked to a privileged social class, while subordinated masculinity is a particularity of the working class, which needs a reaffirmation of power, as we already discussed before. Consequently, hegemonic masculinities do not implicitly mean a nasty

behavior towards women (Connell, 1987, p. 187; Holter, 2005, p. 115). Van Dijk (1993, pp. 249-250) defines dominance as the exercise of power that generates political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality. Moreover, Beynon (2002, p. 20) argues that a stereotypical picture of male dominance emerges as a result of a display of physical power, appreciation for sports, drinking, machismo¹ and sexual appetite.

Since features associated with masculinity, such as “rationality at the expense of empathy and affection/emotion, competition at the expense of cooperation, quantifiable/measurable aspects and less qualifying (in-depth) features, the appearance at the expense of the essence/substance/meaning of behaviors or actions” (Hurubean 2013, 6) are widely valued within a society, the image of a ‘manly woman’ is often adopted by women in order to hopefully enjoy the same privileges as masculine men do. This type of woman could easily be described as being aggressive, ambitious, authoritarian, and ferocious, (Hurubean, 2013, p. 5), lacking empathy and willing to fight her way up the social hierarchy. Moreover, a “manly woman” is also portrayed as a person that can cause an emasculation of men around her, especially within a romantic partnership or at her workplace. A strong woman can potentially cause an inversion of gender stereotypes, as we will further discuss when referring to one of the two films we are analyzing: *Child’s Pose*.

4. The relationship between the state and the individual: a shift from oppression to endemic corruption

Until the dissolution of communism, people in Romania lacked autonomy, in the context of a collectivized society, the state constantly dictating their behavior (Falls, 2001, p. 33). Since there was no real delimitation between the private and public sphere, any decision taken in either one of them had profound consequences on the other. As an illustration, the state exercised control even concerning reproductive rights in a nationalistic quest² to forcefully increase the population. Birth was regarded as a “patriotic act” (Iordache, 2014, p. 2), the communist 770/1966 Decree prohibiting abortion and contraceptives measures with a minimum of 5 children of each fertile woman under 45 required. Brunnbauer (2000, p. 153) also states that during that period

¹ “Machismo is a socially constructed, learned, and reinforced set of behaviors comprising the content of male gender roles in Latino society” (De La Cancela, 1986, p. 291).

² Iordache (2014, p. 5) argues that the communist regime in Romania was also undertaking ethnic assimilationist policies in order to ultimately obtain a nation of many (ethnic) Romanians.

women had the 'duty' of enlarging the socialist nation. Basically, in managing institutions such as motherhood the state was playing a major part in the constitution of the social categories (Connell 1987, 132), those who did not conform being transformed into outcasts, situated at the margins of the society while also putting their lives at risk for their disobedience.

As a result of the measures taken within communist regime, the tension between the interference of the state, expressed through the objectification of the body, and people's fight to reclaim their lives resulted in the highest rates of maternal deaths in Europe until the collapse of the regime (Flister, 2013, p. 306). In order to prevent such opposition, the regime was constantly inculcating to the people a sense of guilt for considering abortion (Miroiu, 2010, p. 585), or even a sense of fear. Moreover, paradoxically, the policy was branded as one that supported women empowerment (Iordache, 2014, p. 6).. On the other hand, the situation of wealthy families was slightly different, women having the necessary economic means to import contraceptive or experience illegal abortions, in comparison to those originally from less prosperous backgrounds, where poverty was actually exacerbated by an unsustainable growing family.

Mihaela Miroiu (2010, p. 585) considers the pro-natalist policy as one of the most damaging interferences of the state into the private life. This violation of the right to choice was primarily developed on a nationalistic ideological basis. However, the public discourse on reproduction in post-communist Romania is still controversially nationalistic, with an even more pronounced ethnic component (Iordache, 2014, p. 15), even though one of the first measures, after the dissolution of communism, was to legalize abortion. Furthermore, this act is currently condemned by the Orthodox Church, which does not advocate for its outlawing (Iordache, 2014, p. 15), but it conveys the idea of a decision in opposition with Christian conservative beliefs and the moral principle of the right to life. And since in Romania there is only a *de jure* separation of church and state, and not a *de facto* one, this can become quite problematic for women.

In a democracy the decision to have children is based on an economic rationality, the relation between costs and benefits ultimately prevailing. However, under communism this decision was dictated by an exterior authority, thus triggering an unsustainable family planning. The state did not take into consideration the negative consequences of a forced increase in birth rate, such as child abandonment or an escalation of poverty

(Andreescu, 2011, p. 663). People were dehumanized, transformed into instruments in support of the ultimate goal – “build up the next stage of socialism: communism itself” (Miroiu, 2010, p. 585) -, in total opposition with ethical values and morality, which should determine all human actions: people should never be used as means to an end (Kant, 2009). For a better understanding of the period we will later refer to the film *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*, a cinematographic production which accurately illustrates the specificities of communism in Romania. This film successfully conveys the agonizing condition of a young woman during communism, her body and sexuality being strictly controlled by the state, a perfect example of the oppressive practices that people had to deal with during the regime, one of them being the violation of reproductive rights.

Before becoming a member of the EU Romania consistently ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in Europe (Gugiu, 2012; Ristei, 2010, p. 342). The communist period left deep scars, but there was also a lack of political will to curb corruption and consolidate democracy after the collapse of communism. Moreover, the implementation of a major judicial reform was difficult since not even professional structures have changed. People were still appointed under the communist system, being constantly subject to influence (Pridham, 2007). Becoming an EU member was insufficient in changing ‘business as usual’ in Romania, even though a new regime of sanctions was introduced and the conditionality was extended into the first three years by the EU. Pridham (2007) was right in saying that after reaching its ultimate goal (EU membership) an obvious relaxation with regards to anti-corruption measures will appear in Romania. Furthermore, it is difficult to tackle corruption effectively in Romania since it affects so many layers of the public sphere, “the state and economy becoming the reservoir for furthering personal or party-political interests” (Pridham, 2007). Ristei (2010, p. 341) argues that for post-communist countries is particularly hard to curb corruption, something which still undermines the process of democratic consolidation.

Post-accession and Romania is still considered to be extremely corrupt, currently one of the most corrupt countries in the EU, although measures such as the creation of the institution CNSAS, responsible for conducting screening processes in order to prevent the coming to power of former communist party activists or secret police officers, under the law 181/1999, were taken. Private bribery and illicit traffic of influence is quite common in contemporary Romania. This practice is more frequent

among the privileged class because of the obvious economic means which come in their support, besides having the 'required' social status to exercise illicit influence. As an illustration, we will focus on analyzing this kind of behavior in the film *Child's Pose*.

5. From gender oppression to moral regression? A comparative analysis of 4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days, and *Child's Pose*

What generates the whole action of the film *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* is the rejection of motherhood, a decision that empowers one of the women in taking back possession of her body, considered to be, during communism, a public property (Miroiu, 2010, p. 577; Andreescu, 2011, p. 661). However, this opposition needed to stay hidden from the vigilant eye of the state. Basically, the fear of repercussions led to a duplicitous life, influence by the necessity to preserve appearances, when the sense of guilt, inoculated through the regime's propaganda (Miroiu, 2010, 585), was not powerful enough to stop women from resorting to abortion. In some cases, when women were disobedient, drastic measures were taken, together with the already implicit social stigma generated by this "decadent behavior" (Falls, 2011, p. 37). The male protagonist (Bebe) even says, when he is preparing to carry out the illegal abortion and finds out that the pregnancy is more advanced than he initially thought: "Young lady, this isn't a game. We could go to prison for this. Both of us. Only I'd face a longer sentence".

In the film *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* we are presented with asymmetrical power relations, which, contrary to the official communist dogma, were not eradicated by the regime. Paradoxically, the decision to escape the oppressive regime, which objectified their bodies, made the two female characters do the same thing, by accepting the proposal to sell their bodies to the male lead in order to obtain an illegal abortion. The male lead is a character which perfectly illustrates the subordinated masculinity stereotype we discussed in theoretical section of this paper. Bebe is an aggressive extortionist, the only way he could exercise power being in relation to a woman. The fact that masculinity is associated with independence, assertiveness and, most of all, with the capacity to dominate (Broverman et al., in Daigle & Mummert, 2014), influences his behavior by making him turn aggressive. Nevertheless, his decision to pressure the two women in selling their bodies is coherent with Bannon & Correia's theory (2006, p. 247). They argue that among the features directly associated with masculinity is the sexual experience with multiple partners, even by extortion or rape. With the purpose of

deconstructing gender roles, Bannon (et al., 2006, pp. 248-249) states that poverty can trigger this kind of behavior. Men are frustrated as a consequence of their social status and start expressing their frustrations through violence, crime and domestic abuse. Since we already pointed out that subordinated masculinity is a particularity of the working class (Groes-Green, 2009, p. 288), we could consider Bebe, the leading male character in *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*, the archetype of this gender role category, especially since he gets involved in illegal activities in order to financially sustain himself, get sexual partners and eventually reaffirm his power.

However, in *Child's Pose*, both male characters – the husband and the son – are portrayed in a way that is totally different to the subordinated masculinity role, discussed above. Cornelia's husband lives in the shadow of his wife, his main role being to act as the breadwinner of his household, therefore adhering to a hegemonic masculinity role. In support of this claim also comes the fact that he is a doctor, therefore part of the privileged class, and we already established that this is a particularity of hegemonic masculinity (Groes-Green, 2009, p. 288). On the other hand, his social status and role within his family do not transform him into an authority figure, which could mean that hegemonic masculinity is just partially achieved in his case. The character's frustrations are not triggered by poverty, social exclusion or the inability to show strength at the work place, but by his lack of power in relation to his controlling wife. As an example, at one point he even calls her, while being sarcastic, "Controlia", because she tries to constantly control everyone's life. Furthermore, Cornelia's son (Barbu) experiences the same situation due to the fact that he is unable to find his own path, thus becoming dependent on his parents, particularly on his mother, which makes him lack confidence and display weakness throughout the whole film.

What is really interesting to observe is the inversion of traditional gender stereotypes in *Child's Pose* regarding the private realm, where the female protagonist represents the authority. She fits the description of a 'manly woman', an aggressive, ambitious, authoritarian and ferocious women (Hurubean, 2013, p. 5), who does whatever necessary to protect her beloved son. Her obsessive love clouds her judgment so much that she even resorts to bribing people in order to protect him. Cornelia's lack of empathy situates her in antagonism with the image of the traditional woman (weak and subordinated), basically contradicting what social norms usually dictate, and even

managing to emasculate her husband and son. Both male characters are illustrated as weak, in the company of the strong personality of Cornelia.

At the present time, strong women are portrayed as emulating features traditionally associated with those of men as a survival strategy in a world currently dominated by them. Moreover, a more masculine behavior of a woman may lead to a pro-social behavior, such as success at the work place or in sports, and a decrease of violent responses from others, contrary to the experiences of more feminine, fragile females (Daigle & Mummert, 2014, pp. 269-270). Interestingly enough, Connell (1987, p. 111) argues that, contrary to popular beliefs, marital power struggles are mostly won by wives, an authentic inversion of power occurring at home. However, he also adds that it would be wrong to consider this local victory a successful attempt to overthrow patriarchy, merely being an apparent hold of power which can be revoked at any time (Connell, 1987, p. 111).

A representation of women in both analyzed films involves motherhood, their approach to it. From this point of view, Cornelia, and one of the female characters in *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* find themselves in total opposition. In *Child's Pose* the obsessive love of the mother generates various dynamics in the film, while in *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* the rejection of this role represents the central theme of the film. One of the mothers is excessively devoted, while the other firmly rejects what social stereotypes and an oppressive regime dictated her to be and do. What both films successfully illustrate, through a comparative analysis, is the transition from the 'heroic mother' stereotype, during communism, to the 'traditional woman' stereotype, during democracy – the latter being a woman trapped within the reproduction of patriarchal values.

The obsessive love displayed by Cornelia can be summarized under the concept of "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1998, p. 8), one of the traditional features being an exaggerated devotion of women towards their children, sometimes even close to reaching a pathologic stage, and manifested through a constant interference into their life. Cornelia shows this kind of behavior throughout the whole film. As an example, when two policemen were taking blood samples and the testimony of Barbu, after the car accident which caused the death of a little boy, his mother (Cornelia) says: "Coming here like hyenas, ganging upon my baby". Important to realize is the fact that her son is 30 years old in the film. Mothers like this frequently act as a buffer, isolating their

children from dangers or any obstacles encountered (Robila, 2004, p. 8), regardless of what their age is. The purpose of Cornelia's extreme devotion was to build the "perfect child", aligned with the new standards proposed by researchers (Macdonald, 2009, p. 415). As an illustration of this, while defending him, Cornelia begins to enumerate all the achievements of her adored son:

He's got a good heart, my child. He's warm-hearted. He's generous. He never liked to boast, he didn't brag about his things. He is very shy. He didn't join gangs. He doesn't drink. Since he was little, he was so good and careful not to get low grades in school, he learned English and French, and poems...We sent him to swimming lessons, skating...

Basically, women in this situation start neglecting their own life for the sake of their child. "He's my whole life. To me and his father he's the apple of our eye", adds Cornelia about Barbu. Given that, even though the female leading character in *Child's Pose* does not embody the traditional stereotype of a weak and obedient woman, she still embodies a sacrificial role, although not for the sanctity of the nation, as it was during communism, but for the well-being of her son. Therefore, although she lives in a democracy, patriarchy still undoubtedly shaped gender roles and inoculated the idea of self-sacrifice to women.

Experts develop an ideal maternal behavior which grabs attention through scientific papers, conferences or the media (Macdonald, 2009, p. 413), thus reaching a large audience. Mothers who are not devoted to their children experience guilt when they take a step back from what social norms dictate. „Good mothers” are „stay home mothers”, they do not formally work, they dedicate their whole existence to their children (Macdonald, 2009, p. 411), starting to live vicariously through them. The idea that women have to keep their status as primary parent and adhere to 'intensive mothering' is considered to be of great importance in a patriarchy (Spehar, 2005, p. 107). As an example, in Romania, there is a predominant mentality which dictates that the ideal nuclear family is ultimately supported through 'intensive mothering'.

The film *Child's Pose* also portrays the dysfunctional relation between state and individuals, public institutions becoming a means to systematically break the law. During communism, with the exception of the nomenklatura¹, people feared the state authority, which was controlling even their reproductive rights, as already discussed

¹ The nomenklatura in Romania could be defined as a social group who held various key administrative positions within the regime and enjoyed a privileged status among all the other groups.

with regards to *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*. However, in a young democracy, public institutions start obeying those that are willing to pay the most. The director of *Child's Pose* perfectly conveys the normality of these current activities in Romania, where bribe and illicit traffic of influence is part of the culture of one of the most corrupt countries in Europe. The intention of Cornelia to bribe people and disobey the law reinforces the idea that corruption has reached such endemic levels within various institutions that being wealthy makes all the difference for people faced with possible punishments. As an example, we can refer to the reaction of Cornelia when her son is questioned by the police: "He can write whatever he wants. It's his signature", says Cornelia, even though her son was clearly giving a false testimony. On the other hand, in *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* there is still an apparent social equality, although an equality in levels of poverty, in a society which positively discriminated only the nomenklatura.

What generates the reprehensible actions of Cornelia in *Child's Pose* is the threat to her son's existence, for whom she sacrificed herself, living vicariously through him. She is considering bribing the authorities, the parents of the child, anyone (!), just to protect her son. In fact, what helps us to observe the dysfunctions of the state is exactly Cornelia's determination to protect her son. Every new frame, after the accident, portrays Cornelia as lacking empathy and ultimately being dehumanized by her immoral and decadent behavior. The moment Cornelia meets the parents of the child reveals a sinister image of her. She pleads for her son while being in tears. Without even caring that those parents lost their child, Cornelia says: "You have another child, but I only have him".

Concluding remarks

Gender inequalities have always been an issue in Romania, no matter the regime. By using a comparative analysis we were able to notice that some aspects transcended communism, while others emerged at the beginning of the recently established democracy. Women are still represented as sacrificial, although currently for different purposes, a shift from the 'heroic mother' to the 'intensive mother' occurring. Women's approach to motherhood represents a central theme which helps reveal the political context as either repressive or corrupt. During the repressive regime, illustrated in *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*, the two women were totally objectified, used as a means to an end. This situation was quite common in Romania, since the state was regulating the

reproductive rights of women, the country ranking first with regards to maternal deaths in Europe. Regarding the image portrayed in *Child's Pose*, we are faced with the reality of endemic corruption, in this case manifested through frequent attempts to bribe people or disobey the law, an obvious illustration of the social decadence and moral deterioration of the 'new Romania'. As for the male characters in both films, their roles range from subordinated masculinity (Bebe) to an apparent hegemonic masculinity – apparent because it only reaches the surface, in the private realm an inversion of gender stereotypes taking place.

Limiting gender to certain socially constructed features is what pushes people to the margins of the society, eventually even impeding the development of a country at its real potential. The Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis was quite effective in unveiling the perpetual nature of unequal social arrangements, legitimized through the use of various emancipator or patriarchal narratives. However, since CDA is quite a challenging discipline, some might say the toughest one, given its multidisciplinary nature (van Dijk, 1993, p. 253), my initial concern has been that I will not manage to adequately use it as a research method, which hopefully was not the case.

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