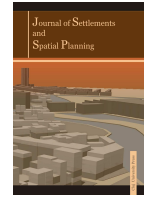




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Women's Roles, Place Attachment and the Socialist Nation in *Cutezătorii* Magazine. Representations in Comics Featuring Romanian Communist Pioneers

Oana-Ramona ILOVAN *1

* Corresponding author

1 Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, Department of Regional Geography and Territorial Planning, Territorial Identities and Development Research Centre, Cluj-Napoca, ROMANIA

✉ oana.ilovan@ubbcluj.ro  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2075-1808>

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ABSTRACT

Socialism created materially and discursively an ideological context (and then tradition) to control social space and implicitly people's experiences in society and space. The aim of my research is to identify representations of the women's roles in communist Romania, as these were constructed by propaganda in comics for communist pioneers and published in *Cutezătorii* [The Daring Ones] magazine (1967-1989). My research material is made of comics where Romanian communist pioneers appear as characters. I discuss gender representations using discourse analysis and critical visual analysis. I interpret these gender representations in relation with the socialist nation and place meanings, as constructed by the official discourse. My research explores the meanings of place and the attachments created, which rest on the respective meanings. I consider the role of this official discourse about place meanings in constructing students' place attachments (i.e., readers of the respective magazine). I concluded that the egalitarian ideology of the communist regime did not affect the patriarchal and the engendered inequalities in the Romanian society because the paternalist communist state supported the patriarchal regime. Comics show a patriarchal society despite the communist propaganda about an egalitarian society. In addition, I showed how, in the analysed comics, which were part of the popular culture, nature- and culture-induced place attachment was influenced by a gendered socialisation with space.

1. INTRODUCTION

Socialism created materially and discursively an ideological context (and then tradition) to control social space and implicitly people's experiences in society and space (Verdery, 1991; Zahariade, 2011). The aim of my research is to identify representations of women's roles in communist Romania, as these were constructed by propaganda in comics for communist pioneers and published in *Cutezătorii* [The Daring Ones] magazine (1967-1989).

Cutezătorii was the most significant magazine for communist pioneers before 1989. In this article, I refer to comics that were created and published during the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceauşescu (1965-1989). My research material is made of comics where Romanian communist pioneers appear as characters. I used as research material three comics with pioneers which had as a subject the *Cutezătorii* Expeditions. I chose the topic of these expeditions due to the political and ideological intent that was at the basis of their organisation.

Socialist and nationalist ideologies were promoted through *Cutezătorii* magazine, and this was transparent also in the published comics. A special type of comics reflects pioneers' lives: (1) real happenings and (2) invented stories having a real referent. I chose the second category and out of this I focused on comics whose referent in reality was represented by the *Cutezătorii Expeditions* (e.g., the stories of these comics are partially or entirely fictional).

This research is based on descriptive and reflexive approaches to comics for pioneers. I discuss gender representations using discourse analysis and critical visual analysis. I interpret these gender representations in relation with the socialist nation and place meanings, as constructed by the official discourse. I consider the role of this official discourse about place meanings and gender in constructing students' place attachments (i.e., readers of the respective magazine).

My research explores the meanings of place and the attachments created, which rest on the respective meanings (for the creation of place and community-based identity, cf. Scannell and Gifford, 2010; Sabău, 2015, 2020; Sabău and Ilovan, 2019; Ilovan and Markuszewska, 2022). These meanings are expressed in statements about place, about its identity. Therefore, in comics, both territorial identities and attachments are discursively constructed, and my article aims to investigate how place attachment and especially attachment to the nation was built under an authoritarian regime. This rhetorical construction of the nation is realised through places imagined by propaganda in comics. Therefore, one of my research questions is what are the places/landscapes represented in comics? In the official discourse of propaganda materials for children, *Cutezătorii Expeditions* exhibited communist pioneers', and women's and men's occupational roles and identities. As such, other questions refer to the kind of knowledge these comics constructed based on girls' and boys' roles, through their embodied practices, their emotions, and behaviours in *Cutezătorii Expeditions*. Out of the varied perspectives possible from which to analyse and interpret the discourses of these comics, I chose the lenses of gender and place attachment with the intention to identify connections between them, if any. In doing so, the core concept of my research – the representation – enabled me to find the common tropes of the discourse on women's and men's roles in communist Romania and their characteristic socialisation with space and nation (i.e., leading to attachment). The section below offers several insights into the main theoretical ideas my research is based on.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This research is tributary to the concept of 'representation' in the New Cultural Geography (Rose, 70

2014). Representations are cultural products where power is embedded and which guide the "reading" and understanding of our living environment (Hall, 1977a, 1977b). Representations construct and are constructed within discourses. The discourse is defined as "a particular knowledge about the world" which creates the framework for understanding the world and people's actions (Rose, 2014, p. 190).

Comics are made of and promote certain representations. Mainly visual representations construct the discourse of comics. In addition, visual representations are characterised by complexity due to features both intrinsic to them and to the interaction with other media (Neri and Malatesta, 2022). Previous research on comics shows that their representations of the Romanian society were always strongly connected with the economic, social and cultural realities of a certain period (Niță and Ciubotariu, 2010). Moreover, many of these representations and discourses were imbued by propaganda messages, especially during socialist Romania (Precup, 2015; Hațegan, 2017; Țăgșorean, 2017; Ilovan, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b; cf. also Roșca, 2006, for the mechanism of propaganda in Romanian mass media).

Comics, due to their large-scale distribution in propaganda magazines, became part of the mass or popular culture and of the social domination imposed by the culture industry under national socialism (cf. Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002). Besides, being profoundly spatial cultural products (Dittmer, 2014; Ilovan, 2020a, 2021a, 2021b), comics reflected the general understandings of social life. During the socialist period, a patriarchal view about women's roles in the Romanian society dominated (Jinga, 2015; Massino, 2019). This patriarchal mentality was called by Miroiu "the multi-millenary totalitarian regime" (Miroiu, 2020, p. 2).

Therefore, spatial socialisation and the creation of place attachment, as well as gender socialisation, could be included among the multi-layered interpretations possible for comics. I will analyse these in the research presented below.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research material of this article consists of a selection of three comics. These three comics out of those published in *Cutezătorii* magazine, which appeared in socialist Romania from 1967 to 1989, feature communist pioneers. These comics were analysed, and their messages interpreted. My analysis focuses on the ideological discourse in these sources. To this aim, I considered the analysis of their visual imagery and discourse analysis (for both images and written text). As shown in previous research on socialist visual imagery (cf. Ilovan, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b; Ilovan, Bagoly-Simó and Herbstritt, 2018; Ilovan and

Maroși, 2018; Ilovan and Merciu 2021), and especially on comics, “image-texts had the role of augmenting the word-text messages” (Ilovan, 2020a, p. 50), more than just illustrating them. Comics also have to simplify their visual and written messages in order to fit the rules of the genre, but the textual attributes of comics amplify their messages conveyed through drawings.

As a historical documentary material (Magnussen, 2016), these comics are particularly relevant for research on representations because they feature characters and situations that have a referent in the socialist reality and, as such, their impact on an audience made of pioneers is higher as their

(ideological) messages are more compelling for this anticipated readership.

One of these comics is an episode from a series of eight missions – *Vacanțele unui tânăr liniștit* [A Peaceful Young Man's Holidays] – that Dim Dunăreanu, a character presented as the prototype of the “New Man”, takes on in order to be admitted in the select *Cutezătorii* Club (a fictional club invented for the sake of this comics series). The action takes place during a *Cutezătorii* expedition in the Apuseni Mountains. This particular comics episode is an entirely fictional one, while the last two (cf. Table 1) are based on real *Cutezătorii* expeditions.

Table 1. The selected comics as research material.

Title	Publication year	Authors
<i>Vacanțele unui tânăr liniștit</i> [A Peaceful Young Man's Holidays] episode 7 (no. 27-no. 40/1970) – 14 pages	1970	script: Constantin Diaconu, drawings: Puiu Manu
<i>Florile Carpaților</i> [Flowers of the Carpathians] (no. 34-no. 45/1977) – 12 pages	1977	script: Ileana Pița, drawings: Ofelia Dumitrescu, Ion Mihăiescu (the latter only for no. 43)
<i>La un pas de extraordinar</i> [One Step from the Extraordinary], 4-12/1987 – 8 pages	1987	script: Constantin Diaconu, drawings: Sorin Anghel

Source: own elaboration based on *Cutezătorii* magazine (CNOP, 1967-1989).

I read these comics looking for key themes or ideas and the construction of place attachment (first as spatial socialisation) and of gender socialisation. As a result, I described the visual geographies having the national space as an anchor and I paid particular attention to the way the characters in these comics were constructed, by taking into account gender as a highly relevant part of these characters' identity. In doing so, previous theoretical and empirical research on representations of places and gender in Geography and Cultural studies was particularly useful (cf. Ilovan, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b; Ilovan, Bagoly-Simó and Herbstritt, 2018; Ilovan and Maroși, 2018; Ilovan and Merciu 2021; Rose, 2014).

4. CUTEZĂTORII EXPEDITIONS REFLECTED IN CUTEZĂTORII MAGAZINE

4.1. The context

In Romania, children's magazines date back to the second half of the 19th century (Țăgșorean, 2016). A weekly magazine for children, *Cutezătorii* was first published on the 1st of October 1967, replacing *Cravata Roșie* [The Red Necktie] and appeared without interruption until the Romanian revolution of December 1989. Therefore, it was the magazine for children with the longest appearance during communist Romania. It was supported politically as part of the

official mass media for children and youth: it was published by the National Council of the Pioneers' Organisation. This organisation was answering directly to the Romanian Communist Party as this was decided by the Central Committee of the Party in April 1966 (Tabără, 2011, p. 96). There was a pioneers' organisation in each school. However, despite being a very efficient means of communist propaganda, the appeal of this magazine was built on materials that provided the young readers with an escape (total or partial) from everyday life. Still, those escapist resources would enable the Communist Party's official discourse (i.e., state propaganda) to be conveyed in order to create the “New Man” (i.e., the appropriate good citizen of the utopian communist society).

The three selected comics are just a part (but representative one) of comics featuring pioneers that were published in this magazine during its entire existence and which were inspired by the new and promising socialist realities: in the case of my present research material, comics based on pioneers' heroic deeds or exemplary behaviour. The communist rhetoric and related ideology are transparent in these comics, with certain topics relevant to propaganda being overrepresented or misrepresented so that they fit political intentions and the primary aim of modelling the young Romanians' consciousness (cf. also Verdery, 1991). It is worth emphasising that the publication of *Cutezătorii* takes place during the national-communist

period of Romania (Mârza, 2015, p. 1047) and this ideological frame is explanatory for the focus of the magazine on anything (nature and culture) that could have made the homeland great or perceived as such. In this political context, education was a strong tool used to create patriots, not just of any kind of nation, but of the communist nation (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Communist propaganda and the Romanian children: “Ceaușescu – Romania protect the childhood” (source: first cover of *Cutezătorii*, no. 32/1986, CNOP, 1967-1989).

This explains the focus of actuality comics on foregrounding the material and cultural heritage of Romania. Moreover, this ideological message about the glorious homeland, about its heroic Party and industrious people, was central in *The Pioneer’s Guide* (CNOP, 1985).

4.2. Organisation, aim and features of *Cutezătorii* Expeditions

Cutezătorii Expeditions was a contest launched in 1969 by the National Council of the Pioneers Organisation, together with *Cutezătorii* magazine, as announced on its 15th of May edition (Meseșan, 2018). Its aim was to encourage pioneers to practice tourism and get to know their homeland. Therefore, it was “patriotic tourism” (Georgescu, 2019, p. 74). According to the regulations of the *Cutezătorii* Expeditions contest of 1969 (CNOP, 1969), the places for the expeditions should be always located at above 500 m altitude. It may be that nature over this altitude was perceived as more challenging physically and thus contributing to building participants’ characters. The

exceptions were the expeditions in the Danube Delta – nautical expeditions – or the expeditions along rivers. So, these expeditions took place usually in the mountains.

It is mentioned, in 1969, that three teams from each county might participate at the contest, but we see that this rule was changed in 1970, and more teams were allowed (CNOP, 1970), maybe to encourage more patriots. Participants are students from the 5th to the 8th grade. These pioneers should be organised in teams of maximum ten students each. The regulations mention that the team members are to be selected from those students having good skills or results in one of the following fields: history, archaeology, geography, natural sciences, ethnography, and folklore. Previous experience of walks and trips is preferred. In addition, they should also be assessed considering their physical state and aptitudes, their passion for scientific research, artistic talent, management spirit, etc. Giving a name to the team and creating an emblem is recommended. Thus, the identity of the team is created and members’ attachment to it and the evoked values/identity markers. A training of at least three days is required. Later, this period was of at least ten days. Students need to make these trips walking, preparing their own food and sleeping in tents. Bad weather could influence their choice to sleep in chalets, but this was an exception. Trips in nature and sleeping in tents, eating together self-made food are among the basic traits of these expeditions. Until the 20th edition of *Cutezătorii* Expeditions (in 1989), these became a national phenomenon because they attracted thousands of pioneers during their summer holidays.

These teams have a scientific purpose to be attained in one up to three weeks. Natural, economic and social phenomena are observed during these expeditions. Creative educational activities are encouraged in nature so that pioneers become stronger physically and morally. To overcome oneself is a socialist ideology trope; this overcoming is done through experiences enabled by the communist regime. The national heritage is the focus of such expeditions. Geographical observations and activities are meant to protect nature and landscape. The aim is to research people’s lives and activities, the folklore and ethnography, the flora, the fauna, geological formations, and the historical objectives along the itinerary. National and socialist values are pursued by pioneers under the supervision of a teacher.

In addition, because these expeditions are to be announced by the end of May, *Cutezătorii* magazine publishes their itineraries, stops, etc., so that they could be identified in the field, during summer. Also, the magazine will publish the results of these expeditions. The pioneers’ roles during an expedition are clearly assigned. Pioneers have diverse roles within their teams: captain, ethnographer, historian, geologist,

cook, etc. Roles for girls are usually those of the sanitary, the chronicler, historian, ethnographer, and cook. Roles for boys are the following: captain, adjunct, geographer, photographer, meteorologist, administrator, biologist, geologist, and folklorist (Diac, 2009).

The contest takes place during the entire summer holiday (that is from the end of June to mid-September) and expeditions have minimum ten days. From each county, five teams are selected as the best by the County Councils. Their materials are sent to an exhibition that takes place in Bucharest. These teams are enrolled in the contest by the Sport-Tourism Commission of the National Council of the Pioneers' Organisation. The speciality of each team commander (teacher) is communicated, as well as the route and the objectives of the research, emblem, and name of the team. The approvals of the County Council of Pioneers' Organisation and of the County School Inspectorate are necessary for the enrolment of teams.

The editorial office of *Cutezătorii* sends each team "a mirror of the expedition" that needs to be completed according to instructions. Teams keep a diary of their expedition. All documents sent to *Cutezătorii* magazine for assessment must be signed. For establishing the results of the competition, the students keep in touch with the editorial office of *Cutezătorii* magazine. The discoveries are written in the diary of the expedition, according to students' research objectives. However, everything should be mentioned there (food quality, funny happenings, how they spent their free time, the itinerary, behaviour, weather, etc.). Students were asked to send photos, collections, and the diary ("all their materials") to the National Council of the Pioneers' Organisation:

"Proving special care for the great values of our artistic, historic and documentary heritage, possible archaeological discoveries and highly valuable ethnographical objects will be photographed, described on special files and their presence announced to the specialised institutions of the Council of Culture and Socialist Education" (extracts from the regulations, Mihalcea, 2009).

Due to these organising regulations, expeditions are relatively inexpensive. Expenses for necessary equipment, transport, and accommodation (if needed), are paid by the Romanian state. It is recommended that part of the necessary money is advanced by the students themselves. Examples of how students should acquire the necessary funds are given: selling bottles and jars, selling medicinal plants, selling products realised in the school garden. Later, parents would cover all costs.

For those counties where more than five teams participate at the contest, the editorial office recommends that their collections and other materials be exhibited at the county level. Also, at the county level there are offered, on behalf of the *Cutezătorii* magazine,

the following diplomas: the most valuable collection, the most beautiful photograph, a special deed testifying team spirit, the most courageous girl, the most courageous boy, the funniest joke, the most original team emblem and "the cook of the most tasteful menu" (CNOP, 1969, 1970).

Cutezătorii Expeditions – contest of tourism and scientific research – are presented on the back cover in one of the magazine's issues, announcing the numbers for the summer of 1976:

"more than 40,000 expeditioners take part in this new edition of our great action" – "From Constanța County around 300 teams will start, from Arad County approximately 200, from Bucharest municipium over 100, from Cluj County, about 180 ... In total, almost 3,500 teams, a huge fleet". Advice is given as students aim to "get out of anonymity", to win the grand prize, to visit as much as in a whole year, and that "they want, at all costs, to amaze the world with their performances" (no. 24/1976).

During the real *Cutezătorii* Expeditions, children are shown as enthusiastic and competitive as they want to be awarded prizes for their discoveries, "in trips that are as fascinating as they are temerarious", "in order to engage in the battle and conquer new ... knowledge fields" (Frazzei and Diaconu, 1976).

"At the end of this hard operation, but of great social usefulness", the students feel like winners (they overcome hard geographical conditions, and themselves). For instance, they are all dirty with paint, after a four-days' work during which they were constructors. Then, they were tourists-researchers for the next nine days, to admire beauties and the richness of their homeland, described as exceptional (Diaconu, 1981).

In an article published in *Cutezătorii*, readers find out that *Cutezătorii* Expeditions are "the school for the love of the homeland" (Diaconu, 1988), and interesting and educational aspects of the contest were presented. The author describes pioneers' feelings during such an expedition:

"their hearts were full of joy and enchantment, of profound patriotic pride", "proud to be the sons and daughters of this land" (Diaconu, 1988). They "discovered 'an alpine botanical garden' – one of the few of the world"; this botanical garden was a "wonder of the world" (Diaconu, 1988).

Scientists and locals worked together for the respective garden, doing agriculture at high altitude, "creating new sources of richness and beauty for our country, for all of us" (Diaconu, 1988). Moreover, the expeditioners are impressed also by modern hydroenergetic constructions, dams and lakes, completed in record time. Thus, the diary of such an expedition mentions that people transform nature and make it more grandiose (Diaconu, 1988). Pioneers' expeditions were examples of the pedagogy of children's free time. Students were communist pioneers also during their summer holiday, not only in schools where

the pioneers' organisations were active. In the regulations of these expeditions, it is stipulated that pioneers would congregate, recite, and sing about their homeland, the Communist Party and the supreme communist leader: Nicolae Ceaușescu (Mihalcea, 2009). They were courageous when working or thinking, as well as responsible, and time was to be spent in a pleasant and useful way. They were getting prepared for life as adults and socialist working people. Thus, two types of community attachment were constructed: attachment to the group of pioneers (i.e., to a collectivity), and attachment to the nation. Both are imagined communities (cf. Anderson, 1991). These expeditions are representations of the Golden Epoch of socialism and of the Romanian nation. Through these expeditions, pioneers become engaged with the socialist society and authoritarian state and, at the same time, satisfy their authority, socialise with peers, and spend time away from home. Youth agency is encouraged. The youth are socialised into becoming responsible citizens, volunteers, and leaders.

Cutezători Expeditions advocate for the implementation of the main ideas of communist propaganda – these expeditions are described as “the school for the love of homeland” (CNOP, 1985, p. 65). Since they were launched in 1969, they proposed, most of all, patriotic tourism in Romania – represented as the homeland of heroes and of the Party's and working people's achievements. Political education during that period is based on the ideas of loving the socialist homeland, the Communist Party and the Romanian working people (Patria, Partidul, Poporul - valori fundamentale ale idealului nostru communist [The Homeland, the Party, and the People – fundamental values of our communist ideal] (no. 51/1986) (Fig. 1). Readers' ideological education was realised in this magazine through text explicitly about the aims of Cutezători Expeditions or enforcing their messages: Regulamentul expedițiilor Cutezători [The Regulations of Cutezători Expeditions] (no. 13/1970), Expedițiile Cutezători [Cutezători Expeditions] (no. 23/1975), Expedițiile Cutezători, școala iubirii de patrie [Cutezători Expeditions, school for the love of homeland] (no. 50/1988). The expeditions are at a national scale and focus on “stimulating pioneers to practice tourism in forms that are interesting and attractive” (Meseșan, 2018).

It should be mentioned that similar activities were previously realised within the Scout movement, created in 1907, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, by Lord Baden Powell. In Romania, in 1912, appeared the first groups of scouts. In 1914 is set up the Romania's Scouts Association (Asociația Cercetașii României) and it was abolished in 1937 by Carol II, King of Romania (Cercetașii României, 2022). During this time the Scout movement of Russia was eradicated in 1920 and in 1922 was set up the first

pioneer organisation of Soviet Russia. The organisation is controlled by the Communist Party, its aim was to educate children as communists, but it was modelled on the Scout movement (e.g., the promotion of outdoor skills and sports) (Siegelbaum and Sokolov, 2020). In Romania, the Organisation of Pioneers appeared at the end of World War II and, during its entire existence, it strongly promoted socialist patriotism (Dulamă and Ilovan, 2017, p. 12).

The socialist educational nature of Cutezători Expeditions was transferred into comics. Based on happenings from reality, readers' detached interaction with these comics is suspended. Comics produced the “reality effect” intended by their creators. These comics are either hero or communist narratives that enhance readers' patriotic attachment. This attachment to the homeland is induced through (national) history (i.e., representations of events and people), and through (national) geography (i.e., representations of places) (cf. Ilovan, 2020a). Historical and geographical information is reinterpreted to fit the communist discourse about the homeland and engender the necessary edutainment and its symbolic geographies. Within the official discourse about the homeland, hierarchies are created: the urban area is more important than the village and folk culture (the countryside is represented as outside the reach of socialist modernisation), and men are more useful for socialist construction and therefore superior to women (cf. Ilovan, 2020a).

At the same time, this official discourse taught Romanians a specific visuality (cf. Ilovan, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b; Ilovan, Bagoly-Simó and Herbstritt, 2018; Ilovan and Maroși, 2018; Ilovan and Merciu 2021) to influence generations to come, because ways of seeing are transmitted through generations. The contextual factors (i.e., propaganda was pervasive in a variety of communication means and in all forms of education) ensured the intertextuality of the visual and written discourse promoted by these comics. Thus, the exceptional nature of the events and characters in these comics shifted, for the readers, to be a feature of the socialist society.

Awards and trophies are offered for the most successful expeditions. The criteria for assessment are the relevance, originality and quality of the research, discoveries and collections realised by the team, the attractiveness of the itinerary and members' behaviour. Golden, silver and bronze medals are awarded for those receiving the various types of trophies.

A national jury decided who received trophies, distinctions, and awards. The contest awarded the Great Trophy: “The Golden Compass”. The winners of the national contest were sent on a special trip (in the early days of the contest, this trip was abroad, in the USSR. Then, because of economic scarcity, the awards were less expensive) (Meseșan, 2018). In the regulations of the second edition, published in

Cutezătorii, in 1970 (CNOP, 1970), the name of the second trophy was Sfinxul Carpaților [Sphinx of the Carpathians] for the best itinerary (original and attractive). Two new trophies are announced: one for the best expedition in the Danube Delta and one for the best results of a girls-only team. The trophy "Scutul dacic" [The Dacian Shield] was awarded for research on the history of the homeland. Other trophies were awarded for the most original itinerary, the most valuable collection (of rocks, insects, plants, ethnography, folklore, etc.), the most united team and for the team with the best management spirit. Merit was also recognised by awards at the proposal of the accompanying teachers, for the following: deeds of abnegation, boldness and altruism, as well as for special scientific research.

4.3. *Cutezătorii* Expeditions and propaganda

Cutezătorii Expeditions were part of the communists' reform of education that was meant to help in transforming the social order (cf. Samoff, 1991, p. 2). These expeditions included organised instructional activities outside school. Children's spare time was under state control during these expeditions because of the ideological framework of their organisation.

However, recent research shows that participants enjoyed them very much despite the compulsory political ingredients (Georgescu, 2019). Participants gain autonomy and feel individual progress due to their experiences. Children become self-conscious and self-confident. They feel fulfilled, worthy, and empowered, as well as part of a collectivity. Georgescu (2019) argues that both pioneers and teachers enjoyed formal self-fulfilment participating to these expeditions with tents camping; they pursue the socialist and national values that the socialist pedagogy of citizenship advocated for, and, at the same time, engaged in activities of the socialist regime.

Cutezătorii Expeditions and their educational role are perceived as manifestations of socialist progress and are themselves a legitimising mechanism for the political system. These expeditions, due to the organisational framework, enabled ideology-centred education in out-of-school settings, not only learner-centred one. They moulded participating children's attitudes according to certain values that should have been discussed in their daily reports in the diary of the expedition. The socialist society is reproduced in the expeditions and roles replicated by girls and boys. Cutezătorii Expeditions are a source of role models. Role models and heroic deeds were meant to shape young readers' characters.

Trips for children during their summer holiday were not invented by communists (see the Scout

movement discussed in the section above). However, Cutezătorii Expeditions developed within a politicised framework and therefore the strength of their ideological messages, especially when these expeditions were transformed into comics for communist pioneers. Thus, the communist regime encourages leisure to be combined with working for the people, transforming the country, its people and landscapes, in both a material (tangible) and intangible construction of communism and of the perfect society. These expeditions also enforce the state-paternalist narrative about children's education.

These field trips were a complementary means of carrying out the aims of communist propaganda as they transformed otherwise common activities of visiting one's country into ideological ones, part of all communists' struggle to get to know and love their homeland, the people, and the achievements that the Communist Party granted them. The ideological background against which such expeditions took place altered their meaning. Pioneers' summer trips with colleagues were ideologically controlled because of the institutional background against which trips were organised. They became part of the propaganda machine, as also the analysed comics will prove.

Propaganda is defined as communication that distorts symbols, resorts to emotions and preconceptions, and shuns rational thinking in order to achieve a certain objective of those who construct it (Bolsover and Howard, 2017, cited by Băluță, 2020, p. 26). In addition, propaganda focuses on producing and transmitting messages that encourage certain reactions, because it shapes popular attitudes (cf. Welch, 2014). It identifies adversaries and takes into account the past, traditions, beliefs, biases, stereotypes, and myths of a certain cultural context where it operates (Domenach, 2004, cited by Băluță, 2020, p. 26).

In socialist Romania, the limits between education and manipulation through propaganda were hard to discern during this period (Țăgșorean, 2016). The austerity that impacted the entertainment available for children and youth, inside and outside school, influenced their vulnerability to propaganda educational products and activities (Țăgșorean, 2016). The press was completely controlled by the Romanian Communist Party and therefore this press was a reliable ally in the Party's plan to educate the future generation according to the communist ideology:

"The Party helps us understand which is the main line of a communist newspaper, of a foot soldier on the ideological battlefield" (Dumitru Popescu, 1962, chief of the Romanian Press Agency, cited in Țăgșorean, 2016, p. 10).

For children in communist Romania, the sources of information (entertainment magazines, books, TV, radio, school, etc.) were entirely controlled by the Party and highly ideologised. Thus, the discourse

in comics was validated by the same or similar messages present in other sources of information. Children's imagination was controlled through the repetition of the same messages (Țăgșorean, 2016, p. 10). As such, one can easily demonstrate the coherence of this official discourse and of the visual one concerning the development of the country and the participation of all citizens in building the socialist nation and its bright future (cf. Ilovan, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b; Ilovan, Bagoly-Simó and Herbstritt, 2018; Ilovan and Maroși, 2018; Ilovan and Merciu 2021). The coherence of this discourse, and of the visual one, make it more persuasive for everybody and especially for children who want to become part of a group or community and find their aim in life. Thus, propaganda, which used many communication media, had a significant role in the formation of the young generation. Except for these heavily politicised sources, children had no other official alternatives for information and entertainment.

In this political and ideological environment, comics were not marginal cultural products, but due to their inclusion in propaganda magazines, they were part of the mainstream politicised official discourse of the Romanian communist state. Through comics, the propaganda messages were more accessible. They enabled the zooming in on the political and cultural tropes of the period. Thus, in comics, the representational code was that imposed by propaganda and censorship. To this was added the realistic representational style characteristic of comics with the topic of Cutezătorii Expeditions.

5. A GENDERED SOCIALISATION WITH THE NATIONAL SPACE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF PLACE ATTACHMENT: CUTEZĂTORII EXPEDITIONS AS REFLECTED IN COMICS

This section includes the main results of my research. First, I present and discuss the egalitarian ideology and the patriarchal society as represented in comics. Secondly, I emphasise and analyse the identified patriarchal attitudes and practices in comics, by focusing on gender representations. Thirdly, I analyse and discuss the gender stereotypes foregrounded by comics. These stereotypes are obvious for both genders, but women's roles are discussed in particular, from childhood to adulthood, and the nation. Finally, representations that engender place attachment are presented.

5.1. The egalitarian ideology and the patriarchal society

Gender is permanently constructed through discourses and experiences. In my research, I focus on the construction and deconstruction of gender identities

in comics. Comics become part of the Communist Party's public discourse as they are written with an ideological intention and published in a propaganda youth magazine. Communist ideology had a hegemonic character in the Romanian socialist society. The egalitarian society and its aims were advertised by propaganda in the mass media. However, in what gender is concerned, comics are mostly a reflection of the patriarchal regime.

Education to create the New Man required the internationalisation of new values, which, for the new socialist society were: the Communist Party, the country, the people (cf. *Patria, Partidul, Poporul - valori fundamentale ale idealului nostru communist* [The Homeland, the Party, and the People – fundamental values of our communist ideal] (Cutezătorii, no. 51/1986). These guiding values (i.e., the Party, the homeland and the people) are included in comics as part of a wider pedagogical strategy of the communist propaganda, which used the reality referent.

Comics reproduce relations in the Romanian society. Characters' responsibility is social and sometimes national. These responsibilities are gender specific (Magyari-Vincze 2004; Miroiu, 2007, 2020; Teampău 2016, 2017; Ilovan, 2021b). Cooperation and national responsibility are ingredients for the characters' heroic deeds. However, the values and practices of the characters are not as emancipated as the ones of the propaganda. For instance, female characters' low participation in decision-making when male characters are present. In addition, the expedition camp replicates for girls the home as a workplace. The political discourse about women's emancipation (Teampău 2016, 2017) is contradicted by the social reality (cf. also Miroiu, 2007) represented in comics, where womanhood is equated with domesticity. Women have traditional domestic roles due to their mainly domestic responsibilities. The analysed comics reproduce the social ideology of domesticity, the girls in comics transferring their roles from home to the expedition camp. The domestic ideology is embedded in characters attitudes and practices. These girls and boys experience gender relationships in the same way they do at home. This proves that the communist system failed to bring equality between genders and a gender-neutral society, because it ignored the already established patriarchal Romanian society. This gap between communist gender rhetoric and the patriarchal society is visible in comics with both female and male protagonists.

Boys and men are represented as communist heroes. They are physically active and healthy, ready to become fit workers. The behaviour of Dim Dunăreanu – one leading character in comics – is morally and politically immaculate, he is the exemplary Romanian communist. He is faultless and thus a role model. Dim has the necessary strength of character, he is a good

athlete, intellectual, strong-willed, devout to the nation, people, and the Party.

The working people has no gender during the socialist period in Romania, according to the official discourse (Miroiu, 2020, p. 2). However, this is not observed in comics for pioneers where the traditional gender roles of the patriarchal society are enforced. From these comics, the reader learns less about women's interests and experiences, but more about the men's. The socially constructed reality influences the gendered representations in these comics. The comics configure gender roles in the Romanian society in a normative way. The feminine identity is constructed in comics through characters' social interaction and the storyteller's comments. Girls are not engaged fully in the plot of the comics, with rare exceptions, but women have duties towards their homeland, too. They are educated to observe these tasks, while investments in other or alternative roles seem unnecessary from the narrative point of view.

Comics mimic a transformation of gender norms, but the presented gender roles mostly contradict this, because interactions reflect traditional conservative attitudes. These normative traditional meanings of gender are representative of the natural femininity and masculinity. Gender equality promotion is just a political project instead of one embraced by the whole of society, as a response to discrimination and violence against women.

The canonical discourse about the girls' and women's roles in comics was written and illustrated by male authors. However, when female authors have the opportunity to create comics (i.e., the comics *Flowers of the Carpathians*), their discourse reflects the men's, or, more exactly, the patriarchal discourse of the Romanian society, socialist or not. The characters are valorised according to their gender and their respective prescribed gender roles. Girls and boys, women and men are treated differently. This patriarchal discourse is popularised by the analysed comics. Certain ideological inflexions about gender equality are present, but they do not manage to present girls and women as independent agents, with a mind of their own, deciding for themselves, but as active individuals in subaltern positions in relation to male characters.

Girls and women are part of the underrepresented and, mostly, the anonymous half of the characters in comics and when they appear they contribute to the legitimization of patriarchal stereotypes. Most of the characters are culturally formed as women and men according to patriarchal ideas and attitudes about femininity and masculinity. If the representations of girls and women were intended to have an emancipatory role, the comics failed this aim: the patriarchal mentality undermined the communist ideology about gender equality.

Gender culture is framed/created in different contexts and school education and ideological education are the two environments that supported the circulation of comics where gender relations were presented. This conservative establishment has civic and political impact, besides the cultural one. Communism was defined in Romania, as "state patriarchy" (Miroiu, 2020, p. 4), because of the patriarchal tradition of gender relations in the Romanian society, both in the rural and urban areas, and in education as well.

The stories in these comics validate and normalise gender roles. The differences between genders are constructed culturally in comics, due to the embedded patriarchal values, customs and overall mentality, reflected in characters' social interaction. The polarisation of gender roles is reflected in the way boys and girls were educated to interact. This interaction based on gender norms is described in the analysed comics: girls are to consider certain tasks, boys others. This discourse about women's and girls' roles in social life is normative. It tends to reproduce the learnt male and female roles of the domestic environment and institutionalise them through formal and informal education. The analysed research material exhibits not necessarily a masculine interpretation and (re)presentation of the gender relationships, but a patriarchal discourse present in comics created by both women and men.

Conservative perceptions about women and men are underlined. Hierarchies between genders are in place, there is no real partnership or sharing of power between genders. Gender hierarchy in communism was one constant among other hierarchies supported by the regime. The very nature of this hierarchy is oppressive for women and girls in terms of effort, if not because of the women's awareness concerning their difficult roles in a patriarchal environment, in which the dominance of men over women is a systemic one. The oppressive relations are embedded in society and perceived as the natural order of things.

Gender equality is marginal to the stories of these comics and gender hierarchies are not contested. Girls and women are in a lower position concerning their work, knowledge, and power. These roles constrain women and limit their freedom in decision-making. In comics, the reality is coded and represented by men. There is no feminine alternative discourse – a reality coded and represented by women, which would be outside the patriarchal discourse. Therefore, with few exceptions, girls' work is perceived as unimportant and therefore goes unnoticed (i.e., girls are mainly described through the performed acts of love and care), while boys' work turns out extraordinary. The discursive power of boys and men is obvious in these

comics, while girls' and women's social and civic value is assessed in relation to the male characters with whom they interact.

These comics are rhetorical instruments used with ideological purposes. At the same time, they maintain the status quo of the traditional gender norms. No part of the gender discourse in comics is disruptive for the patriarchal society, but it maintains Romanian social values as I show in the next section.

5.2. Patriarchal attitudes and practices in comics: Gender representations

Field trips are popular with children, comics too. And comics about field trips, which also had a referent in reality, even more so. Besides entertainment, comics were informative and educational. From these comics, it is clear that the ideology about women's emancipation was discursively imposed from above, because authorial intentions resonate with other propaganda materials during that period. Still, a patriarchal perspective on gender relations regulated characters' attitudes and behaviours. This normative patriarchy was practised in Romanians' private lives (at home) and therefore it was not possible for them to dissociate from it in the public sphere (Miroiu, 2007, 2020; Teampău, 2016, 2017). This domestic patriarchy is transparent through characters' roles in comics (e.g., girls cooking, near the fire, and boys are active: playing, bathing, and swimming, practising archery) (Fig. 2-3).



Fig. 2. Pioneers during their summer holiday: spending free time in a useful way (source: *A Peaceful Young Man's Holidays*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 27/1970, CNOP, 1967-1989).



Fig. 3. Representing gender: domestic roles for girls (cooking), boy active (hunting) (source: *A Peaceful Young Man's Holidays*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 27/1970, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“Oh, look there! The Eagle! It attacked my pigeon again. But it won't go away this time”; “Give me the arch, Nic, and leave it to me!”

In *A Peaceful Young Man's Holidays*, girls are portrayed through their roles, not as individuals (we do not know their names at least). As individuals, except for the woman-teacher – Oana Munteanu – they are anonymous and almost invisible in the plot. The readers draw conclusions about them based on a fugitive presence: cooking (as feminine work), helping, being scolded by a male character for behaving too chatty about the team's plans for the expedition:

Nic: “Geese saved the Capitol, but this does not mean that they have not remained geese. You sent articles about our plans to all publications in the country and look now at the result of this” (*A Peaceful Young Man's Holidays*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 28/1970, CNOP, 1967-1989).

Thus, they are represented through subordination, another much appreciated virtue of women (i.e., submissiveness).

Girls have little or no agency. Boys are the main characters. The accompanying history teacher is representing the women in the story. She assists the boys with their plan. The character of the teacher, Oana Munteanu, is the image of the woman educator. Most of the other female characters in the analysed comics either cook or have sanitary skills. These seem to be among the traditional and highest virtues women possess. Another role of assistant is played by Dim Dunăreanu's girlfriend and then wife – Anca –, who thanks him for having taught her to pilot a plane and thus to become useful in solving the operation of catching the thieves of a Dacian thesaurus. She keeps in touch with the Militia and at the end Dim declares he's proud of her.

In fact, the most emancipated woman of the analysed comics is Anca. She is doing a traditional job for men, piloting a plane, but her skills are subordinated to the male characters' decisions. Despite the fact that work is represented along a more egalitarian line between Dim and Anca, her subordination is maintained also in the new social system. She has no autonomy as a character. Her actions are defined through her relationship with the male character. Her character re-enacts one traditional value associated with femininity: women are a support for men (cf. also Teampău, 2016, p. 146) (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Dim, as the Communist “New Man”, is helping the pioneers, together with his girlfriend (source: *A Peaceful Young Man's Holidays*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 36/1970, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“Hello, Dim! The director of the *Cutezătorii* Club speaking. Answer if you hear me!”; “I hear you, director! What's happened?”; “In the network X14 news have been broadcasted three minutes ago. Five

bandits operate in area B42. Ten pioneers and a teacher have been taken prisoners and now they are in danger ..."; *"Nineteen degrees to the north! Full speed!"*; *"What a pity! We haven't got a gun with us"*.

The energy and qualities Anca develops, when taught by Dim, serve a propagandistic role in these comics. Anca builds a more sophisticated image of the women whose work is a civic duty. Anca is working outside her home in matters that serve directly the Romanian state. Through this kind of work (i.e., non-domestic), she builds an alternative identity for women. Anca does her duty protecting the pioneers and her boyfriend, helps catching the villains and thus also defends the Romanian state and its ancestral heritage. She is a useful citizen, one to be proud of (and Dim declares this). She is the new model of womanhood in what is officially defined as a gender-neutral socialist society. She is determined and assertive in her relationships with the main characters. Anca is liberated, she is a comrade. Thus, Anca and Dim are 'work and life comrades' within this patriarchal society (cf. Miroiu, 2007, p. 200).

Nevertheless, none of the women in these comics have a leading position. Anca and Oana Munteanu occupy the same jobs as men (one is an occasional pilot, the other is a teacher), but their position is subordinate to the will and decisions of their male partners. In addition, comics show that boys protect and guide the girls. The girls obey, assist, and appreciate boys. These are the role models pioneers should aspire to according both to ideological guidelines and a patriarchal Romanian matrix.

Due to the bravery of the characters in *Cutezătorii* Expeditions, the expeditions themselves were the perfect framework for patriotic initiatives and work. In this context, one value advocated for is the civic spirit. This is subordinate to the goals of the political regime: it can mean getting involved in activities that protect the country from diverse enemies, or any voluntary work for the common/societal good.

This civic spirit includes also the idea of self-sacrifice for the common good, an idea highly advertised by the state. This was one of the Party's expectations that all citizens should strive to meet, it was part of the official discourse which pointed out ways to serve the country and its people: therefore, it was felt as an imperative.

Dim and the pioneers are participating in preserving the heritage of the country. Pioneers are fighting villains who steal from the state and the Romanian people. Pioneers are devoted to their country. They mobilise for a greater cause in these expeditions: it is not only about tourism and entertainment, but also about protecting nature, giving help to those in need, defending heritage and even the country.

Their contribution to the wider Romanian society, through their courageous and sometimes heroic deeds, is meant to give them feelings of self-worth and pride. Pioneers and their friends (who collaborate with state institutions) are represented as morally superior.

The depicted pioneers have a heightened moral sense that translates into their brave behaviour. A solidarity among all pioneers appears when their courageous deeds and work are appreciated by the political system; this solidarity is extended to this system: pioneers and the communist system are supporting each other, they are comrades, showing their gratitude towards each other. Children are part of the new communist order and everybody in the society is proud of this order and of pioneers themselves. A large community celebrates pioneers' deeds, and a moral lesson should be drawn (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Men, women, pioneers, militia, malefactors and their relationships (source: *A Peaceful Young Man's Holidays*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 40/1970, CNOP, 1967-1989).

"The expeditioners enter the village with the bandits tied up. The crowd applauds them", "Anca, smiling, reports on her progress: 'Comrade Commander, I accomplished my mission. 'The Brain' of the bandits was arrested, too", "Thank you Anca, I am proud of you", "Thank you for helping us. We wouldn't have managed without you and Dochia's dowry would have been taken by foreign hands", "I think you would have managed. With such archers it would have been impossible for you to fail ..."

The second comics – *Florile Carpaților* [Flowers of the Carpathians] – takes its name after that of the team of girls who left for a *Cutezătorii* expedition to the Apuseni Mountains. In the *Flowers of the Carpathians*, the atmosphere is an enthusiastic one. This comics is about courage as one of the main traits of character for pioneers. The red tie of the pioneers was a symbol of the pioneers' daring deeds:

"In the summer of 1975, the members of the team 'Flowers of the Carpathians', participant at 'Cutezătorii Expeditions', climbed the paths of the Apuseni Mountains, got to know the beauty of the people's traditional costumes, listened to the song of Iancu and to the old legends brought to life by the calm storytelling of the elderly from the Land of the Moți. One year later, in July 1976, the ten temerarious decided to continue their ethnographical and folkloric investigations in the picturesque region of the Apuseni" (*Cutezătorii*, no. 34/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

The girls' expedition starts with a surprise, a team of boys will join them: *"The Dacians' Descendants"*, who will have a historical character

expedition in The Land of the Moți. The aim is to discover secrets of the convoluted history of the Dacians. Readers find out that “our heroes” started their expedition on the 1st of August 1976. Through these expeditions, pioneers are not socialised only spatially, but also from a gender perspective. They learn how to interact “correctly” with the others in an out-of-school situation. The two teams are from Bacău. Another one, joining them later, is from Iași.

Boys are good detectives: from the start, a boy finds the youngest girl who is wandering in the neighbourhood of the railway station, trying to forecast the weather based on data from previous years and she is about to miss the train. Three boys laugh at the meteorologist girl. Irony delegitimises this girl character; she is publicly humiliated through irony. Her head is in the clouds, this happening is meant to convey:

“One of the boys, Valentin Bădău, assumes the role of detective and leaves to search for Gabriela. He finds her in the last moment. The youngest one of the girls’ teams, rather forgetful and distracted, tries to forecast the weather” (Cutezătorii, no. 36/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

Girls tend to forget, they are disoriented, distracted, target of ironic remarks (from both boys and girls). For instance, the train worker announces them that they are in the wrong train. The last image shows a boy pointing his finger to the girls and saying:

“You girls share all the blame! Since last year you’ve been a team specialised in losing and mistaking trains. What should we do now?!” A boy: “Gheorghită, why do you blame the girls? Why didn’t you notice that we’ve boarded the wrong train?” Then, “Where’s Gabriela?” “Maybe she changed her mind. Maybe she returned home ... to her mum!” says a girl, laughing (Cutezătorii, no. 35/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

Boys solve things and have the initiative. Girls take notes of everything that happens, they document their expeditions. Boys follow their example and praise them. Boys discuss history and former statemen, girls observe flowers and take pictures in the botanical garden. Boys make breakfast for the girls before leaving earlier with the plan of being ahead of girls with research, while girls save animals, little birds.

The boys spy on the girls and announce their teacher that all ten girls have notebooks and are taking notes and that they believed that the girls had ten leaders of their team. Girls cooperate. Girls are not ten captains as the boys thought at first, but ten very good expeditioners. In expeditions, cooperation is encouraged over competition. Girls tend to cooperate more, while boys are represented as more competitive.

Girls are passive in comparison to boys. For instance, the girls are to make the fire and cook dinner, while the teachers (both men) and boys go to look for one missing member of the team:

“Girls, you light the fire and prepare something to eat ... And the boys, together with me and commander Neagu, leave to search for him. Petrică, climb in that fir tree and if

you see him, let us know” (Cutezătorii, no. 42/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

Boys tend to forget things on their way or take initiative without announcing. Or they are punished for their mistakes and sentenced to carry the luggage of the girls. However, they compensate for this by providing the team with food (i.e., the stereotype of men as providers):

“I forgot my backpack in Gîrda and I returned to fetch it. Coming back here, I made a detour to a sheepfold and the warm-hearted shepherds gave me a bucket of milk. We could use it in this cold weather ...” (Cutezătorii, no. 42/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

They are represented as more independent than the girls and become the main characters in the comics “Flowers of the Carpathians”. Boys protect girls from danger and also scold them for not paying attention to the path. One girl is inattentive and she hurts herself, but a boy then saves her.

Work is a value in socialist Romania and is (i.e., should be) perceived as a moral necessity and pleasure, not a burdensome obligation (Țăgșorean, 2016, pp. 13-14). Volunteer work for everyone’s benefit is advocated for in these comics (e.g., the pioneers build a bridge).

For instance, one girl decides that next year they will build a small bridge to enable access between two tourist objectives. The editorial office shows part of the content of a letter they received saying that next year (1977), the two teams built the eight metres bridge during their new expedition.

The team Flowers of the Carpathians win the prize Busola de Aur [The Golden Compass] and are congratulated by the boys. Even when at the end of the comics we find out that the girls’ team won the trophy, we do not hear anything about their feelings or opinions, but the boys’ voice is heard congratulating them; the boys talk about their own feelings concerning this event and plan to come again in the area of the Apuseni Mountains next year, for a similar experience. The legitimacy of girls’ winning the trophy is acknowledged by the boys. Before this, girls are presented laughing at one boy’s mistake of having boarded the wrong train and gossiping about this. Although the conclusion is that boys can be wrong and may get lost as well, the contrast between these two last images in the comics reinforces one stereotype: the moral superiority of men over women.

The third comics I selected, *La un pas de extraordinar* [One Step from the Extraordinary], is a series of inspiring stories about pioneers who participated in Cutezătorii Expeditions. The editorial office of Cutezătorii claims that these stories are based on real happenings from expeditions.

“The temerarious” are in the Piatra Craiului Mountains, where a rescue guard is interviewed by the chronicler of the team – a boy, asking about a rescue

action. At the respective moment, a young girl just had an accident. But the pioneers are well-trained for the mountain and start to rescue her (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. A boy leading the way in a rescue action in the Piatra Craiului Mountains and giving advice (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 5/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“I don’t know why, but even if I don’t know her, I feel as if she is a close friend of mine. That much I wish that I were the one to find and save her ...; What’s important is not who finds her, but that we find her as soon as possible!”

A girl finds her, and she starts crying. The girl treating her (“she is so good”) has the role of the doctor during the expedition. The saved girl and the girl who saved her declare they will be friends. The role of caregiver is a significant component of women’s gender identity (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Doctor and patient in the Piatra Craiului Mountains (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 5/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“Be calm! It’s nothing serious. In 2-3 days, you’ll be fine ...; You are so good ...; Thank you, children! And you, comrade teacher, you’ve been very helpful, indeed; In a few days, when we end our expeditions, we shall visit you in the hospital. You’ll be fine until then!; I will look for you when I arrive home. I thank you and your colleagues. For all that you’ve done for me; I am looking forward to meeting you again. I am sure we’ll be friends. For several years I have wanted to have an older friend ...”

The role of protectors is true of men’s gender identity because in comics they are mainly portrayed as active defenders of the state, of heritage, of women, and they are also providers of what is necessary for living. For instance, in the mountains, during a storm, a man is bitten by a viper. A girl pioneer, the sanitary of the team, offers to help and make the injection. In the dialogue between this girl and the boy pioneer, she says she can manage by herself, but the boy offers to protect her (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. A girl leading the way during a rescue action in the mountains, protected by a boy (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 6/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“Let me do this, Dan, because I can manage also alone! You’d better pay attention that you don’t slip. I am worried about the handbag as there is the only sterile syringe we have left; I can’t leave you on your own, Ioana! Both of us must reach the other riverbank!”

In another episode of *One Step from the Extraordinary*, girls are attentive not to be laughed at by the boys because they are scared by some noise during the night. One of the girls is champion at running and this is helpful to find a solution. They found the donkey of some geologists researching in the mountains. Pioneers are portrayed as ambitious, working in teams or groups to solve tasks (Fig. 9 and Fig. 10).



Fig. 9. Pioneers find solutions to a problem, during their expedition (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 7/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“Let’s tell this to comrade commander, but I am afraid to get out of the tent!; If we call her, everybody might get scared. I’d better run there. You know that I am champion at running! I only need 3 seconds!; Let’s wake up the boys. But in perfect silence. If there’s a bear, we should not stir it; Let’s get out with our flashlights on and make some noise! It will get scared and run away!; I’ve got a better idea: we have mull and surgical spirit and we shall find a few sticks among the firewood. Wild animals are afraid of fire”.



Fig. 10. Pioneers save an animal and help geologists in the mountains (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 7/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“We are geologists. The donkey is our helper. It carries our tent and samples of rocks and ore. Only three days ago, during the night, a bear scared it and it disappeared. We’d lost any hope of seeing it again. But thanks to you ...”

Another episode takes the reader to the mountains, where a shepherd and his sheep are in danger of attack from wolves and bears. The readers see that boy pioneers ask comrade commander (the woman teacher) to stay with the girls, while boys leave to help the shepherd. The teacher wants to scare the wild animals with the blitz of the camera (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Male pioneers decide the roles of boys and girls during a dangerous action (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary, Cutezătorii*, no. 9/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“You, comrade commander, should stay with the girls in the camp. We, the boys, shall go alone!; No, I want to come, too! With the photo camera blitz, I will scare it more than you can with your torches!”

Wolves are defeated. A woman-shepherd brings pioneers milk and cheese in the morning to thank them for their courage in saving her and the sheepfold (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12. Peasant woman thanking male pioneers for their vital help (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary, Cutezătorii*, no. 9/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“I’ve brought you some milk and cheese. Take them, you deserve these! Last night I was only by myself at the sheepfold and if it weren’t for you to come and help me ...”

In another expedition, a boy brought a kite up the mountain and was scolded by his teacher (a woman). In the end, his decision to bring the kite proved saving (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Gender roles and representations during a rescue action in the mountains (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary, Cutezătorii*, no. 11/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“Don’t worry Lenuța! We shall manage. Get from the girls our plastic sacks and some dry clothes and wait for us with some hot tea; It snows in the middle of summer. I already feel my hands and feet cold!; If you with three coats feel so cold, imagine

how cold are those four!”

Girls are portrayed as nurturing those in need: ill colleagues, hurt pets, orphaned wild animals. Still, they are sensitive and weak. They are overwhelmed with emotions and portrayed crying easily despite any reasoning offered by the male characters. Girls are (re)presented as vulnerable, needing male protection and guidance, they are generally unable to master themselves. The boys ask the girls to wait for them with hot tea when they return to their camp. Girls tend to worry; they wait for the boys to act and solve problems.

According to one of the comics, girls are curious, while the boys’ motivation is a more mature one: to offer help.



Fig. 14. Gender stereotypes and the construction of boys’ moral superiority: girls are curious, boys want to help (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary, Cutezătorii*, no. 12/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“Couldn’t we change our route a bit? I am very curious what it is about ...; A rather big detour from our itinerary. But if the others want this, too ...; Agree!; Let’s go!; Maybe somebody needs our help!”

5.3. Stereotypes: From childhood to adulthood. Women’s roles and the Nation

The roles of male and female characters in comics are representative for gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are defined as “unilateral and exaggerated images of men and women, used repeatedly during daily life” (Marshall, 2003, cited by Ciocan, 2020, p. 91). The comics included in the mass media for the communist youth contributed to spreading gender stereotypes. By analysing the gender stereotypes in these comics, one has insights into the culture and society of the communist period in Romania. They show the gender expectations and norms. Gender norms are part of the social values of the society. These comics reflect the reality of expectations from pioneers. The description of relationships between genders framed a normative discourse about women and men in socialist Romania, as a mainly patriarchal society.

Both girls and boys were presented in stereotyped roles. We see that despite authors’ possible intentions to make them equal to the male characters, female characters have sketchy and meteoric appearances, usually augmenting their traditional roles of especially assisting male characters in their actions. Therefore, also in comics, like in real life Romanian

socialist society, these female characters are propaganda objects; the promotion of women during communism was politicised (Teampău, 2016, 2017).

Besides reinforcing gender stereotypes (they are the ones to cook, they are caregivers, they take orders from male characters and do what they are told, they confirm and support men's decisions, they are inattentive, uninformed, feeble and need protection, etc.), these comics also try to reform. For instance, presenting the equality of citizens including men and women seems to be one of the objectives in the comics *Flowers of the Carpathians*. The plot is written by a woman, but still this comics fails to bring this idea forward, as the entire comics is a reflection of stereotyped roles of men and women in the Romanian society.

The title of the comics proves to be only a discursive strategy because the main characters are still the boys and their team. Moreover, focusing the plot of the comics on the interaction between teams of only girls and only boys enabled the highlighting (without being aware) of gender stereotypes that in fact, during a critical reading of this comics, only undermined the official discourse about gender equality.

Girls' and boys' roles are tailored according to a traditional and conservative Romanian society, stereotypes are pervasive despite authors' efforts to promote some kind of communist emancipatory discourse about women's status in the socialist society. The female characters' sharing the spotlight on equal footing with the male characters was only an illusion. There is no real partnership between women and men, gender inequalities are only replicated by the plot of the comics for pioneers.

Certain scenes are meant to be a translation in the comics plot of the communist egalitarian discourse, but their message fails: they are still reflecting patriarchal attitudes and practices so much ingrained in the Romanian society. This pedagogical and propagandistic discourse addressed to children socialises them in the same patriarchal framework. Even the women-authors of this comics reinforce the same gender clichés to be found in comics authored by men (the majority, cf. Ilovan, 2021b).

These comics are part of the highly politicised campaign of promoting women, started in 1965 (Teampău, 2016). Through comics, readers are encouraged to identify themselves with those girls and boys, and with the roles they perform. For instance, we see that the pioneers, Anca and Dim share the power of the state when they defend it, and the state defends them. The pioneer readers thus could feel empowered themselves if they identified with the characters in these comics.

In comics, women are represented as emancipated, through the education and jobs they have

in comparison to the women before (such as the woman peasant with traditional activities), but these comics do not tackle in any way the problem of patriarchy which is a taken for granted ingredient of gender relations among children and among adults as well. In most comics, a hegemonic masculine perspective informs the patriarchal stories.

The character Anca is the new type of woman that comics shape discursively when socialising girl and boy pioneers with gender relationships and gendered hierarchies. This socialisation is based on both comics inspired by expeditions with children of readers' age and by readers' direct experiences in the socialist patriarchal society.

Comics also show a lack of solidarity among girls exhibited through malicious comments. Comics also use irony for derogatory comments to girls, made by both boys and girls. A girl becomes an object of derision, because of her dreamy nature. She is ridiculed. Derision is inviting the solidarity of the readers/audience through jokes or sarcasm: the girl is humiliated ("maybe she went back to her mother"), prone also to the readers' derision. The authors imply the readers' input when making deriding jokes about girls. Discriminatory derision, if not hostility, as amusement can hide feelings of superiority.

Among the normative image of the girls and young women in Romania, due to the topic of the comics (*Cutezătorii Expeditions*), the image of the woman as a mother is not present, but these comics emphasise the 'natural' role as caregivers for girls.

Some of the gender stereotypes are the following: housewife, passive, at the tents during the expeditions, dependent on male characters' decisions, chatty (talks a lot and announced the newspapers all over Romania about facts that shouldn't have been written), cheerful. These are the features supposed to belong to women, more than to men, or exclusively to women.

Boys and men are characterised by strength, courage; they are often away from the camp of tents, independent, they are more cautious, serious and quieter than girls. Boys are vigilant. Girls are credulous and incompetent. They believe in appearances. Boys are fighters, strategists, women are helpers, they have sanitary responsibilities and skills. Boys are presented as rational, independent and efficient, they have control and are domineering, while girls are emotional, attracted by and attached to beauty: flowers in the botanical gardens, traditional clothes, nature/landscape.

Boys come and go from the camp. They are presented doing sports (e.g., archery, swimming) – active, while girls are rather passive, cooking, usually within the camp when boys are away, warned not to leave because it is dangerous "outside", and if they do,

they should be accompanied by male colleagues for protection, to succeed in what they do, or to manage the jobs/tasks they have.

Most of the girls in comics are depersonalised female characters. Women are (re)presented through their emotions and sensuality and men through self-confidence and power in decision making (for themselves and others) and in acting. The gender hierarchy is maintained, as girls are (re)presented as the vulnerable members of their group. Their roles and usefulness in solving individual and group problems make boys and men superior to girls and women. The privileges of the male roles are to be more active than girls, to be courageous. Represented women's experiences in comics are: anonymity, subordination, vulnerability (helplessness) and as such the discrimination against girls and women based on their gender identity as marginal and marginalised. This discourse mainly reinforced the marginalisation of women because of the roles traditionally attributed to them.

The social roles described for men and women in comics match the traditional or "natural" ones, not the emancipatory discourse of communist propaganda. Subaltern positions for the girls and women in comics show that most times the female characters are part of the stage props, while men and boys are the leading actors. These representations enforce certain interaction patterns between genders.

Therefore, stereotypes should be recognised, irrespective if they refer to gender or the nation (the beautiful, rich and ancient Romania, like no other country in the world), and should be delegitimised by a critical analysis, in order to demystify the nationalist representation of the Romanian geographical space. For instance, the ethnocentric bias and Romanian exceptionalism are emphasised in comics. Romania is presented as a unitary state and nation-to-be even before nation states appeared (the focus on Dacian history and heritage):

"an uncanny anticipated knowledge of the future greatness of Romania, and a type of anticipated national consciousness that was pure invention" (Precup, 2015, pp. 100-101).

Dacians and their civilisation were politically exploited beginning with the 1980s. One overstatement concerning the Dacian heritage is present in this comics: Dochia's dowry (Fig. 15).

The focus on Dacian heritage and its relevance to Romanian history is visible in the plot of this imaginary Cutezătorii Expedition in the Apuseni Mountains: "Working to write the monography of their village, the students of a school in the Apuseni Mountains find almost one hundred years old writings of a primary school teacher, where he argues that, starting from a legend, he had done some research that made him conclude that 'Lacrimile Dochiei' [Dochia's

Tears], a string of alpine lakes nearby 'Imparația lui Zamolxe' [Zamolxe's Kingdom] had been arranged by the Dacians to conceal, for unknown reasons, the entry to an underground area whose plan they will probably find carved in stone. Wanting to be acknowledged within 'Cutezătorii Expeditions' contest, ten pioneers from this school – three girls and seven boys – led by their history teacher, Oana Munteanu, make up the team 'Decebal's Archers' and train hard to go to that area in order to uncover the mystery" (A Peaceful Young Man's Holidays, Cutezătorii, no. 27/1970, CNOP, 1967-1989).¹



Fig. 15. Pioneers defend a Dacian treasure from bandits (source: A Peaceful Young Man's Holidays, Cutezătorii, no. 35/1970, CNOP, 1967-1989).

"God help me! What a dowry Dochia had ...",
"We are the richest people in the world, boss!"

5.4. Place attachment and a gendered spatial socialisation

Place attachment is the emotional bond people develop with places, where place is social and physical (Lewicza, 2008; Ilovan and Markuszewska, 2022). Comics reveal the construction of two types of attachment: nature-induced and culture-induced place attachment, as presented below.

5.4.1. Nature-induced place attachment

Comics are representations that created an attachment to the socialist nation and the socialist period. Place attachment can be understood based on place meanings. Comics construct people-place relations through discourse. In this context, comics are a crude manifestation of the strong connection between political power and knowledge, and they are part of the official discourse that constructs children's attachment to their homeland. The pioneers' subjective ties with places were formed also by the texts they read, not only through direct experience. And comics were part of those texts (besides school textbooks, for instance), influencing spatial socialisation.

¹ Decebal, Dacian king, whose reign was between 87 BC and 106 AD. Dochia, Dacian princess, Decebal's daughter or sister. Zamolxe was a Thracian god.

Intertextuality is explained by these comics. Their discourse is related to discourses advertised by *Cutezătorii* magazine itself, by school textbooks and other activities as pioneers (within and outside the school). The interactions at the micro-level of the comics have consequences at the societal level, if not directly, then through supporting the same discourses of the propaganda, that were delivered also through other media. Intertextuality was paramount for propaganda, but also for education in general (whether in the context of a totalitarian regime or not).

Reading comics was one of the processes through which the communist pioneers formed their meaningful relations with the nation and its places. Expeditions, real or imaginary, encourage experiential practices in learning about the homeland. Thus, place meanings are constructed with the participants' involvement and place attachment is created. The most common meaning of places in these comics is related to history-induced patriotic attachment, geography-induced patriotic attachment, and the village and folk culture.

These meanings represent the essence of places as exposed in statements in comics (either belonging to characters or to the storyteller). Engagement with the environment, through various experiences in these expeditions, creates attachment to its natural and cultural meanings (cf. natural and civic place attachment – Scannell and Gifford, 2010). Both types of attachment are induced by the meanings of places covered in comics. Pioneers' attachment to the nation and the homeland rests on these place meanings.

These comics are the result of a realistic approach in the field of popular culture. Comics make unknown places familiar and motivate readers to take part in expeditions that could ensure similar experiences to those had by the characters in comics. Because pioneers are familiar with the places or experiences described in comics, they are able to create the meaning of the propaganda images in collaboration with the authors of those comics. Moreover, the narrative is constructed through both image and text and the conveyed meanings of places are more powerful because they reach the readers through two discourses: visual and written.

But which are the significant themes and meanings in relation to place? There are two main categories of elements that are depicted in comics and that engender place attachment through discourse (visual and written) about them: biophysical elements and socio-cultural elements. The visual (re)present the possible loci of attachment, using elements (natural and cultural) that are familiar to the readers. The drawings are snapshots of what is more significant for the creators of the story, but also of what should matter the most to the readers. Visual elements triggering place

attachment refer to representations of places in the urban area (e.g., statues, botanical gardens, entertainment through balneal tourism, railway stations), in villages (e.g., folkloric and ethnographic value) and in nature per se, without social referents, but historical (e.g., the Dacian heritage) and geographical ones (e.g., beauty and richness of the nature in the mountain area). These images as arguments for significant places within the homeland are to be understood based on the context (social, economic, cultural, political) within Romania.

The images in comics incorporate a complex mechanism of representations, they do not mimic or reflect reality; these images construct the reality they claim to present, they influence visual perception and guide viewers' interpretation of reality by favouring certain angles of looking and a preference for certain meanings ascribed to places, experiences, events, etc. That is why images need to be decoded; representations and the process of representing are not neutral (Rose, 2014).

There is a multitude of social, cultural, political and economic factors that influence the process of representation of the "objective" reality. These representations generate knowledge and construct the national imagery rather than convey knowledge as they claim. They are ideological constructions with a political intent because they are produced within a communist propaganda magazine for children and youth. However, only an audience study could establish the strength of this relation between intention and reception, which is not an objective of this research. Images that convey the essence of places refer to certain natural and cultural tropes that I present below.

The cartographic elements are mentioned throughout the comic narrative, as the story lists means of transport and places reached by the characters (i.e., pioneers) (Fig. 16-18) and where meaningful events take place. We are thus provided with representations of the pioneers' mappings of the country, performed during their expeditions in the summer holiday. They visit Turda. Then they travel by narrow gauge train to the Apuseni Mountains. The girls go to Ocoliș, "*where they will make ample research in the field of ethnography and folklore. Of course, the team 'Dacians' Descendants' joins them with vigorous gait*" (no. 39/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

They continue with Beiuș, Oradea, Băile Felix, Arad, Timișoara, Alba Iulia. "*Someone suggests they sing the march of the team 'Flowers of the Carpathians' that girls composed during the last year's expedition. Everybody starts to sing: In Apuseni we climb to Padiș and Scărișoara*" (*Cutezătorii*, no. 35/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

"*After they've admired the fantastic landscape of Cetățile Ponorului and Izbul Albastru, our*

expeditioners stop at Izbuluc Galben. Here they sadly discover that they cannot cross towards Poiana Galbenă, because the little bridge is old and unsafe” (Cutezătorii, no. 43/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).



Fig. 16. The pioneers start their journey by train (source: *Flowers of the Carpathians*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 34/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“In the morning, at 6.30. On the platform of Valea Seacă the members of the team ‘Flowers of the Carpathians’ wait impatiently. There are 25 minutes until the train arrives and it will take them to Toplița, the first ‘stopover’ for our expeditioners”.

One drawing shows the pioneers in front of a train wagon together with a train worker. They go back home by train, from Reșița to Bucharest (Fig. 17)



Fig. 17. Pioneers benefitting from modern means of transport get to know their homeland (source: *Flowers of the Carpathians*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 34/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“The train has arrived. Our expeditioners have taken their places in the compartment”.



Fig. 18. Travelling back home (from Reșița to Bucharest) (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 8/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“I wait for you next year too, to come in our nature reserve!; We shall come to continue our research; And if other poachers come ...; ... we shall take a ‘snapshot’ of them, too”.

Places enable the formation or enhancement of the national feeling. Visiting them is an activity that takes pioneers back to the past, to significant events in Romanian

history, or makes them more aware of the present (Fig. 19-23).



Fig. 19. Mountainous landscape in the Apuseni (source: *A Peaceful Young Man’s Holidays*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 28/1970, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“If only I knew that I have to break the record of the soldier at the Marathon!; Don’t be upset, Radu. We need to hurry up. And then, what was hard is over. One more hour to walk and we are at ‘Dochia’s Tears’; Look, another messenger-pigeon!; This means that we are on the right track. The airport from where these winged postmen take off is somewhere close”.



Fig. 20. Pioneers in the beautiful mountains that host the Dacian thesaurus (source: *A Peaceful Young Man’s Holidays*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 30/1970, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“Morning, in the expeditioners’ camp. I think there’s no need to repeat what each of you has to do; No worries comrade commander. We shall give them a treasure they will not be able to carry”.



Fig. 21. Pioneers push their limits and overcome themselves and nature (source: *Flowers of the Carpathians*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 42/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

Women's Roles, Place Attachment and the Socialist Nation in *Cutezătorii* Magazine. Representations in Comics
Featuring Romanian Communist Pioneers

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Place Attachment during Territorial Development Challenges

"The next morning, our expeditioners travelled again with the famous narrow-gauge train to Gârda de Sus. Once there, they decided to climb the mountain to Scărișoara, ignoring the rain which did not want to take a 'break'. The ascent was getting more difficult. Commander Miron decided to a short halt. – Gheorghîță, where is Gheorghîță? Maybe he slipped in the precipice ..."



Fig. 22. Pioneers camp in a beautiful meadow in the Apuseni Mountains (source: *Flowers of the Carpathians*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 44/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

"Towards noon, the temerarious expeditioners 'invaded' the wonderful Poiana Florilor [Flower Glade], which, honestly deserves its beautiful name. The picturesque view, the scent of the flowers and of the freshly mowed grass 'commanded' them to halt immediately".



Fig. 23. Pioneers travel through the homeland by foot and by train (source: *Flowers of the Carpathians*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 45/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

"... nature is a real constructor, creator of beauty. Here is a statuary group that resembles 'the coronation of Michael the Brave', then 'The Eagle', 'The Crying Bride', 'The Three Steps Rocket' ...; And now please come in the kitchen. The host left for us, in 'the fridge', a fish, a goose and some eggs frozen for several thousands of years; The itinerary of the expedition continued to Beiuș, Oradea, Băile Felix, and Arad. Here they are, in the railway station in Timișoara, waiting for the train for their last 'stopover' – Alba Iulia. Suddenly, through the microphone there was an announcement: ... the student Ion Cata is held in Lugoj

railway station. Please ...; Ionică! In Lugoj! How did he get there?"

A gendered division of labour is represented when the pioneers help peasants to collect the hay (Fig. 24).



Fig. 24. Pioneers help the peasants in the Land of the Moți (source: *Flowers of the Carpathians*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 44 /1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

"Comrade Commander! What if we helped with gathering the hay; Bravo! I knew you were generous and industrious girls. The boys should raise the haystacks. Quickly, let's finish before the rain begins!; Nearby their camp there was an unbelievable to-and-fro: the peasants were mowing and gathering the hay, they were hasting to finish work because the sky had been covered by menacing clouds".

Inspired by a special happening whose heroes were the members of a team participating at the expeditions that took place in the summer of 1986, readers find out that the team "Protectors of Nature" travelled to the Făgăraș Mountains (Fig. 25).



Fig. 25. Mountainous landscape with chamois in the Făgăraș Mountains (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 4/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

"The team 'Protectors of Nature' were last summer on an expedition in the Făgăraș Mountains. On one of the days they noticed, on a crest, several chamois that showed their beautiful silhouettes against the blue sky; The third photograph! If we have a good one, we shall enrich our diary with a valuable document!; If we manage to climb those cliffs, we shall enrich it with another equally valuable document.

They say that the edelweiss grows on the paths of the chamois!"

There, a chamois kid is found hurt, then fed with milk from a nearby sheepfold, and saved. A shepherd is featured (Fig. 26). A girl is crying – she is sorry that she has to say farewell to the wild animal after it recovered.



Fig. 26. In the Făgăraş Mountains, with a shepherd, while pioneers save a small wild animal (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary, Cutezătorii*, no. 4/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

"Quick, give us some milk!; I will give you as much milk as you need, but you won't be able to feed it, because we do not

at the sheepfold. But I have a better idea!"

Then, in a nature reserve, a pioneer takes notes about it and about the storage lake which is full of trout (Fig. 27). Pioneers help a forest ranger to catch poachers.



Fig. 27. A pioneer learning from a forest ranger (source: *One Step from the Extraordinary, Cutezătorii*, no. 8/1987, CNOP, 1967-1989).

"You told us so many interesting things about the nature reserve! Now we kindly ask you to tell us about the storage lake".

5.4.2. Culture-induced place attachment

Flowers of the Carpathians is one of the few comics with peasants of the socialist period, and their lives, in *Cutezătorii* magazine. However, the comics construct a museified (re)presentation of the village, through authenticity and oldness. The village is exoticised, it is part of a world not touched by modernisation. The ethnographic expeditions are meant to uncover an idealised countryside: to explore "another folkloric and historic site". The children in

Poșaga village guide their guests. Villagers show them old houses, old clothes, the painting on the pottery, and tell them the legend of the village featuring a shepherd. Also, other locals get involved in the pioneers' expedition: a forest ranger hosts them in the chalet during a storm. Then, in Pietroasa commune, "another ethnographic and folkloric objective they visited", they spent time "at the cultural house, because they were invited to a social meeting of the villagers". The Romanian village is objectified, it is part of a museum hosting the authenticity of Romania (Fig. 28).



Fig. 28. Pioneers visiting the countryside: traditional image of the peasant woman and house (source: *Flowers of the Carpathians, Cutezătorii*, no. 39/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

"Here is the traditional image of the woman villager in Ocoliş. I am in a hurry to begin my interview. I hope to be able to do well at this first 'exam' as a reporter".

One image presents a peasant woman telling them about the area and her work (Fig. 29).



Fig. 29. Learning about the countryside and the village life from the peasants (source: *Flowers of the Carpathians, Cutezătorii*, no. 39/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

"... well, dear children, our Ocoliş is an old settlement of shepherds. And it is well known for the 'Golden' Valley, as we call the Arieș, and for the beauty of its clothes of the Moți. From our grandmothers and great grandmothers, we learnt the craft of wool processing, we learnt to make the threads - to spin - to weave the cloth that we embroider".

Traditional clothes are presented by women, the history of the village is told by the men. The figure of the village teacher is depicted in the abstract of the comics, who tells them “the legend of this picturesque village hidden in the mountains” (*Cutezătorii*, no. 41/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989) (Fig. 30).



Fig. 30. Traditional gender roles in a mountain village (source: *Flowers of the Carpathians*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 41/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“The expeditioners are now in the house of auntie Maria: ‘This is a very old costume that my grandmother wore at dance and during religious holidays’. The children listen then to the story of another son of these places, the retired teacher Ioan Roșca: ‘you ask me why our costumes and pottery are decorated with trout? Then you should know that this tracery has its origin in the legend of our village which lies on the valley of the river with the same name – Poșaga’”.

Through a “mediatic patriarchy” (Ciocan, 2020, p. 91), gender stereotypes are transformed into convictions. Distinctions between boys’ and girls’ roles are obvious in comics. These comics contributed to the creation and maintenance of gender stereotypes. The patriarchal dynamics in comics underline the lack of gender balance in the communist society. Their messages are persuasive due to similarities with the daily life and expeditions organised in reality. Gender relationships and roles are discursively constructed by comics, and this is realised in connection with the visited places during pioneers’ field trips.

In Cluj-Napoca, boys are pictured in the historic city centre, in front of Matei Corvin statue, discussing his personality. Boys are discussing history and, at the same time, the girls are at the Botanical Garden taking notes, studying and admiring the flowers and taking pictures (Fig. 31).



Fig. 31. Gendered experience of space and the gendered construction of place attachment (source: *Flowers of the Carpathians*, *Cutezătorii*, no. 37/1977, CNOP, 1967-1989).

“2 August 1976, Cluj-Napoca. Gicu Arcudeanu demonstrates his historical knowledge, speaking very documented to his colleagues about the events related to the personality of Matei Corvin; At the same time, in the Botanical Garden in Cluj-Napoca. Brîndușa [Crocus] explains like an expert to her colleagues who write down thoroughly ‘...10,000 plant species from all over the world ...”

As discussed above, these comics engender two forms of attachment for the readers, attachment to the space of Romania (place attachment at the country/state scale) and attachment to the socialist nations (community attachment). These forms of attachment reinforce each other and are supported by the natural and cultural elements of Romania.

These comics, due to their contents (describing expeditions through Romania) are geographical narratives. For propaganda, comics are a visual teaching aid, enabling the production and reproduction of historical and geographical knowledge that helped construct the nation and its imaginary for children. Such discourses construct place attachment. First, they develop the rhetorical construction of place meanings and further place attachment. In the construction of place attachment through the discourse of comics, which represent places within the Romanian homeland, images and written text have a performative power: the readers interact with them, with their meanings, and these readers’ perceptions, their feelings towards the represented places, make possible the further construction of meaning.

Place attachment is linked with the national visual rhetoric of the regime and of the comics implicitly. The building of attachment to the natural and cultural meanings of places was encouraged and reinforced at the national scale. Knowing the natural and cultural heritage of the country meant loving the socialist nation more and fighting more for the communist aims. As a result, place attachment to the national scale was highly politicised. Place-attached citizens are loyal ones, devout not only to the natural and socio-cultural meanings of places, but to the political system itself, because this system used the same meanings to legitimise its decisions, actions, and overall power. The national rhetoric based on the geographical features (beauty, simetry and proportionality of landforms) of Romania is still quoted in present-day Romania.

6. IDEOLOGICAL, GENDER AND SPATIAL SOCIALISATION. A DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

Expeditions were activities for ideological socialising that included tourism and leisure, adventure and disciplined entertainment. They consisted of

patriotic tourism aiming to build the socialist man. The comics based on these expeditions are morality tales. Pioneers become more responsible, independent, get attached to their team, to the others, as well as to their forerunners, they learn to appreciate history and places. Stories have a moral or a message to be taken away in order to become a better person and citizen. Both male and female characters are pictured as role models for their respective gender.

Comics helped pioneers understand the present through connecting to the past (history) and present meanings of places (geography). In comics, the past was reconstructed and reinterpreted, and the present was constructed during the positive experiences of the expeditions. Thus, patriotic education was realised. Its aim was political and ideological (socialist and nationalist). Both tradition and modernisation contributed to the meaning of places and enabled pioneers' identification with their socialist nation and national space. The exhibited meanings of the visited places insist on the features of the national identity.

Pioneers' activities, when adventurous, involve courage, have a patriotic stake, the national interest is in their hands. They defend national heritage or make significant discoveries for the national history and economy. Either the glorious past or the modernised present is to be gained from pioneers' courageous decisions. The role of the characters in comics was, from a propagandistic point of view, to generate trust in the Party and the state. Pioneers are 'living' accomplishments of the regime: confident and devout citizens. The public consumption of communist values and ideals is unwittingly realised through reading these comics. The interpretation of their values and ideals is guided by propaganda in the comics. The desired behaviours are approved of, and the problematic ones are criticised. Thus, comics construct pioneers' Communist identity.

The gender lens is another perspective through which these comics can be read. These comics show that the communist society is not gender-neutral, but male-dependent and male-centred. In the comics, the gender roles discourse is sometimes confusing. Women are both emancipated, like Anca, and also have traditional, submissive, and passive roles. One explanation could be that there is a contradiction between the politicised state discourse about the emancipation of women and the patriarchal perspective of those who created the comics (who, despite the ideological directives, could not escape their traditional education and ingrained gendered hierarchies). A complementary explanation is that these comics 'truthfully' reflect the double or triple burden that women carry in the communist society because of their required complex set of roles (domestic work, paid work, motherhood).

Two main cultural patterns are reproduced in comics: the focus on the meanings of places for the

national identity and gender relations and hierarchies. The micro discursive practices in the comics are reflecting the macro discursive practices of the propaganda.

These comics are discourses about gender and place attachment in Romania. One can see that the places the two genders visit and experience are many times related to their gender identity and roles. Girls are less mobile than boys, they are less place explorers than involved in developing social relationships and caring for the others. These representations are accepted as social truths in what gender roles are concerned and as historical and geographical truths when place meanings are covered. These comics contribute to the configuration of social roles according to genders. Boys are therefore going to be perceived as more courageous than girls because they are represented as more active and responsible.

The political education of children is obvious in these comics; there are topics preferred by the communist propaganda that were related to their political aims: love for the country, for its history (the Dacian heritage), its geography (rich in resources, beautiful country), defending the country against its enemies (thieves), ethnographic heritage and the idyllic village, anyone can become a hero based on his or her courageous behaviour in defending the homeland; Romania is presented as exceptional and virtuous, ingenious, courageous, unique through its people, shaping the future generations of communists through education that boosts their pride and the nationalist feeling; the hardworking Romanian (even during holidays, girls and boys spend their time in both entertaining and useful ways).

Their duty as both pioneers and responsible citizens is fulfilled and acknowledged by regular people and state institutions (i.e., the militia in *A Peaceful Young Man's Holidays*). They are to live up to expectations, but still be modest (i.e., *One Step from the Extraordinary*).

Most of the action in these comics is designed based on the struggle between good and evil, where the good wins and the happy ending legitimises all good characters' (mainly pioneers') decisions and actions. Through identification with the characters, readers become themselves participants in the story of the comics and better internalise its intended messages. In their imagination, all readers who identified with the characters, become heroes themselves and are most probably eager to take part in future *Cutezătorii Expeditions*. Moreover, these comics show participants' enthusiasm during *Cutezătorii Expeditions*.

Details about visits contribute to the authenticity of narratives. These stories are perfectly integrated into the cultural context of the nation and therefore they seem more authentic to the reader. Through their decisions, overall discourse and

activities, pioneers are pictured as loyal to the political regime and role models for the readers (whose loyalty is meant to be built through the power of these characters' examples). Having pioneers as characters, the moralising overtones in these comics are quite effaced and this is why readers are more prone to accept their message and generate the "right" attitudes and behaviours.

These contemporary heroes are acting in settings familiar to the readers, therefore they can identify with them easily, possibly not always aware of the intended propaganda (cf. Mertin, 2009). When communist pioneers identify themselves with the characters from comics, they become part of an imagined community. An imagined community is formed through shared lived or imaginary experiences (cf. Anderson, 1991). Communist pioneers share common experiences with their peers represented in comics and thus a solidarity is born, a feeling of collective belonging to the pioneers' community and to the communist nation. The creation of a sense of community appears first as pioneers (pioneers are bold explorers), then as Romanian workers building socialist Romania. The working people represent a collective authority that children and the youth strive not to disappoint and expect to be worthy and thus part of that imagined community once they are adults.

However, many female presences are episodic. Therefore, it is more difficult for female readers to recognise themselves in the few characters available for them as role models. In comics women and girls are auxiliaries to their male counterparts; these roles were frequent in the socialist Romanian reality (Teampău, 2016, 2017).

7. CONCLUSIONS

Cutezătorii magazine was the official media outlet of The National Pioneers' Organisation. *Cutezătorii* had a national reach, and it was a platform for the communist Party's ideological messages, which directed pioneers' opinions, at least officially. *Cutezătorii* magazine reported on the expeditions, winners of trophies, published the rules for participation, etc. It underlined that any expedition, no matter how simple, is a temerarious deed. The rules of the expeditions are to be read again and again in this magazine (*Cutezătorii*, no. 19/1976).

Comics in *Cutezătorii* represent the political, cultural, social and geographical realities of Romania during the communist period. Comics contributed to the ideological education of children and youth to love their country, the people and the Communist Party. Their contents contributed to patriotic education. These comics are political products of popular culture that helped build the socialist nation (through

representations of places, events, and situations deemed as relevant) and of the New Man. They are made of written text messages and iconic elements (i.e., drawings). They reinforce stereotypes of gender, of Romania as a nation, and of place features that influence representations in the contemporary period. The ideological function of comics was to socialise children with the places and social relations "representative" in communist Romania.

The comics, as historical documentary material, enable us to uncover the workings of the propaganda. Pioneers' lives are pictured as part of the socialist reality, and we can understand the construction of place attachment and of the gendered national imagined community. This imagined community was created under the direct influence of communist propaganda which controlled both the site of production and that of the audience of comics for children and youth (cf. Cora, 2014, for a discussion about the role of mass media, art, cinema, education in communist propaganda).

Education and the media impacted the construction of place meanings and attachments to place. Comics introduce the students into the material and symbolic reconstruction of the Romanian socialist nation. They are cultural products that are (re)presenting places, events and practices, thus producing meanings that are internalised by the students and eventually will define who they are. Through comics, students' gaze was trained on their country: how they should think about and use its beautiful places. The symbolic and cultural appropriation of the national space is realised through comics as well as other socialist education products (such as school textbooks and picture postcards, cf. Ilovan, Bagoly-Simó and Herbstritt, 2018; Ilovan and Maroși, 2018; Ilovan, 2020b; Ilovan and Merciu, 2021), and through the overall ideologically correct and hegemonic discourse of the socialist period.

These comics, created with political intent, need to undergo critical reflection and analysis as they contributed to children's spatial socialisation within a totalitarian political system and highly ideologised production of geographical and historical knowledge. The children-readers discover places and appropriate them through comics when they identify with the characters: either pioneers like themselves or role models they aspire to. These stories and visual representations are appropriated by children mainly through their emotions, and they are even more influential if children had previous knowledge or direct experience with the respective places. Such representations develop children's care for those places and attachment.

The discourse of the comics can be interpreted from many perspectives, but in this research, I chose

the gender and the place attachment lens, and I proved that those two are related. This relation is significant for present-day discourses about gender and places in Romania, because through comics, a tool for out-of-school education, the young communist pioneers were socialised as citizens of Romania and sons and daughters of the Romanian nation and homeland.

Women and girls are represented as female citizens in the communist society. They play mostly marginal characters. Girls' and women's gender identity is minimised by placing them in inferior positions in relation to men and their roles in society. Even if appearing at first in the plot of the comics, most female characters are being effaced as the story develops. They have secondary roles or supporting roles for male characters. In comics, we see that the girls and women accept their subordinate condition and gender roles and inequalities as well and, therefore, this type of media (i.e., the comics) is a subversive one concerning gender-related socialisation of the young readers.

Gender equality was part of the communist project and consequently its official discourse, but was alien and even contradictory to the Romanian society's features. Comics prove that the discourse about gender equality in socialist Romania was a fragile one: the gender stereotypes define the patriarchal society. We understand the roles of women and men in the Romanian socialist society based on the values and messages sent by comics. Comics reproduce the sociocultural model of patriarchy, emphasising the asymmetrical power relations between men and women.

Previous research shows that gender identity is part of the individual's identity influencing people's opportunities for personal evolution, their resilience and contribution to societal development. Structural misogyny is the result of the patriarchal society and related discourses engender inequality. My research shows that patriarchal codes of behaviour are re-enacted in comics which, according to communist propaganda, should have advocated for gender equality (Potter et al., 2012). Communist propaganda and regime further reinforced the patriarchal Romanian society and mass media enabled the diffusion of an inherent and durable patriarchal pattern of interaction between genders. This pattern was even more naturalised and officialised through the published comics. They featured exemplary characters and deeds and consequently their relationships were also models for the young. These comics impact beyond school or formal education context: education influences gender justice in the respective society. Therefore, my study contributes data that could inform research about the construction of representations of the nation and of gender relations within it, in communist Romania. Further research could be done on the impact of these representations on Romanians.

In my analysis, I pointed out narratives that encode gender norms and inequality. The respective gender codes as well as represented place attachments could still be active because these representations were passed down from the generation who socialised through comics to the younger ones. Comics exhibit the contexts, activities, behaviours, and roles the two genders relate to. These are adapted to the particular cultural definitions of gender, femininity and masculinity, in Romanian society. They reflect the power asymmetry between genders in socialist Romania and the related construction of place attachment through propaganda. In this research context, my article also invites for a critical re-reading of these comics at present, although during that period, when they were published, the readers may have identified with the characters, and shared their attitudes, feelings and attachments (i.e., to varied communities and places). In this research, I also identified the types of places described in comics and their characteristics, as well as how they were supposed to influence place attachment at the national level: attachment to the country, its nature and culture.

My research underlines the role of comics as pedagogic devices in constructing Romanians' place attachment and in socialising the young with gender hierarchies and different experiences of space because of this. Further on, socialisation with space, which was regulated through gender roles, maintained a characteristic system of values in the patriarchal Romanian society.

Future research could investigate how place attachment and attachment to the nation was built through comics created and published during a democratic regime and compare the discourse of those comics with the one constructed during an authoritarian regime. In addition, the interplay between gender and place attachment and attachment to the nation should be analysed comparatively in comics from democratic and non-democratic countries.

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