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Old and New Hierarchies: Rewritten Social Norms in *Silent Valley*

Abstract

The article discusses the socialist and post-socialist hierarchical structure in Romania by focusing on the sociological reading of the series *Silent Valley* (*Valea Mută*, 2016). As argued in the text, the production shows a remarkable, novel approach to breaking the discursive taboos of the Ceauşescu system by featuring homosexuality, corruption and revised gender roles on screen. The main focus of the article is on revealing how the old socialist socio-political hierarchies have been inherited and/or transferred to the capitalist-democratic epoch. By analysing such structures, the text provides a gender-centred description of the Romanian socialist and contemporary framework, while giving special attention to the situation of the Roma minority in the country. In a formalist-structuralist reading, it aims to dissect the phenomena of gender hierarchy, political and social dominance, and people's subjugated position within this context.

Keywords: Romania, *Silent Valley*, minorities, hierarchies, hierarchical balancing, homosexuality, Roma community, gender binaries.

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Introduction

Dissecting post-socialist socio-political hierarchies on screen is giving way to a televisual form of historical-psychological remembrance that openly discusses and often reckons with the previously dominant social norms and activities. During the Ceaușescu regime in Romania (1965-1989), hierarchies were built along a strong binary form, with decision-maker party members holding major political positions and the proletariat obeying the rules and measures implemented by the political leadership (Kligman, 1998). In this state structure, minorities – be they ethnic, political or gender-based – were discriminated against and often penalized with imprisonment and other forms of physical and mental punishment. Ceaușescu's disciplinary society was then replaced by a quasi-democratic leadership, but the transition process to a liberal, European framework seemed and seems to be a controversial and complicated procedure.

Although Romania has stepped on the road of collective remembrance and started to reckon with the socio-political taboos of the previous socialist regime, certain issues remain under-negotiated and underrepresented. New television series and films contribute to opening a discourse on these topics: in the post-2000 cinematic corpus, we find several films that openly criticize the oppression of the previous regime, thus starting a process of national remembrance. Andrei Gruzsnicki's *Quod erat demonstrandum* (2013), Gabriel Achim's *Visul lui Adalbert (Adalbert's Dream)*, 2011), Tudor Giorgiu's *Despre oameni si melci (Of Snails and Men)*, 2012), Cristian Comeagă's *Cel Ales (The Chosen One)*, 2015) or Cristian Mungiu's *4 luni, 3 săptămâni si 2 zile (4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days)*, 2007) are just a few examples of the rich corpus that explicitly discusses the oppressive atmosphere of the Ceaușescu regime and citizens' position within it. Be they about clandestine abortions, endless queuing for food, the terror of secret services or the bureaucratic labyrinths of the epoch that kept people in fear, films of the post-socialist epoch openly deal with the uncomfortable taboos of the previous system. However, certain topics, such as the Roma question, homosexuality and further gender-related topics remain marginal in Romanian cinema.¹

By focusing on HBO Romania's series *Valea Mută (Silent Valley)*, Marian Crișan, 2016), the present article discusses various forms of socialist and post-socialist hierarchal structures. Primarily, it focuses on gender binaries,

¹ In the recent film corpus, we only find two feature films that openly discuss homosexuality. However, both Cristian Mungiu's *După dealuri/Beyond the Hills* (2012) and Tudor Giorgiu's *Legături bolnăvicioase/Love Sick* (2006) focus on female couples, thus avoiding the portrayal of male homosexuality.

social hierarchies and the Gypsy question, and their representational forms in the series, thus aiming to contribute to the scholarship on the new Romanian post-socialist socio-political discourse.

Silent Valley openly references the long-embedded socialist socio-political hierarchies, which gives birth to a uniquely Romanian representational form of social remembrance on old and newly emerged gender roles and ethnic hierarchies in television. Because discussing the present position of all ethnic minorities² and hierarchies in Romania would go beyond the scope of the present writing, the study focuses on three areas. First of all, it investigates the changing landscape of female representation in *Silent Valley* and certain taboos raised by the series, such as male homosexuality and anti-patriarchal structures. Secondly, it analyses the position of Romani people within the post-socialist narrative context. As follows, the study aims to answer the following questions: What impact did the Ceaușescu regime's conservative *Zeitgeist* leave on citizens' consciousness? What kind of influence and/or stereotypes can we reveal in the post-socialist era that reference the half-century-long oppressive context? And, finally, how can the series contribute to starting to break through these taboos and the old way of understanding gender roles?

Socialist Hierarchies

In his study on the use of social hierarchies as tools to control communist societies, Jiří Kabele (2008) introduces the term 'constructivist system' as a ruling form that enables authorities to execute power and practise control over constitutional institutions. According to him, the constructivist structure worked as an "unconstitutional modification of the constitutional system" (Kabele, 2008, p. 206) whose elements – Party hierarchy, state (non-party) hierarchy, monopolistic state ownership, dependency threads and intra-hierarchical boundaries between the state and the Party, together with the system of dependency as a path of organizational and private interest enforcement – all created a party-state that institutionalized a formal hierarchy between institutions and decision-makers (Kabele, 2008). In this political structure, the three components of power – the Party, state institutions and armed forces – created what Kabele calls 'hierarchic balancing' (Kabele, 2008) where the Party practised dominant influence over the other two, thus establishing a binary power structure with state institutions and armed forces being subordinated to ruling politicians.

² According to the Population and Housing Census by the Romanian Institute of National Statistics from 2011, the largest ethnic groups in present-day Romania include Hungarians (6.10%), Ukrainians (0.25%), Germans (0.17%), Russians (0.11%) and Turks (0.13%).

In this constructivist structure, the constant political interdependence and hierarchy between party and non-party bodies rested on a network of *nomenklatura* members who decided upon committee appointments and positions (Deletant, 1995). The party state's communist hierarchy rested on the state administration and armed forces, which were both under strict Party control (Tismăneanu, 2003). In this way, the state created a collision of political hierarchies. As Christine Levine (2015) suggests in her study on social and political hierarchies, the amalgamation and intersection of hierarchical forms often result in “the most straightforward manifestations of brute power” (Levine, 2015, p. 85). As she states, when hierarchies collide – be it in bureaucratic management or the hierarchical binary of gender – they generate more disorder than order. The collision of hierarchies leads to absolute domination and, consequently, oppression that all have deforming effects on a society.

Nicolae Ceaușescu's dynastic socialism (Tismăneanu, 2003) is an evident example of such a hierarchical collision whose ruler-ruled two-sided dichotomy arranged bodies according to importance or levels of power. Ceaușescu was determined to reconstitute the socialist state as ‘People-As-One’ (Kligman, 1998), which included the marginalization of citizens who did not fit into this ideological concept, thus punishing political opponents, ethnic minorities, the LGBT community as well as females who did not serve the country's pronatalist policy (Gallagher, 2009).

For re-creating Romanian society as one body, Ceaușescu inaugurated a strict form of biopolitical establishment (Foucault, 1977) that controlled reproduction and sexual behaviour (Kligman, 1998). Despite his alleged reform of equality, he made steps towards deepening the feminine-masculine binaries. He claimed the foetus to be “the socialist property of the whole society” (Harsanyi, 1992, p. 46) and alleged that “giving birth is a patriotic duty [and] those who refuse to have children are deserters, escaping the law of natural continuity” (Baban, 1999, p. 199). As a further step, with the legislation of Decree 770 in 1966, he forbade abortions and the use of any kind of contraception, to increase the fertility rate in the country (Kligman, 1998). Those who secretly performed abortions were punished with a sentence of one- to three-year imprisonment and “one- to three-year prohibition against the exercise of specified civil rights” (Kligman, 1998, p. 57). The number of self-induced, illegal abortions rose year by year and became the predominant contraceptive method among women, including several dangerous and desperate actions that resulted in the death of about 10,000 women during the Ceaușescu period (Deletant, 2019).

The regime's political demography defined the parameters of citizen's life: marriage, death, work and relationships were under absolute control

(Deletant, 2019). Sexuality was for procreation and was eliminated from the public discourse, removed from films and from everyday life (Baban, 1999). Also, females were educated to fear men: it was said and thought that coition outside the family and without the purpose of reproduction was immoral and led to insanity (Deletant, 1995). The perfect woman was supposed to be married and asexual, productive in work and fertile, giving the state at least five children during her lifetime (Kligman, 1998). Childless couples over the age of 25 were also punished with additional taxation (Deletant, 2019).

The strict control also affected homosexuals, who were considered mentally ill and were often sentenced to psychiatric hospitals (Deletant, 1995). The regime used homosexuality as an accusation against dissenters who undermined the creation of the new socialist man (Stan & Turcescu, 2007, pp. 316–317). In this manner, the support of the Orthodox Church for eliminating gay citizens only exacerbated the already existing tension between homosexuals and the state (Natase, 2004). In 1968, Ceaușescu revised Article 200 that punished homosexual acts with one to five years' imprisonment (Natase, 2004) and imposed a ban on private sexual activity and discourse. As Long (1998) notes, "Article 200 suppressed not just any public development of gay and lesbian identity but the very acts and desires on which that identity might be based. ... Article 200 was a comprehensive effort to keep a new minority identity from breaking forth" (Long, 1998, p. 14). LGBT activities were thus closely watched and reported to the authorities. By imposing a total ban on the private sexual sphere and same-sex relations, the socialist government abolished any access to privacy and free self-expression and eliminated LGBT activities from the public sphere (Long, 1998).

While communist regimes propagated egalitarianism – with small wage differences and gender equality – Romanian society still abounded in political, ethnical and gender-based hierarchies. Besides Ceaușescu's aim to Romanize the country by eliminating ethnic minorities via banning foreign languages from public life and the right to education in their mother tongue (McMahon, 2007), the government set up a strong patriarchal system that was structured along female-male gender dichotomies. Although the three communist Constitutions in 1948, 1952 and 1965 emphasized women's political rights and gender equality, and encouraged women to participate in the political structure, they had less participation in decision-making (Băluță & Rothstein, 2015). Women were second-rate citizens who, while representing about 46% of the workforce, were overrepresented in low-status jobs, their wage being lower than men's (Friedlmeier & Gavreliuc, 2013). Ceaușescu's system rewrote gender identities and forced women to think

about themselves as mothers, while those who resisted this idea – including gay citizens – had to face collective punishment, which only strengthened traditional gender differences. Thus, although the system pronounced equality and emancipation in the workforce, it failed to redefine the roles of representations of gender, while maintaining patriarchal structure and values (Băluță & Rothstein, 2015).

Post-Socialist Hierarchies

Norman Manea (2004), a well-known Romanian writer who went into exile during the Ceaușescu era, identified the post-socialist epoch as moving forward and backward at the same time. According to him, the contract with the future, the pursuit for international recognition and the adaptation of socio-economic requirements push Romania towards a democratic, liberal framework while, on the other hand, the communist past and the rethinking of history and social values pushes it backwards. He argues that in the post-Ceaușescuian framework, the country's most important values are hierarchy and authority which, as Carey and Eisterhord (Carey & Eisterhord, 2004) further elaborate, have given way to a fragmented party structured and dominated by patrimonialism and clientelism. In the new political structure, the power and constructivist method of leadership and state structure have been replaced with an oligarchy of elites from the socialist *nomenklatura* who have absolute control over the Romanian state. This “post-sultanistic society”, as Sellin (2004, p. 117) has put it, is structured along former communist networks that serve as the basis of Romanian post-communist patrimonialism. According to him, in the capitalist era, people still follow the lead of the previous constructivist epoch by being subordinated to the top echelon of political authority that, with the help of bureaucracy, still practises omniscient power. Long-oppressed society responds to the new structure by organizing itself along patron-client lines that, similarly to the previous ruler-ruled binary structure, keep citizens in a subordinate position.

The post-communist patrimonial politics and the new era of “baronization”, as Sellin (2004, p. 129) puts it, “is ... manifested in the battle for control of cadres with personalized loyalties across multiple institutional and policy channels” (Sellin, 2004, p. 119). As Gallagher (2009) emphasizes, the communist elite has maintained its ruling economic and political position after the system change and since, and made Romania “the number one place for corruption in the former Soviet satellites of Eastern Europe” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 205). This led to great mistrust between society and politics (Constantineanu, 2010, p. 188). As a Eurobarometer survey published in 2008 illustrates, people

generally lack trust in the justice system and, despite the pressure from the European Union to deal with corruption in Romania, the presence of former *nomenklatura* members in leading positions and the newly inaugurated anti-corruption law in 1999 seem to have less effect on the economic order, whose characteristics still mirror the previous epoch's political thinking of hierarchic balancing (Gallagher, 2009). As Stoica (2012) describes, while the 1990-2004 period was marked by the phenomenon of power seeking wealth, since 2004 the dominant tendency has been that of wealth seeking power, whereby entrepreneurs and businesspeople enter politics to practise influence. This neo-feudal order thus operates with local barons that have absolute access to state resources (Verdery, 1996). The survival of the communist elite and former "cadres" suggests that leaders of businesses, organizations, the police and the political elite still run a constructivist system.

It is, however, not only the political and economic framework that bears marks of the Ceaușescu regime and its hierarchic balancing. The reproductive policy, the inequality between sexes and the mistreatment of minorities left a significant imprint in Romania's social life and people's way of thinking. Women's representation and participation in leading positions are still rare: the members of the five administrations from 1990 to 1999 were all male, and women still remain second-rank politicians (Băluță & Rothstein, 2015). Because of the half-century-long devaluation of women, gender inequality is still persistent in the social framework. According to a national inquiry about gender representations from 2000, 63% of Romanians believe that women are responsible for domestic tasks, 70% argue that males are the main breadwinners and 83% believe them to be the head of the household (Băluță & Rothstein, 2015).

The post-communist *Zeitgeist* – together with the Orthodox Church's central and decision-making position in the country and its homophobic standpoint (Ramet, 2007) – thus (re)created a conservative society, with the reaffirmation of traditional gender roles and anti-feminist attitudes (Manea, 2004; Turcescu & Stan, 2014). As Miroiu and Popescu (Miroiu & Popescu, 2004) emphasize, "The Communist regime succeeded in educating people into negative feminine features: obedience, fear and an underlying lack of autonomy and assertiveness" (Miroiu & Popescu, 2004, p. 306), which created a deeply hierarchical and divided society. Because feminist values have rarely been acknowledged by most of society, women are still positioned in subordinate roles, which is further exacerbated by people's ever-rising confidence in the Orthodox Church that propagates traditional gender roles and anti-feminist attitudes (Friedlmeier & Gavreliuc, 2013).

Present-day Romanian society thus functions as a traditional rather than a modern structure, which suggests a certain return to the pre-socialist era.

Interestingly, as Friedlmeier and Gavreliuc (Friedlmeier & Gavreliuc, 2013) point out, compared to Generation 20 and Generation 50 – the younger and elder population in Romania, Generation 35 – people who were born in the late Ceaușescu period – practise the most conservative attitude, hierarchy and low egalitarianism.

In the light of this, it is less surprising that Romania is still one of the most homophobic and conservative countries in Eastern Europe (Moraru, 2010). Most of the *ex-nomenclatura* politicians and the majority of Generation 35 consider gay activities to be sinful, unnatural acts that lead to social decay (Natase, 2004). In 1998, the prohibition of homosexuality was even more intense than after the system change: Act 200 not only criminalized public homosexual acts, but gay organizations as well. For gay citizens, the post-socialist era was thus dominated by beatings, humiliation, imprisonment and constant physical and mental abuse by the police (Reekie, 2012). In the late 2000s, Romania remained the only country that intended to join the European Union with a law that criminalized homosexuality. Eventually, the pressure from the Council of Europe led to the decriminalization of gay activities and in 2001, Act 200 was eliminated from the Constitution. Still, homosexuality is often referred to by politicians as an illness that should be eradicated from Romania, while anti-gay activity protests are frequently held in the country (Roman, 2003).

Silent Valley: Homosexuality Uncovered

The local Romanian HBO production *Silent Valley* tackles controversial topics by representing homosexuality, corruption in state institutions, organized crime networks supervised by politicians, females in leading positions, and the oligarchical structure of the Romani minority that were and still are considered taboos in the Romanian social discourse.

The series is an adaptation of the Norwegian *Øyevitne* (*Eyewitness*, 2014) written and directed by Jarl Emsell Larsen. The seven-episode crime production was remade in the USA and France as well, but the plot shows significant differences in the case of Romania. The creators aimed at producing a national thriller set in a genuinely contemporary context that mirrors the socio-political atmosphere of Romania. As Marian Crișan, the director of *Silent Valley* emphasizes, they added local elements to the story and focused on characters that are anchored in the Romanian reality in order to create an honest representation of the contemporary landscape of the country, while tackling divisive issues such as the functioning of the Anti-Drug Ops and Special Ops Division (DIICOT) and the controversial – often corrupt – role of the police in investigations (Marinescu, 2016).

Silent Valley tells the story of two teenagers, Horia (Vlad Balan) and Filip (Theodor Soptelea) who, during a night of intimacy at a cottage belonging to Horia's family, witness a murder of four men in the woods. Afraid of their homosexual encounter being exposed, they deny their presence at the scene to the police. However, the tension between the two boys grows day by day as Filip – who faced the murderer – fears for his life, and Horia suffers from insomnia after the events. While Filip tries to get close to his friend and help him, Horia rejects his every attempt by pronouncing his homophobic standpoint, which pushes Filip into an ever-deeper crisis.

The series' other main plotline revolves around the investigation led by Filip's adoptive mother, Elena Zamfir (Rodica Lazar). Elena is a well-respected criminal prosecutor who, because of the corruptive political climate in Bucharest, relocated her family to Brasov. The middle-aged woman soon learns that one of the victims was an undercover DIICOT policeman who infiltrated the infamous Jartea Clan, a local Romani underworld group. While Elena investigates the hermetic world of the Roma community, the Anti-Drug Ops and Special Ops Division of the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT) inaugurates their new leader – the perpetrator of the crimes in the forest – Robert Dima (Emilian Oprea). Robert is a professional, obsessive leader whose aim is to deal with organized crime in Brasov at any cost. His violent, unorthodox methods and unexpected raids on the Jartea Clan only hinder Elena's investigation.

As predicted by Antony Root, HBO Europe's executive for original programming and production, the local version of the Norwegian thriller played very differently in Romania (Holdworth, 2016). On the series' IMDb page, the first comment criticizes *Silent Valley* for its homosexual content that, as the writer states, "is too much for us". While such homophobic reactions are quite common on other film sites such as *Cinemagia.ro* as well as the series' Facebook page, others praised the show for its novel content and the courage to dissect such controversial topics. People who disliked the show blamed it for its representation of homosexuality, while others who supported it concentrated on topics of corruption, injustice and the controversial role of the police in the investigation, and welcomed the honest approach to Romanian society.

Beyond doubt, the producers of the Romanian version of *Eyewitness* were prepared for this divided reaction, which might be the reason why the intimate relationship of the two teenagers is less prominent in the production. In the American as well as Norwegian version of the show, the boys are depicted kissing and hugging in almost every episode, while in *Silent Valley* such intimate actions are rarely shown. It is only in the first

episode and the opening sequence that Horia and Filip have any bodily interaction. Other than this scene, there is only one further reference to the boys' mutual attraction. However, the explicit representation of such acts is completely missing in the following episodes, which not only suggests the legacy of the socialist epoch's homophobic policy, but also the impact of the Orthodox Church and contemporary Romanian anti-gay movements.

Also, while in the Norwegian and American versions of the show, Filip's family are supportive and open towards his sexual orientation and attraction, in *Silent Valley* the characters handle his coming out with serious reservations. First, it is Filip's biological mother who warns him of the consequences of his homosexuality, stating that she hopes it is only a temporary period in the boy's life. The tension between the mother and Filip is further emphasized by circular camera movements that not only create continuity in the sequence, but create absolute tension by presenting the two characters in a 180-degree shot. The same stylistic device is used in the most heightened narrative moments. When Filip confesses his confrontation with the murderer to Elena, the camera work again takes on a spatial continuity in the narrative space, similar to the scenes when Robert is giving orders to his colleagues on how to attack the Jarcea clan. The semi-circular camera movements thus always suggest tension in the narrative and are used in key moments that further the narrative progression of the story as a whole.

In contrast to his coming out to his mother, when Filip confesses to Elena and his foster father that he has feelings for Horia, their reaction is complete shock and silence. This scene – opposite to the stylistic devices used in the heightened scenes – is choreographed in a shot and counter-shot triangle structure that focuses on the characters' facial expression. This traditional set-up creates less tension in the narrative space, for at this point, Filip has nothing to lose. While Elena and her husband avoid any comment on Filip's coming out, Horia's father labels his son's friend with pejorative adjectives and forbids him to see the boy. His aggressive outrage leaves no option for Horia but to break his ties with Filip. Unlike other adaptations of the show, *Silent Valley* ends with Horia entering his father's car, thus avoiding greeting his friend who awaits him in front of the hospital. This open ending clearly references the contemporary Romanian homophobic framework. Together with avoiding the direct representation of any detailed, intimate gay activity on screen, the show mirrors the aftermath of the previous regime's conservative gender policy still prevalent in the contemporary social discourse.

The visual representation of the two boys only strengthens Romanian's controversial outlook on the topic. Unlike the characters in the Norwegian and American shows, Filip gets a more feminine presence on screen. In

contrast to Horia, whose dark hair, muscular figure, manly clothing style and motorcycling hobby stand for the socially accepted Romanian male figure, Filip's skinny, pale character is usually represented in light-coloured and pink t-shirts. This visual depiction of and difference between the two boys in *Silent Valley* clearly mirrors society's misunderstanding and misinterpretation of homosexuality and gender roles in Romania. In contrast to the Norwegian and American shows, where both teenagers have an equal visual representation and similar traits, the Romanian show references Filip's sexual orientation by feminizing him on screen. Thus, while *Silent Valley* attempts to break the taboos of the previous and contemporary political epoch, it does so in a very cautious way. The socialist regime's homophobic standpoint as well as the present influence of the Orthodox Church and political leadership – together with Romania's homophobic social context – clearly influenced the creators of the show, who put less emphasis on the physical attraction of the boys towards each other in order to match the profile of the local televisual market.

Female Identities

While the representation of homosexuality in *Silent Valley* resonates with the old, conservative understanding of gay activities in the country, and demonstrates the divided understanding of homosexuality in present-day Romania, the series goes against the depiction of women as second-rate citizens. The main investigator, Elena, is not only a powerful, ambitious character but a childless woman too, who has devoted her life to her career. She supervises the investigation and her male colleagues, and decides upon the police's every step. In conservative, patriarchal Romanian society, the representation of such a feminine leader figure goes against the traditional gender roles, which is often emphasized by Robert's chauvinistic expressions towards Elena. He often makes fun of the woman by calling her mom, while constantly questioning her capabilities in proceeding with the case. Despite her complicated situation, Elena, the forensic district attorney, does not step back from the investigation; what is more, she firmly answers the questions of the press and represents the case in public channels as a strong, committed and professional criminal prosecutor. Her strength is further portrayed by her Westernized look: she is a blond, blue-eyed, slim character who always wears elegant clothes and make-up, which signals her independent, open-minded position within the conservative set.

What makes her character even more unusual in the Romanian social context is her relationship with her husband. As an unemployed man, Silviu (Mihai Calin) takes care of the household and Filip, which overwrites

the traditional, dominating gender forms in Romania. While in the Norwegian and American shows, husbands are utterly supportive of their wives, Silviu constantly blames Elena for not spending enough time at home with Filip. He goes so far as to state that Filip's psychological crisis is due to the investigator's absence from home and later blames Elena for his own unemployed situation. Their arguments create serious domestic conflicts because Silviu – like Robert – is incapable of acknowledging his subordinate, untraditional role. While Elena has absolute dominance in the police hierarchy, her ambitious, careerist position leads to conflicts at home. Despite these everyday misunderstandings, the woman does not give up her dominating position which, for a patrilineal and patriarchal society, comes as a surprise.

The character of the main investigator stands in sharp contrast with that of the socialist ideal woman. Elena has no children and no experience of motherhood, she spends all her time working by leading the district investigation bureau; what is more, in the end it is she who reckons with the dominating male character, Robert. *Silent Valley* thus not only scratches the surface of homosexual taboos but goes against the traditional Romanian gender roles, an initiative that might contribute to overwriting the traditional Romanian televisual forms of gender binaries.

Elena – along with Robert – also often expresses her standpoint of *nomenklatura* members being responsible for crimes in the country. The role of oligarchies and corrupt DIICOT members are often referenced by Elena and Robert who, not fearing the consequences, both aim to deal with the leading crime groups. In this regard, Robert is complex character who is determined to stop political crime and corruption in Romania but in order to do so, he must sacrifice his life.

Roma Minorities

While in the Norwegian show it is the Balkan mafia that causes headache for the police, *Silent Valley* features the Gypsy minority as the organizers of crime in Brasov. Be it the Hungarian, German or Roma situation in the country, the ethnic question was always a controversial issue in the socialist period of Romania. Ceaușescu supported Roma groups by employing them in agriculture and improved their housing, educational and living standards (Barany, 2004). At the beginning of the 1980s, Gypsies got settled in fixed dwellings in urban areas, which eliminated their nomadic way of life and improved their living conditions in blocks of flats (Achim, 2004). At the same time, however, the systematization process made them a minority in the new environments, and the elimination of their traditional

neighbourhoods caused severe problems (Crowe, 2007). As a 1977 report indicates, the supporting measures – such as their registration at the civilstatus office, the legalization of marriages between them, schooling, hygiene education and military service – did not lead to the expected results (Achim, 2004). In 1977, 32.7% of the Gypsy population were unemployed, there were still around 65,000 nomadic Gypsies in the country and, because of their drop-out from schools and the inability to acquire qualifications, the majority suffered unemployment (Achim, 2004, p. 191) and were forced into the mafia-like underground or black market to make a living (Pavel, 1998, p. 71). While they were offered jobs by the socialist leadership, the work was meant for unskilled and poorly paid labour, which put Gypsies on the lowest rung in society; thus they were often subjected to anti-Romani sentiment and violence (Crowe, 2007, pp. 145–146). While a group of Gypsy intellectuals and industrial workers appeared during the socialist regime – which was the main goal of the Romanian leadership – they only made and still make up a marginal group within society (Boia, 2001; Engebrigtsen, 2007).

Since the fall of communism, Romani groups have been less involved in education and face constant discrimination in society. Because they rarely possess any marketable skills, and lost their jobs in the agricultural sphere after the system change, their unemployment rate has skyrocketed. In 1994, 52% of adults belonging to the Gypsy community were unemployed (Barany, 2004), while their criminal activities and involvement in drug trafficking and theft have risen significantly (Boia, 2001). As Achim (2004) notes, “There is no doubt that the level of criminality among the Roma population is much higher than among the level for the country as a whole” (Achim, 2004, p. 206). Today, the gap between the Gypsy minority and the Romanian population is constantly increasing (Nicolae, 2013).

Currently, at 5.25%, the Romani minority is the second-largest minority group in Romania (Nicolae, 2013), which causes tension in interethnic relations. In a highly stratified society such as Romania, we only find a small number of wealthy Roma, while many of them left their villages and established slums and squatter settlements with poor living standards on the outskirts of Romanian cities. Because of the rising criminal profile and unemployment, Gypsies now stand at the bottom of the social hierarchy and, as Toma (2006) concludes in her ethnographic-quantitative research on Gypsy stereotypes in Romania, Romanian citizens consider them to be “lazy, thieves and dirty ... because they don’t want to work, ... they are not decent like other normal people ... and they don’t deserve social assistance” (Toma, 2006, p. 157).

The representation of a Romani clan in *Silent Valley* as the town's main criminals is an evident response to the current socioeconomic and ethnic discourse in Romania, while it also consolidates Western cinematic stereotypes of the Balkans. As Cruz (2008) puts it, the Euro-centred cinematic model – with films such as Terence Young's *From Russia with Love* (1963), Michael Bay's *The Rock* (1996) or Michael Winterbottom's *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997) – has set up a portrait of the region as a “land inhabited by vengeful savages who let their primitive violent instincts guide them, [characterized by] male chauvinism, treason, beautiful women, unworthy of trust, brutal force, alcohol, gambling, revenge” (Cruz, 2008, pp. 17–18). The Western influence generated a regional cinema driven by self-exoticization that goes hand in hand with mirroring stereotypical self-representation, thus confirming Western cinema's Euro-centred vision of the Balkans (Cruz, 2008, p. 22). As Imre (2003) and Iordanova (2003) conclude, European films that feature Romani people work with reoccurring themes, narratives and settings that feature patriarchal power structures within families, a nomadic way of life, poverty and folk music. In a similar vein, Eastern European examples from the contemporary cinematic corpus – such as Benedek Fliegau's *A szél (Just the Wind)*, (2012) or Martin Šulík's *Cigán (Gypsy)*, (2011) – represent remote locations and a pre-industrial way of life to suggest the temporal and geographical remoteness of the Gypsy population, which forces “a visual performance of otherness” (Hadziavdic & Hoffmann, 2017, p. 709).

This way of self-exoticization and the common cinematic tropes of Gypsies are dominant in *Silent Valley*. Aleodor (Ioan Tiberiu Dobrică), the youngest Romani figure who is chased by the Jardea clan, and his family live in an impoverished suburban slum surrounded by muddy paths, horses and crumbling houses (Figure 1). Women in this setting wear kerchiefs and long skirts, and are subordinated to the male members of the family. While the spatial setting of the Roma community emphasizes their marginal position within Romanian society and corresponds to the stereotypical portrayal of Gypsies in Western media (Schneeweis & Foss, 2017), the series' other spaces suggest a Westernized, Eurocentric image (Shohat & Stam, 1994). In contrast to the barely lit, dark inner places of the slum and its old, dilapidated interiors, Elena's brightly lit home and well-decorated, modern house signals a contemporary Western way of life. Her outfit and her representation as a strong woman is thus synchronized with her domestic sphere, which sets up a hierarchical structure between the middle class and the marginalized Gypsy community, while it also does away with socialist interiors and décor to suggest the opening of a new epoch in Romania's history.

The neglected slum area also stands in strong contrast with the home of the ex-lawyer Gypsy baron, Nicu Jardea (Ovidiu Niculescu). The prosperous members of Jardea's organization are depicted wearing heavy gold necklaces, watches and bracelets. With their open shirts hardly covering their muscular, tattooed bodies, the presence of Romani men communicates danger and absolute power. With its antique golden furniture and grandiose inner spaces, Nicu Jardea's home signals his superior position within the local Romani community. As the local baron, he often hosts parties, employs bodyguards and has a wide network of informants and men loyal to him. His power is further emphasized by his representation in the narrative space. In most of the scenes, he is featured in the centre of the image as he faces his men, giving out orders. He is captured through over-the-shoulder shots, which illustrates his dominant position, while his pink t-shirt and gold necklaces illuminate his masculine figure in the barely lit spaces where he is usually featured (Figure 2). Jardea's baron-like position is thus featured via his physiognomy and spatial positioning as well as his portrayal in dark locations that all suggest his power and emanate danger.

In *Silent Valley*, the hierarchy in the Roma structure is built on the exploitation of the less prosperous Gypsy population that has no other option but to obey the gang's orders. The Roma community, together with wealthy businessmen, the police force and oligarchs create a hierarchical balance that, similarly to the Ceaușescu period, is built on the binary structure of "him versus us". Robert is clearly aware of this situation and the fact that, because of the leading hierarchical structure that involves *ex-nomenklatura* members, politicians and businessman, the only way to deal with organized crime is violence and severe psychological pressure. His character as a murderer and head of the DIICOT thus becomes more nuanced: on the one hand, he is a hero who attempts to stop crime in the region by getting involved in a murder through which he settles accounts with members of the Jardea clan. He acts as an oligarch of drug trafficking in order to catch the members of the organization. On the other hand, by murdering one of his undercover colleagues and kidnapping Filip, he makes several mistakes.

Unlike the killer in the Norwegian show, Robert is a positive figure whose only aim is to do his duty by going against the oligarchs of the region. As his death suggests, however, such an initiative is doomed to fail and organized crime continues operating in Romania. The police are incapable of fighting against the ruling position and suspicious activities of oligarchs, which predicts a negative, albeit realistic future image of Romanian hierarchical structures. The inheritance of the previous regime's binary political power structures and gender policy are further emphasized by the

show's camera work. While the *mise-en-scène* of *Silent Valley* is structured along the classical lines of shots and counter-shots, close-ups and fixed camera positions, the city and the surrounding forest are captured via aerial drone shots, which not only opens up the narrative space but, by using this device prior to the occurrence of the crimes, universalizes the message of the show on a greater, national level (Figure 3). In this way, Brasov stands for Romania and represents the country as a dangerous territory, with oligarchs, organized crime, corruption, brimming xenophobia and anti-gay views, which, on the one hand, references the previous political epoch, while also suggesting a post-socialist neo-feudal order with leading oligarchic powers on the other. This message is further emphasized by the crimes that all happen in the surrounding forests. The murder, Horia's accident and, finally, Robert's death all take place amidst nature, which detaches the show from the city and opens up the space of the forest as an allegory of contemporary Romanian society and hierarchies.

Conclusion

In terms of discussing and representing the taboos of the Ceaușescu epoch and its inherited and revived clientelism, patrimonialism, homophobia and xenophobia, *Silent Valley* is a breakthrough in Romanian televisual history. The show breaks ties with the previous regime's gender policy and identities by featuring a childless, strong woman as the lead in the narrative, and – although in a much more limited manner than the Norwegian production and its adaptations – openly references homosexuality on screen. Also, albeit in a Euro-centric way, it references the Gypsy minority question in the country and the inability of the ethnic group to leave poverty and break its ties with the underworld. While *Silent Valley* uses a rather stereotypical portrayal of Romani groups, the Romanian audience's divided response focused on male homosexuality on screen and the too liberal portrayal of same-sex relationships, which clearly suggests the impact of the Ceaușescu epoch's anti-gay policy and the present standpoint of the Orthodox Church, which both contributed to setting up a conservative social discourse in Romania.

Besides questions of gender and same-sex relationships, *Silent Valley* portrays the constructivist socialist structure's hierarchic balance that now organizes itself according to oligarchic power, which illustrates that authority and people's subjugation to it is still dominant in Romanian society. The series openly references the involvement of oligarchs and politicians in the crime network that, as suggested by the series, is only possible to deal with using unorthodox, violent means. Whether it is a metaphor of and a call for a new revolution that might give justice to people – as everyday protests

against corruption indicate – or a hopeless warning to break the binary patron-client power structure, remains a question of the future.

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Régi és új hierarchiák: Átírt társadalmi normák a *Silent Valley*

A tanulmány egy formalista-strukturalista olvasaton belül a szocialista és kapitalista hierarchikus struktúrákat vizsgálja a *Silent Valley* (Valea Mută, 2016) című román sorozatban, miközben emellett érvel, hogy – a Ceaușescu-rendszer tabujait megdöntő, avagy a homoszexualitás, változó nemi szerepek, a roma helyzet és korrupció témaköreit nyíltan felvállaló – produkció új fejezetet nyitott az ország televíziós sorozatgyártásában. A tanulmány központi fókusza a szocialista politikai hierarchiák felfedése

jelen kontextusban, és a változó domináns nemi szerepek reflexiójának leképezése a kortárs televíziós szférában.

Kulcsszavak: Románia, *Silent Valley*, kisebbségek, hierarchiák, hierarchikus egyensúly, homoszexualitás, roma közösség, nemi bináris fájlok.

Stare i nowe hierarchie. Napisane na nowo normy społeczne w *Silent Valley*

Artykuł bada socjalistyczne i kapitalistyczne struktury hierarchiczne w rumuńskim serialu *Silent Valley* (Valea Mută, 2016) w ujęciu formalno-strukturalnym. [Autorka] argumentuje jednocześnie, że przełamując tabu systemu Ceaușescu poprzez otwarte podjęcie tematów homoseksualizmu, zmieniania ról płciowych, sytuacji Romów i korupcji, produkcja otworzyła nowy rozdział w dziejach seriali telewizyjnych w Rumunii. Głównym przedmiotem artykułu jest ukazanie w tym kontekście socjalistycznych hierarchii politycznych oraz refleksja nad zmianą dominujących ról płciowych we współczesnej sferze telewizyjnej.

Słowa kluczowe: Rumunia, *Silent Valley*, mniejszości, hierarchie, równowaga hierarchiczna, homoseksualność, wspólnota Romów, binarność płciowe.

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Annex



Figure 1. The Gypsy slum in *Silent Valley*



Figure 2. Jarte's screen dominance in *Silent Valley*



Figure 3. The universalising area shot in *Silent Valley*Note