

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

<https://www.e-ir.info/2025/09/10/bodies-of-resistance-visibilising-womens-lives-under-romanias-abortion-ban/>

IOANA PAUN, SEP 10 2025

Romania's communist regime (1947–1989) was marked by totalitarian control, pervasive surveillance, and political and ideological repression. Under Nicolae Ceaușescu's leadership (1965–1989), the regime intensified into a dynastic dictatorship characterized by a cult of personality unparalleled in Eastern Europe, comparable only to North Korea's Kim dynasty (Boia, 2016). It is widely recognized in the literature as the most repressive regime in the Eastern Bloc, weaponizing policies that controlled everyday life, including reproduction (Kligman, 1998). On the 1st of October 1966, Ceaușescu enacted the 770 Decree which criminalized abortion and contraception, mandating women under 45 to bear at least four children. The policy was introduced to reverse the country's declining birth rate, which had fallen to 1.9 children per woman by 1966—the lowest in postwar Europe (Trebici, 1991). Despite evidence suggesting limited efficiency and high social costs, the regime justified the policy as a patriotic duty for securing the nation's socialist future (Tismăneanu, 2006).

Thus, the Decree prohibited abortion except for limited cases: women over 45 years old or with four or more living children, pregnancies threatening the mother's life or those caused by incest or rape, and cases of severe fetal abnormalities (Trebici, 1991). Even these exceptions required approval from state-appointed commissions, which often prioritized political loyalty over medical necessity (Betea, 2008). Women who underwent illegal abortions faced imprisonment for up to three years (Șerban, 2021; Bucur, 2008). By 1967, contraceptives such as condoms, IUDs, and contraceptive pills were removed from pharmacies (Barbulescu, Croitor and Onojescu, 2010). Married men could only purchase condoms with written spousal consent (Popa, 2006). Due to limited options, women sought out informal networks (Kligman, 1998; Betea, 2004).

Shortly after the Decree was enacted, income taxes increased on individuals without children regardless of marital status, starting from the age of 25. Financial incentives were also adopted, increasing children's allowance and decreasing the income tax for families with three or more children by 30% (Cozma, 2012). Nonetheless, the 1980s marked the most repressive period. In 1984, women of reproductive age were subjected to mandatory quarterly pelvic exams in factories, and even in high schools to detect pregnancies (Doboș, 2010; Betea, 2004). Local authorities monitored compliance and absences led to wage deductions or public shaming (ibid.). Doctors, midwives, or individuals involved in performing or facilitating illegal abortions were sentenced to five to fifteen years in prison (Barbulescu, Croitor and Onojescu, 2010). In extreme cases meant to deter others, medical professionals who performed abortions were executed (Kligman, 1998).

Moreover, prosecutors and secret police ('Securitate') agents were present in maternity wards, closely monitoring procedures (Cozma, 2012). When women arrived at the hospital due to complications caused by attempted abortions, they were interrogated. Doctors were not allowed to treat them unless they disclosed information about the methods used and the individuals who performed the abortions. As many women refused to confess, they were denied medical care, often resulting in death (Doboș, 2010).

As such, women turned to clandestine procedures, which sometimes had horrific consequences, such as sepsis, uterine perforations, hemorrhaging, and organ failure, and death (Hord et al., 1991). Official figures state over 10,000 women died from unsafe abortions during the Decree's 23-year enforcement (Kligman, 2000), although this does not

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

consider unreported cases or deaths resulting from botched procedures (Șerban, 2021). During these years, 87% of all maternal deaths were caused by abortion and Romania consistently registered the highest maternal mortality rate in Europe (ibid.). In 1989, the number of maternal deaths peaked at 159 deaths per 100,000 live births, the highest rate recorded in Europe (Hord et. al., 1991). That year alone, 545 maternal deaths were linked to back-alley procedures (Kligman, 1998).

This paper seeks to answer the following questions: *How does current alternative film and media construct women's experience under the abortion ban from 1966 to 1989? How do present discourses interact with each other and with past experience?* I argue the contemporary feminist discourse aims to disrupt both the communist past and contemporary patriarchal discourse engaging with past experience. I understand these patriarchal discourses as readaptations of each other, as patriarchy does not disappear; it transforms. Through memory work and visceral imagery, the feminist discourse memorializes women as victims and political dissidents and opposes sanitization and reappropriation of their experience and trauma. Although it disrupts patriarchal structures at the material level which pertains to the policy itself, it does not disrupt them at the symbolic level. The discourse invertedly recenters male voice at the expense of female subjectivity, allowing past oppressors to reframe themselves as victims. It further confines female characters within a patriarchal paradigm.

In Chapter II, I discuss literature on women's reproductive rights in the region under communism, and specifically in Romania. Chapter III provides the theoretical framework and methodology for the discourse analysis in Chapter IV. Finally, Chapter V presents the conclusion.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic work has extensively analyzed the impact of communism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), particularly post-1989 transformations (Verdery, 1996; Rose, 2008; Törnquist-Plewa and Stala, 2011). Far less attention has been paid to how communist regimes shaped women's lives, especially through reproductive policies and gender role constructions. This chapter explores how these dynamics evolved across CEE, focusing on Romania's unique case.

Scholars agree women's bodies and reproductive policies were central to the political apparatus of the socialist state (Einhorn, 1993; David, 1999; Alsop and Hockey, 2001). Mirroring the Soviet Union's rhetoric and approach, CEE states initially legalized abortion during the mid-1950s, framing it part of women's emancipation from capitalist patriarchal dependency (Githens and McBride Stetson, 1996; Stenvoll, 2002; Brunnbauer and Taylor, 2004). However, declining birth rates in the 1960s led to pronatalist shifts. Propaganda defined family as "society's basic cell", reconfiguring women as "socialist worker-mothers" (Einhorn, 1993; Bucur, 2008).

Back then, contraceptive methods were lacking across all states and abortion became the primary way of birth control (Einhorn, 1993; Stenvoll, 2002). IUDs and contraceptive pills became more accessible only in Hungary and East Germany from the 1970s onward (Zielinska, 1987). During the 1960s, the region adopted a pronatalist approach (David, 1999). Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria, for instance, relied primarily on propaganda and material incentives—such as birth grants, paid maternity leave, family and childcare allowances, and taxation for families without children—to encourage higher birth rates (David, 1999; Brown, 2020; Randall, 2011). Although Bulgaria severely restricted abortion on request in 1968, it revised its policy in 1974 due to extreme public scrutiny (Brunnbauer and Taylor, 2004).

Romania, however, took the most repressive path by criminalizing abortion, eliminating access to contraceptive methods, and establishing systemic reproductive control for 23 years (Anton, 2018; Kligman, 1998; Bucur, 2008). It represents a critical case for understanding how the communist state's use of reproductive policies and control over women's bodies plays out when pushed to its most violent and invasive extreme. Studying how pronatalism evolved into a form of systemic violence further contributes to broader theoretical debates on biopolitics and reproductive autonomy.

The prevalent socio-economic and political literature regards the 770 Decree as an authoritarian intervention

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

intended to engineer demographic growth and consolidate state power (David and Wright, 1971). It overwhelmingly conceptualizes its impact and consequences as institutional failures. Literature agrees the policy ultimately exacerbated poverty, increased the number of maternal deaths, led to around 100,000 orphans, and worsened inequality (Trebici, 1991; Bejenaru, 2010; Hord et al., 1991; Glasper, 2020). Through this perspective, maternal deaths are viewed as just another consequence that aggravated public health crises, trivializing their brutality. Furthermore, studies document individuals born because of the Decree have lower health and development outcomes, diminished labor market performance, and sometimes lifelong traumas (Dóczy, 2010; Pop-Eleches, 2006; Glasper, 2020). As this literature largely employs quantitative data and policy analysis, it desensitizes the female suffering endured by abstracting it into metrics of institutional success or failure. Therefore, it continues to frame women solely as instruments of demographic ambitions.

Although scholars critique the legislative processes and practices for prioritizing demographic goals over women's autonomy, they focus more on political decision-making than foregrounding the impact on women's lives (e.g., Popa, 2006; Doboş, 2010; Cozma, 2012). For instance, even when Pălăşan (2009) critiques the state's control over reproductive choices, the Decree is addressed within the broader framework of political repression. This perspective overlooks the specifically gendered violence of the policy, leading to conclusions that it "affected the sexual lives of all citizens" (Tismăneanu, 2006, p. 510). Subsequently, it downplays the impact the Decree had on women. While this literature provides an essential structural analysis, it treats women as passive subjects within socio-economic and political discussions. It fails to explore the complex and gendered realities that underpinned everyday life under the Decree.

Feminist scholars focus, instead, on lived experiences, emphasizing gendered violence and trauma. Extensive scholarship states the state reconfigured women's roles to support the policy. Kligman (1998) and Massino (2019) demonstrate the official discourse glorified motherhood, while focusing less on women's roles as socialist workers. Although women were deemed emancipated, they were reduced to their reproductive function (Teampău, 2014; Oprea 2012). This dissonance extended to the private sphere, as despite the official discourse of emancipation, patriarchal norms prevailed (Miroiu, 2004, 2006).

Subsequent research explores the impact the Decree had on women. Forced pregnancies inflicted social suffering and shame (Andrei and Branda, 2015) which women internalized, viewing their own bodies as an 'internal enemy' (Betea, 2004, p. 251). The pervasive feeling of fear was transmitted onto following generations, creating a legacy of silence, trauma, and lack of sexual education (Anton, 2011, 2018). This continues to impact women's contemporary choices regarding motherhood (Arsene, 2017).

Furthermore, this literature regards illegal abortions as political acts of dissidence through which women reclaimed their bodily autonomy (Kligman, 1998; Miroiu, 2004; Bucur, 2008). However, memory studies discussing how women who underwent clandestine procedures are represented in contemporary media reveal gaps. Scholars explore how literature (Marinescu, 2022; Prodan, 2021) and film (Adam and Mitroiu, 2016; Mitroiu, 2016; David, 2022) act as post-memory, transmitting traumatic history onto the next generations and how illegal abortions are represented in these pieces. These studies, nonetheless, do not critically assess whether the discursive construction of characters and narratives still reproduces patriarchal structures.

Although Haliliuc (2013) offers a notable exception by critiquing the patriarchal framing of post-communist memorialization of women, her study is not specifically concerned with the period under the Decree. Overall, the literature treats these representations in isolation, without examining how a broader and coherent feminist counter-discourse might emerge across multiple media forms and how it might interact with patriarchal narratives. Given the brutality of this past, it is imperative to better understand how the past is represented in the present.

Through this paper, I aim to address the identified gaps. I argue contemporary feminist counter-discourse memorializes women as victims and political dissidents, while visibilising the violence inscribed on their bodies. I argue it constructs a counter-memory to communist and contemporary patriarchal accounts, disrupting them at the embodied level, but reproducing their structures at the symbolic one.

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Foucault (1972) defines discourse as “practices that systematically form the object of which they speak” (p. 49). Thus, power operates through discourse to construct ‘regimes of truth’ of what norms and assumptions become naturalized and how subjects are positioned within it (Foucault, 2014, p. 93). Discourse produces subjectivities by shaping social structures and individual subject positions. This process of subjectivation (ibid.), involves two interconnected dynamics: subjection (being governed by discourse) and subject formation (being intelligible within discourse). As Butler describes it, “subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency” (1997, p. 2). Therefore, we are shaped by discourse but can also find ways to act within and against it.

Power is also dispersed through institutional practices (Foucault, 1975). Foucault's understanding of power as productive allows him to distinguish between different modalities of power and their subjects. While disciplinary power targets the individual through surveillance, biopower operates at a collective level, structuring features of life: birth, health and mortality (Foucault, 1978). The former produces self-regulating subjects who internalize the surveilling gaze, whereas the latter is exercised through institutions to shape and control populations.

Because discourse produces power relations, counter-discourses emerge as sites of resistance. As Foucault states, “where there is power, there is resistance” (ibid., p. 95), which means that dominant structures contain the possibility of their own disruption. Counter-discourses challenge or reframe dominant meanings, which allows new understandings of subjecthood (ibid.). For Butler, this occurs through subversion, where one destabilizes dominant norms by reinventing and reinterpreting them in unexpected ways (Koložova, 2021).

However, extensive emphasis on discursive resignification overlooks the material and structural forces that shape subjectivity (Boucher, 2006). Barad (2003) posits discourse and matter are co-constitutive. Through agential realism, Barad asserts subjectivity is not just inscribed onto passive bodies but emerges through intra-actions—the ongoing interplay between the material and discursive. From this perspective, subversion does not only occur in the discursive but also in the material. Counter-discourses, thus, are also produced through bodies, objects, and spaces. In patriarchal discourse, the female body is marked as an abject—“what disturbs identity, system, order ” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4)—and must be expelled to uphold the symbolic order, the domain of structured meaning and social law. Blood, decay, and bodily fluids threaten this order by exposing the instability of the controlled subject. Thus, the female body and women are rendered unrepresentable. The monstrous feminine, as an extension of the abject, disrupts these boundaries and refuses containment, revealing the fragility of patriarchal structures (Creed, 1993).

Aligned with Hansen's (2013) approach, this paper adopts an understanding of identity as discursively constituted through a process of linking and differentiation by articulating similarities to some elements and simultaneously defining itself in opposition to what it is not. This process is central to the construction of the “self” in opposition to a series of “others”. As such, the discourse analysis in this paper identifies three “selves”—the contemporary feminist “self”, the communist patriarchal “self”, and the contemporary patriarchal “self”. It focuses primarily on the feminist “self”, while considering how patriarchal discourses construct women as “other”. Therefore, the feminist discourse and the female subject constructed within are my main objects of analysis. Through feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis (FPDA), we understand how the “other” actively constructs and represents itself—in this case, through memory work. As an “active practice of remembering” rejecting a singular truth, memory work allows reclaiming the abject body and creating alternative representations of female subjectivity (Kuhn, 2000, p. 186; Hirsch and Smith, 2002). Thus, collective memory, as the “juncture where the individual and the social come together” (Hirsch and Smith, 2002, p. 7), becomes a *lieu de dispute* (Milani and Richardson, 2023), where counter-memories emerge as forms of resistance to the dominant discourse (Foucault, 1977).

Unlike Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which focuses on power asymmetries within a discourse, FPDA emphasizes the multiplicity of discursive positions and that identities move between dominant and resistant discourses rather than being fixed within a single power structure (Baxter, 2003). I deconstruct and interpret materials of memory work foregrounding female subjectivity by analysing how they dislodge patriarchal structures in a bottom-up process, while also “tracing the unreliable fragments” (Gannon, 2008, p. 46; Baxter, 2003). I study how

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

the construction of the "other" might, at times, align with how the patriarchal "selves" produce it, while also resisting them. This intertextuality underscores how the female subject negotiates its agency and resistance within and against patriarchal narratives. As such, we understand how women are intelligible within discourses and how their lived experience and trauma under the Decree is represented or obscured.

Data

Drawing on Hansen's (2013) methodological approach to discourse analysis, I identify the relevant temporal perspective and key events that inform my data collection. The primary timeframe period is from 2007 to 2021, to which I contrast the comparative period from 1966 to 1989. The key events I consider are the 770 Decree signed in 1966, the Revolution of 1989 after which abortion was legalized, and Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007. The latter triggered a process that reconfigured and 'Europeanized' Romania's national identity (Puscas, 2006, p. 82). Given EU's requirements and pressure from civil society, the issue of gender emerged, to some extent, in the public political discourse following Romania's accession (Miroiu, 2010). This primary timeframe allows for an analysis of how the contemporary patriarchal and feminist discourses have developed within a European context, where the issue of gender is more visible. The comparative timeframe, on the other hand, refers to the period under the abortion ban and supports analysis of the communist patriarchal discourse contingent on it.

According to feminist post-structuralist thought, I turn to collective biography as a feminist methodology because it foregrounds female subjectivity, enabling an inquiry into experiences that are difficult to articulate, such as trauma (Gonnick and Gannon, 2015). I identify testimony-based accounts as a primary source of data. Both non-fiction and fictionalized testimonies provide counter-memories because the individualized narrative challenges hegemonic historical accounts (Hirsch and Smith, 2002). For non-fictional testimony-based materials, I consider the independent journalistic project *The Decree Chronicles* (2019 – present) and the short documentary episode "Adevăruri despre Trecut: Copiii Patriei" ["Truths about the Past: The Nation's Children"] (2015) produced by the Romanian National Television (TVR). *The Decree Chronicles* collects testimonies, carries out interviews, and publishes articles on its website on how the consequences and impact of the Decree are felt today. It has garnered attention primarily through Facebook, with 4.7k followers and around 129k views for video recorded testimonials. Meanwhile, "The Nation's Children" is televised yearly on the TVR channel as part of the documentary series "Truth about the Past". The episode has recorded 60k views and 185 comments on Youtube (TVR, 2017). Both projects, thus, occupy significant places within the public discourse.

Regarding fictionalized testimony, I consider the book *Si se auzeau greierii* [And crickets could be heard] by Corina Sabau (2019) and the film *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* [4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days] by Cristian Mungiu (2007). Sabau's book has been discussed in popular newspapers, such as *Adevarul*, which is one of the biggest publication trusts in Romania (mediaTRUST, 2023). It has also been discussed in established cultural publications, such as *Dilemaveche* (Chivu, 2020), *Observator Cultural* (2021), and *Scena9* (Iovănel, 2020). Mungiu's film was the most viewed Romanian film in 2007, reaching more than \$270,000 at the Romanian Box Office (Box Office Mojo, n.d.). As such, both pieces are central to the public discourse.

Including alternative sources of media is critical because public media and official archives often memorialize the experiences of the powerful at the expense of the disenfranchised (Hirsch & Smith, 2002). For the contemporary patriarchal discourse, I rely on secondary analysis of public media and official archives: the Sighet Museum (Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance) which is the main museum on Romanian communism (Haliliuc, 2013) and the Romanian New Wave (RNW) films. The RNW emerged in the mid-2000s as a 'medium of remembrance' through which Romanian society has addressed the heritage and traumas of the communist past (Adam and Mitroiu, 2016; Mitroiu, 2016). Relevant films in the public discourse include *Tales from the Golden Age* (2009) by Mungiu, grossing over \$200,000 at the Romanian Box Office (Box Office Mojo, n.d.), *If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle* (2010) by Florin Șerban with over \$216,000 (Box Office Mojo, n.d.), and most recently, *The New Year That Never Came* (2024) by Bogdan Mureșan with over \$500,000 (Box Office Mojo, n.d.). Both the Sighet Museum and the RNW maintain critical positions within contemporary discourse on the past.

For the comparative period, I rely on secondary analysis of the *Femeia* [The Woman] magazine from November 1966

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

until December 1989. It was the mouthpiece of the National Council of Women (CNF) and the only magazine targeting women specifically (Massino, 2019). Although there is no reliable information for its circulation, its role as a tool for state propaganda renders it a valuable source for deconstructing the communist discourse (ibid.).

Considering this paper employs interpretive methods, I acknowledge my positionality has influenced my analysis. Growing up with the stories of my mother and grandmother, who lived under the 770 Decree has shaped my understanding of the trauma and suffering experienced by women during that period. I recognize the possibility of unconscious biases even though I have strived to maintain a critical distance.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

This section analyzes how feminist discourse repositions women's experiences under 770 Decree to subvert both communist and contemporary patriarchal narratives. First, I examine how it creates a counter-memory at the embodied level by exposing erased violence. Then, I explore its limitations at the symbolic level, where it partially reproduces patriarchal structures.

The Material and Embodied Level

This section examines how communist discourse sought to pacify women's bodies by demonizing abortion and constructing the deviant woman. I show how contemporary patriarchal narratives continue this erasure through the male dissident archetype. Finally, I discuss how feminist discourse constructs a counter-memory, reclaiming women's embodied experiences and restoring their visibility.

The Communist Patriarchal Discourse

1. Demonizing Abortion

Teampău's analysis (2024) of *Femeia* (1966–1989) reveals after Ceaușescu declared maternity a socialist duty in 1966, the magazine increasingly framed abortion a transgression of the natural order. Through testimonials from women who regret it, it aimed to instill fear, pacifying women into obeying the ban. For instance, a story from the November 1966 edition (p.3) reads: "After five abortions, at her own request, the following pregnancies—this time wanted and awaited—ended on their own: at 3 months, at 6 months, then again at 3 months, and again at 6 months... If she hadn't rejected nature's gift back then, her first child could be 16 today". Abortion is constructed as a transgression of the natural order, which reduces women to their reproductive function, implying consequences are self-inflicted (Massino, 2019).

Similarly, the medicalized discourse embedded with falsehoods aims to instill obedience. Multiple testimonies from doctors claim abortion, even when performed under appropriate conditions, causes uterine perforations, 'secondary sterility', or prolonged menstruation (Massino, 2019). Thus, the discourse aims to produce one single 'truth' about women's bodies and abortion. From a Foucauldian perspective, women internalizing this fear of abortion become self-regulating subjects that discipline themselves in line with the Decree. Meanwhile, the discourse erases the state's responsibility for women's suffering.

2. The Deviant Woman

Thus, the communist discourse constructed the binary: the "Eternal Feminine" versus the deviant woman. Massino (2019) argues women who underwent abortion were casted as 'immoral', 'selfish', and 'naïve' for transgressing the legal and natural order. This discursive production of the wrong type of womanhood serves a moralizing and disciplinary purpose, sanctioning deviation from the subject who embodies the roles of mother and wife (Oprea, 2015). Meanwhile, men's roles remained unquestioned with no mention of fatherhood duties (ibid.). Furthermore, *Femeia* relied on stories of maternal death to produce the deviant female subject. An article from the April 1984 edition (p.4) reads: "At midnight, the woman ceased to live. Painful, isn't it? Painful and absurd. (...) But who can pay for the fact that three children were left orphaned? They were left alone due to the dirty act of their mother".

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

This framing moralizes and instrumentalizes embodied female suffering rather than erase it. Through its discussions of maternal death and botched abortions, communist discourse did not erase the abject—the bleeding and disobedient female body—but contained it within narratives cautioning against deviance which justified control. Therefore, the abject female body becomes the monstrous feminine, representing cultural fears about unruly femininity that demand discipline and control. As Cohen (1996) posits, monsters signal the boundaries of acceptable behavior, embodying the anxieties a society seeks to repress.

Thus, the discourse punishes the non-compliant woman by producing specific subject positions: the docile and 'maternal' woman versus the deviant and selfish one. The reinforcement of this binary constructs a single 'truth' about femininity, portraying non-compliant women as moral failures rather than victims of a draconian regime. At a societal level, it aimed to discipline women into self-regulating subjects who internalize these norms and fear. Petre (1995, pp. 22-23) argues this practice created for women, "a history of their own", marked by humiliation and quiet resistance.

The Contemporary Patriarchal Discourse

1. The Male Archetype

Through memory work, the contemporary patriarchal discourse erases the female history and experience. It works through a dual mechanism that, first, constructs dissent, victimhood, and collective trauma as inherently masculine. Romanian feminist scholars argue resistance under communism is portrayed as inherently masculine, privileging public acts of defiance over embodied or private resistance (Bucur, 2008; Haliliuc, 2013). The Sighet Museum focuses on early resistance in the 1940s and 1950s (Haliliuc, 2013), rendering public opposition the default 'truth' about political resistance. It commemorates politicians, military leaders and public intellectuals, reinforcing the dichotomy between the private and the public sphere (ibid.). It establishes the public and the masculine experience as the default political history, rendering women 'unrepresentable'.

Similarly, the RNW constructs collective trauma and experience through male subjectivity. Films such as *Death of Mr. Lazarescu*, *12:08 East of Bucharest*, and *Freedom* produce a hegemonic model where the collective experience is inherently male (Dima, 2023; Fulop, 2015; Popovici, 2017). Only *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* critiques the Decree. Thus, the women's historical experience under the ban remains particularly marginalized.

2. Conditioned Visibility

Within this male-centered paradigm, women's visibility is conditioned on their relational identities to men. For instance, the Sighet Museum's exhibit on incarcerated women reduces their identities to their relational categories, as a panel states: "Mothers, Wives, Sisters, Daughters". Women are recognized as political victims by association or through sacrifices made for male figures, not for their own lived experiences. The RNW further conditions female visibility on direct subordination to men. As supporting characters, women are generally portrayed as helpless, and as protagonists, they are almost exclusively depicted through sexual violence and abuse (Popovici, 2017; Dima, 2023). Fulop (2015) notes, from his sample, only two films feature female protagonists who achieve their goal. Others follow the "slow disempowerment" (p.6) of their female characters. At a discursive level, female suffering remains incidental to male narratives. Through the repetitive portrayal of female victimhood in relation to men, the embodied experience of women during communism remains unacknowledged. The tragedies of the Decree are marginalized in public media and official accounts, with the Sighet Museum treating them as an 'optional episode' (Haliliuc, 2013, p. 121) and the RNW addressing it only through Mungiu's film.

Therefore, the discourse contains the abject by erasing the embodied female experience entirely. It maintains gendered boundaries by refusing to acknowledge the bleeding and suffering female body. The patriarchal tropes of the deviant woman, the abject, and the monstrous feminine construct a logic of containment, policing the boundaries of female intelligibility within discourse. Essentially, they sustain a circular logic, where resistance to reproductive control constitutes deviance; deviance confirms abjection; abjection produces monstrosity; monstrosity legitimizes further repression.

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

Ultimately, the contemporary patriarchal discourse is a transformation of the communist one, as both redefine the public/private divide and produce a female subject configured within the familial unit (Einhorn, 1993). During communism, women were emancipated as 'worker-mothers', not as citizens, and their bodies served productive and reproductive state goals. In post-communism, family remains 'society's cell', becoming the "focal point in the search for identity and new values" (ibid, p. 39). Thus, women's roles as mothers or other relational identities to men prevail over alternative roles, such as women as citizens or political dissidents. Therefore, feminist scholars regard the transition between the two political systems and discourses, as one from state to private patriarchy (Miroiu, 2004; 2006).

The Contemporary Feminist Discourse

So far, I have presented how the communist discourse sought to pacify women into complying with the abortion ban by producing two contradictory female subjects. I have shown how the current patriarchal discourse relies on the male dissident/victim archetype, erasing female subjectivity and women's experience under the Decree. Now, I discuss the contemporary feminist discourse which seeks to visibilise and center women's experience and trauma. It constructs a counter-memory to hegemonic accounts of the communist past and employs graphic and visceral imagery.

1. Memory Work: Trauma and Victimhood

The feminist discourse revealed through my sources relies on female subjectivity. My sources function as post-memory, transmitting traumatic knowledge to the next generations (Hirsch, 2008). Collective memory is *aliu de dispute* (Milani and Richardson, 2023) where different discourses strive for dominance over collective remembering. The feminist discourse works to disrupt the contemporary patriarchal discourse by constructing a complex representation of gendered trauma on individual, collective, intergenerational, and visible/invisible levels to memorialize victims of the Decree.

At the individual level, female trauma is where personal suffering and institutional oppression meet. In 'And crickets could be heard', Ecaterina attempts to terminate her pregnancy but suffers a hemorrhage and ends up in hospital, where authorities are notified and she is prosecuted. What follows is a display of biopolitical power: "They took off their jackets, loosened their ties, unbuttoned a few buttons on their shirts. This is not a story worth an antibiotic (...) that will keep you alive" (p.92). Foucault (1975) argues power is disseminated through institutional practices, which positions prosecutors as the embodiment of the regime, turning the female body into a site of reproductive control. This appearance of normalcy underscores the profound power asymmetry—while for Ecaterina the interrogation is a matter of life or death, for them, it is routine. This reflects Arendt's concept of 'banality of evil', where systemic oppression is carried out as standard procedure (1963).

Throughout this discourse, individual narratives evolve into a generational and collective voice. In a *Decree Chronicles* interview (2021) Irina Chelba reflects on her mother's death from a botched abortion: "When I got married the first time, she wasn't there. When I first got my period, she wasn't there" (00:15:00). Her testimony situates personal trauma within a continuum of generational trauma, linking it to the regime's biopolitical oppression. Chelba's first-person account becomes a site where grief is mediated and transmitted onto the audience (Hirsch and Smith, 2002). The 'absent mother' produces two female subjects—those directly affected by ban (the mother) and those by its legacy (the daughter). In the book, Ecaterina's death shifts the narrative voice to her daughter, Sofia, who internalizes the trauma: "I'm the girl whose mother has died" (Prodan, 2021, p.98). Foucault (1977) understands death as a discursive event where memory and writing transform it into a reconfiguration of subjectivity. Ecaterina's death persists beyond the individual experience, becoming part of collective struggle and resistance. By producing subjects who bear this memory, this narrative rejects any singular truth and recognizes a multiplicity of female experiences as victims of the regime.

This multiplicity of perspectives is reinforced as trauma is constructed on levels of visibility and invisibility. This is most evident in Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days*. In the final scene, Otilia fixates on Gabita and attempts to start a dialogue but fails. Then, she glimpses at the audience. In their post-traumatic silence, return to dialogue is

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

impossible since language reached its limit (Parvulescu, 2009). Otilia's conclusion—"We will never speak of this again" (01:48:17)—encapsulates this crisis that evades language (Caruth, 1996). Thus, Otilia's brief glance at the audience underscores the notion of "being-with" the body and embodying trauma in the aftermath (Parvulescu, 2009). The refusal to fully break the fourth wall prevents a false sense of identification, preserving the audience's role as a witness (ibid.). Throughout the film, the deliberate silences, gazes, and gaps—such as refusing to visually represent rape—center the interiority of the female subject (Gradea, 2016; Kasman, 2018). These choices underscore Mungiu's skepticism towards claiming objectivity because just as trauma cannot be fully articulated (Lacan, 2018), it cannot be fully conveyed through cinema either.

2. Embodied Dissent

As the discourse identifies women's bodies as the site of oppression, it locates resistance in materiality. It emphasizes the private acts of resistance which produce the female subject as a political dissident. Bucur (2008) argues the communist regime turned female bodies and families into intensely regulated sites, blurring public and private spheres. Therefore, abortion became embodied dissent.

The TVR short documentary (2017) suggests this idea: "The Party assumed control over the most intimate aspect of human personality: sexuality. [...] Women, no matter the risk, resorted to abortions" (00:15:03). By not explicitly framing clandestine abortions as acts of defiance but rather as ways of "adapting to restrictions" (00:11:17), the rhetoric leaves open the question: Were these acts survival strategies or covert resistance?

Even within this ambiguity, these acts still produce discursive power through Barad's agential realism (2003). As matter and meaning co-constitute each other, the physical actions women take are transformative discursive practices, reconfiguring and producing new subjectivities. Material outcomes are, thus, the primary ontological units. Even if some women did not consciously frame their abortions as resistance, their embodied practice generated a counter-discourse. This result is represented in *4 Months, 3 weeks, and 2 Days* as Otilia's actions—obtaining money for abortion, meeting up with the abortionist, reserving the hotel room, and enduring rape in exchange for her friend's abortion—embody defiance against state control. She refuses to internalize the surveilling gaze and self-regulate (Foucault, 1975), continuously rejecting its power and the possibility of its triumph. These material practices transform 'private' acts into sources of discursive power.

By reconfiguring private acts as political defiance, embodied resistance constructs female subjects as brave political dissidents. Edwina's testimony (Mesesan, 2021) reframes personal loss into a radical act of courage: "My mother died in 1981 because she tried to have another home abortion. Now I know she was very, very brave". Emphasizing the mother's courage destabilizes the communist portrayal of women who had abortions as 'immoral' or 'selfish', and frames them as brave agents fighting for their bodily autonomy. This construction transcends the victim/survivor dichotomy. It disrupts the contemporary patriarchal discourse, by reconfiguring the category of 'political dissident'. In Sabau's book (p.74), Ecaterina's inner monologue before attempting abortion constructs the brave female subject: "I will thicken the thread of these women, the next woman from Matasea Populara who will gather her courage and say: 'I have a strong heart, a young woman's heart'. The metaphor of 'thickening the thread' situates her within a continuum of female resistance, reinforcing the collective nature of trauma and defiance. She glimpses agency as she moves beyond the state-imposed discourse by refusing to internalize guilt and shame (Susan and Gannon, 2006).

3. Graphic and Visceral Imagery

a). The Female Body

The recurrent use of graphic and visceral imagery anchors the female body as the locus where women confront the perishable nature of their condition, thus visibilising the abject, the unrepresentable (Kristeva, 1982). In Sabau's book (p.86), excessive depictions of blood ("I grip the edge of the stretcher with one hand and try to stop the blood. That sound again—the one I had hoped never to hear, as if it were flowing from a faucet.") force the reader to confront the abject where life and death collapse (Kristeva, 1982). According to Creed's concept of monstrous-

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

feminine (1993), the blood "as if it were flowing from a faucet" introduces an element of horror, disrupting the symbolic order that seeks to repress the female body. In horror, the female body is never fully contained, so it must be controlled or destroyed, which is implied in the line "[t]he nurse presents me to the doctor: the woman from whom it leaks" (p.84). This reduces the female body to an abject that defies the sanitized narratives of both patriarchal discourses. Through explicit imagery, the discourse reveals the grotesque reality of the Decree and demands an acknowledgement of the violence inscribed onto women's bodies.

Non-fictional testimonies further confront the abject. In *Decree Chronicles* (2021), Ioana Coja names the unrepresentable: "As they took that mess out of me, it smelled awful, of rotting tissue" (00:05:19). Her brother curetted her with his fingernail: "I have to remove the placenta with my nails. And that's what he did" (00:06:58). Kristeva (1982, p. 3) notes the abject "upsets even more violently the one who confronts it". However, the difficulty of confronting it allows reappropriation and sanitization of bodily suffering by the contemporary patriarchal discourse (Scarry, 1985). For Coja, naming the abject is cathartic and politically empowering because it obstructs the patriarchal discourse from appropriating or erasing her embodied experience. Therefore, the discourse demands a recognition of the unmediated and uncontained corporeal experience.

b). *The Fetus/Newborn*

Graphic imagery extends to the fetus and newborn, portraying them as objects of the regime's violence as a continuation of the woman's body. In *The Nation's Children*, a woman recalls giving birth: "I got on the table. He pulled [the babies] out with the forceps. He crushed one's head and tore the arm of the other. One lived for 5 days, and the other for 4 days" (0:16:26). The regime turned childbirth into a mechanical process, dehumanizing both the mother and the child (Oprea, 2016). Representing violence on the newborn collapses the distinction between the female subject and the fetus/newborn and reduces both to objects of control. As such, the narrative voice in the episode states: "Women were forced to give birth, the Party dictated. Under what conditions—it was none of its business" (00:16:21). The graphic imagery of mutilated newborns disrupts the sanitized rhetoric of the communist discourse that romanticized childbirth while concealing its brutality. This mechanism does not de-center the violence against the female body but reinforces the total harm inflicted on the female reproductive process.

In Mungiu's film, the 30-second shot of an aborted fetus forces the audience to face the regime's brutal intrusion into the most intimate sphere. This scene deliberately transgresses all cinematic and cultural taboos, exposing the material reality of female oppression (Nasta, 2016). The fetus's expulsion signifies the rejection of the symbolic order and the state's control over the female body (Gradea, 2016). This transgression forces the audience to acknowledge the body as the site of oppression, disrupting romanticized communist narratives of motherhood and exposing the political violence concealed by the contemporary discourse.

By naming and visualizing the abject, the excessive blood, the smell of rotting tissue, the mutilated newborn, the bloody embryo—these sources subvert the sanitized narratives that conceal female subjectivity. They reclaim horror as a form of resistance, disrupting patriarchal erasure of female subjectivity and embodied trauma.

4. *The Symbolic and Structural Level: Recentring Male Subjectivity*

I have discussed how the feminist discourse disrupts patriarchal discourses at the material level by memorializing victims and visibilising oppression. However, it does not fully subvert these discourses at the symbolic level because it reproduces aspects of them.

a). *The Male Savior*

Following Cixous, as long as men continue to write about women's experiences, women remain spoken about rather than speaking (1975). Their subjectivity forms within a male-dominant framework, reducing their experiences to sites for male expression.

Thus, men often position themselves as saviors in testimonies documenting women's suffering. In a *Decree*

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

Chronicles interview (2019), Florin Iaru centers himself as a hero: "From my point of view, I saved a couple of destinies" (00:00:19). The term 'saved' asserts his agency, while 'destinies' abstracts women's suffering. His metaphor—"It is just like jumping in water to save someone from drowning"—produces the female subject as a passive victim. His apparent compassion constructs women as in need of rescue, in contrast, to men, who save them and oppose the regime. Even within a discourse meant to challenge the communist state's oppression, the epistemological framework remains unchanged at the symbolic level, reinforcing the 'heteronormative matrices of intelligibility' (Butler, 2002). In contemporary dominant narratives, male agency is the default and female agency is understood only in relation to it.

A doctor's testimony from the *Decree Chronicles* (Stoicescu and Oncioiu, 2021) reconfigures male heroism through expertise. The article introduces him as such: "With a curettage forceps in his hand, B.T. realized he had the means to act in opposition to this system". His opposition to the regime is grounded in his medical knowledge, positioning him as a figure who *knows* and *acts*. His technical explanation—"I had a special way of operating. The forceps is applied on the cervix at 12 o'clock. I applied it at 6 o'clock."—shifts the discourse from women's suffering and resistance to male ingenuity. Unlike Iaru, the doctor acknowledges women's endurance: *'It hurts like hell. Women are exceptionally resistant to pain.* If it were me, I would have died a hundred times." While this appears to construct a brave female subject, structurally, it frames women as the site of male resistance, not political dissidents themselves. His admiration paradoxically reinforces their passivity by emphasizing their pain endurance, not their political agency. 'If it were me' recenters male subjectivity as the reference point, turning female suffering into something men observe, not something women articulate. This aligns with Cixous' (1975) critique that when women are denied the space to construct their own subjectivity, they are reduced to objects within male discourse.

By centering male heroism, collective memory reproduces a history where resistance is male-led and female experience is secondary. This undermines the feminist discourse's own political goal of reconstructing women as autonomous political dissidents. As memory work discourses shape our subjectivity for different moments in time, women might internalize this passivity in their reflections of the past and daily lives (Susan and Gannon, 2002). When patriarchal structures persist symbolically, they risk resurfacing materially.

b). Discursive Appropriation

The persistence of patriarchal structures at the symbolic level also allows past oppressors to reframe themselves as victims. This occurs within the intersection of the past communist patriarchal discourse, the contemporary patriarchal discourse, and the feminist discourse. Building on Arendt's banality of evil (1963), under communism, bureaucrats could justify horrific acts as obligations of their role. Including male subjectivity allows oppressors to rhetorically shift their positionality, reappropriating the language of suffering and blurring distinctions between perpetrator and victim. This repositioning is most evident in the short documentary (2017) as a doctor states: "I still cannot forget these women even today. I see them coming to me in white coats, [...] covered in dust, standing one after another, waiting for me to perform a genital examination. Without a doubt, this was a completely unique form of humiliation" (00:15:30). He acknowledges women's victimhood but adopts an observational stance, portraying himself as a passive witness rather than an active participant. His phrasing distances him from agency and erases his complicity. As Foucault (1978) notes, discourse operates by not just what it says but what is left unsaid—the doctor never denies performing examinations or reporting pregnancies.

Moreover, the prosecutor's stance is a blatant example of discursive appropriation: "We all lived through the same nightmare" (00:21:57). His use of "we" universalizes trauma, obscuring the gendered violence under the Decree. Most disturbingly, this equates his experience with that of the women he prosecuted, erasing the power asymmetry and his role as enforcer of repression. Like the doctor, he avoids open acknowledgement of complicity, implying the system operated independently of individual choices. As feminist disruption remains largely at the material level, patriarchal narratives persist structurally. This reframes oppression as bureaucratic inevitability rather than a gendered system of violence, allowing agents of oppression to reinsert themselves victims. In turn, women's voices and subjectivity are reappropriated and marginalized.

3) Negotiating Resistance: Female Agency Within Patriarchal and Authoritarian Structures

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

Writers and filmmakers critiquing the past face the challenge of crafting a realistic representation of communist Romania while constructing female characters who disrupt both the regime's policies and the patriarchal norms underpinning them. Thus, subjectivation in feminist discourse remains intertwined with the patriarchal norms it seeks to subvert (Butler, 1994). This shapes how protagonists in the novel and film of my analysis resist gender norms without fully disrupting them.

Ecaterina's inner monologue during a hemorrhage exemplifies this: "*His words are measured in blood clots. In my blood clots. Maybe one day, I'll be able to afford a gaze like his—so certain, so assured*" (p.80). The passage contrasts the embodied ('blood clots') and symbolic ('words', 'gaze') as his discursive dominance reinforces her material suffering. She acknowledges this imbalance but remains acquiescent, internalizing the inevitability of this power structure. Thus, she aspires to embody the strength conferred on men by the patriarchy, thereby remaining inscribed within that paradigm. In other words, as Virban (2024) notes, Ecaterina remains anchored in the ideal of the "communist woman" who endures rather than resists.

Her reflection—"I remember that I am more than (...) the wife of a handsome man, more than Sonia's mother. I am a woman whose life began long before them" (p.6)—suggests a glimpse of self-recognition beyond relational roles. Yet this assertion is not sustained. Her attachment to her husband obscures the gendered hierarchy in which she is embedded. Her imagined confrontation—"I would confront him head-on... But what would I achieve by doing so?... what could I even blame him for?...He married me, gave me his name, and blessed me with a child" (p.56)—shows how her desire to speak up is dissolved by the internalized logic of submission and gratitude. Her actual confrontation—"If you had told me, I would have taken time off and stayed with you. But... you said, 'I don't deal with women's things.' The other women manage, don't they?" (p.79)—constitutes a contained transgression rather than a sustained symbolic rupture. The narrative depicts her as someone whose agency is hermetically contained by the discursive conditions of that time.

While she recognizes her identity beyond relational roles, she never fully detaches from them: "I remember that I am more than (...) the wife of a handsome man, more than Sonia's mother. I am a woman whose life began long before them" (p.6). Her confrontation with her husband marks a moment of rupture, but it is rather ephemeral. The passage—"How long had these words been waiting to come out?" (p.79)—shows her discursive resistance has been suppressed for long, yet it only materializes in a fleeting challenge: "If you had told me, I would have taken time off and stayed with you. But... you said, 'I don't deal with women's things.' The other women manage, don't they?" (p.79). Her resistance at the symbolic level remains a contained transgression rather than a fundamental disruption culminating in a transformative resolution.

In Mungiu's film, Otilia follows a similar pattern. She momentarily leaves Gabita's side and resumes her role as Adi's girlfriend at his mother's birthday dinner. The camera lingers on her silence as she absorbs trauma, while his family patronizes her. Her silence is a mode of negotiation which neither accepts nor directly confronts, which, ultimately, does not disrupt. Later, she challenges Adi (01:25:00):

Otilia: What would we do if I got pregnant?

Adi: But you won't.

Otilia: How do you know I haven't already?

Adi: Wait, are you?

Otilia: You don't even know when I'm supposed to get my period.

Adi: Why do you talk like this? It's never happened before, has it?

His dismissiveness underscores gendered power imbalances since the Decree targeted women exclusively. Although she resists his indifference, she leaves without a resolution. To understand why these women remain constrained despite their resistance, we turn to Kligman's (1998) analysis. State-cultivated duplicity forced individuals to navigate a divide between the official and private discourse, captured by the saying "[s]ay what they want to hear, but do as you will" (Miroiu, 2004, p. 210). Women were declared equal, yet actively oppressed and expected to conform to patriarchal roles in private.

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

In fictionalized media, Ecaterina's and Otilia's partial compliance is not belief in the system but survival since absolute defiance was dangerous. Otilia's reluctance to leave Adi and Ecaterina's hesitation to confront her husband signal strategic decisions. Both exist in a liminal space, calculating how far they can push against the system and still survive. This embodies the paradox of subjectivation as their possibilities of agency are shaped by the same forces they resist. The past communist discourse lingers in the contemporary representation of female subjectivity. The impossibility of these characters to disrupt the symbolic patriarchal structures impacts how we remember women's trauma under the Decree. Although narratives critique gender norms under communism, their inability to dismantle them leaves this critique incomplete. As collective memory absorbs these injustices, women may internalize men's absence as inevitable. Therefore, visibilising gender norms without condemnation reinforces adjustment and over subversion.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed how contemporary feminist discourse has constructed women's experience and trauma during Romania's Decree 770 and has visibilised their embodied struggles. This discourse memorializes women as victims of state violence and political dissidents who opposed reproductive control and visibilises their embodied struggles, thereby challenging hegemonic patriarchal narratives which marginalize or appropriate their experiences.

However, it fails to subvert these structures at the symbolic level as it invertedly recenters male voice and subjectivity which pacifies women, contrary to the discourse's own political goal. It allows past oppressors to reframe themselves as victims, while confining female subjects within patriarchal paradigms. Essentially, this discourse of memory work operates within, rather than challenging existing symbolic frameworks. As patriarchal structures persist at the symbolic level, they risk resurfacing at the embodied one, undermining the fight for bodily autonomy. Ultimately, this dissertation argues for a more reflexive feminist approach to memorializing women's experiences and trauma under the 770 Decree—one that questions, investigates, and resists reproducing patriarchal structures while continuing to honor women's resistance and survival.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Femeia. Retrieved from Ziarele Arcanum. Editions consulted: 10/1966–11/1989. Editions discussed in the final paper: 11/1966, 4/1984.

Jurnalul Decretului [Decree Chronicles] (2019–2021). Articles consulted:

The Party State Tasked Women with Having Children. The Repercussions Are Still Felt (2021)

Our Sex Life Was an Ordeal (2021)

I Secretly Performed Over 100 Abortions on Kitchen Tables (2021)

The Unforgettable Tragedy: Confessions from the Decree Era (2021)

Guardians of the Decree: The Hidden World of Anti-Abortion Enforcers (2021)

Interviews consulted:

Un scriitor a invatat sa faca avorturi pentru a-si salva prietenele de la o viata pe care atunci nu si-o doreau (2019)

"Sonda Tiemann, glucoza, ser fiziologic, seringă si o camera de camin" (2019)

Sa nu tipi (2019)

Jurnalul Decretului Episod 1 (2019)

Amintiri din Epoca Decretului (2021)

Mungiu, C. (Director) (2007). *4 Luni, 3 Saptamani, si 2 Zile* [4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days].

Rogojina, R. (Producer) (2015). *Adevaruri despre Trecut: Copiii Patriei* [Truths about the Past: The Nation's Children]. Distributed by Romanian National Television (TVR). Premiered: 2015.

Sabau, C. (2019). *Si se auzeau greierii* [And Crickets Could Be Heard]. 1st edition. Published by Humanitas

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

Secondary Sources

Adam, E. and Mitroiu, S. (2016). Remembering the Past: Representations of Women's Trauma in Post-1989 Romanian Cinema. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 3(1), p. 1182718. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2016.1182718>.

Alsop, R. and Hockey, J. (2001). Women's Reproductive Lives as a Symbolic Resource in Central and Eastern Europe. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 8(4), pp. 454–471. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135050680100800404>.

Andrei, A. and Branda, A. (2015). Abortion Policy and Social Suffering: the objectification of Romanian women's bodies under communism (1966–1989). *Women's History Review*, 24(6), pp. 881–899. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2015.1013304>.

Anton, L. (2011). *Socialist Mothers and Their Legacies: Migration, Reproductive Health and 'Body-Memory' in Post-Communist Romania*. [online] Available at: https://hal.science/hal-00785532v1/file/ANTON_Socialist_Mothers_and_their_Legacies_Working_paper_IASH_2011.pdf [Accessed 20 Apr. 2025]

Anton, L. (2018). Forgetting Pronatalism? Abortion Governance and Pro-life Discourses in Post-communist Romania. *DOAJ (DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals)*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.14672/ada2018145755-73>.

Arendt, H. (1963). *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Viking Press.

Arsene, M. (2017). Haunting Impositions: Women and Reproductive Policies in Romania under Communism and After. *Analize—Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies*, [online] 9(23), pp. 87–100. Available at: https://www.analize-journal.ro/wp-content/uploads/issues/numarul_9/9_5_mihaela_arsene_88-101.pdf [Accessed 20 Apr. 2025].

Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(3), pp. 801–831. <https://doi.org/10.1086/345321>.

Baxter, J. (2003). *Positioning Gender in Discourse : A Feminist Methodology*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Barbulescu, E., Croitor, M. and Onojescu, A. (2010). *Documente privind politica sanitară în România (1965-1989)*. [online] Cluj Napoca: Mega. Available at: http://hiphi.ubbcluj.ro/modernizarea_ss/Documente_politica_sanitara.pdf.

Bejenaru, L.M. (2010). Relația dintre creșterea demografică și dezvoltarea economică în timpul regimului comunist. Între propaganda oficială și realitățile cotidiene. *Caietele CNSAS*, [online] 1(3), pp. 197–217. Available at: http://www.cnsas.ro/DOCUMENTE/CAIETE/CAIETE_CNSAS_NR_%203_2009.PDF.

Betea, L. (2004). „Uzina pruncilor. Victimele decretului antiavort din 1966”, *Magazin istoric*, May/ 2004

Betea, L. (2008). Interdiction des avortements. In: A. Neculau, ed., *La vie quotidienne en Roumanie sous le communisme*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Boia, L. (2016). *Strania istorie a comunismului românesc (și nefericitele ei consecințe)*. București: Humanitas.

Boucher, G. (2006). The Politics of Performativity: A Critique of Judith Butler. *Parrhesia*, [online] 1, pp. 112–141. Available at: https://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia01/parrhesia01_boucher.pdf.

Box Office Mojo (n.d.). *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days—Box Office Mojo*. [online] Box Office Mojo. Available at: <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl4245849601/weekly/> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2025].

Box Office Mojo (n.d.). *If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle—Box Office Mojo*. [online] Box Office Mojo. Available at: https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt1590024/?ref_=bo_se_r_1 [Accessed 21 Apr. 2025].

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

Box Office Mojo (n.d.). *Tales from the Golden Age—Box Office Mojo*. [online] Box Office Mojo. Available at: https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt1422122/?ref_=bo_se_r_1 [Accessed 21 Apr. 2025].

Box Office Mojo (n.d.). *The New Year That Never Came—Box Office Mojo*. [online] Box Office Mojo. Available at: https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt33030375/?ref_=bo_se_r_1 [Accessed 21 Apr. 2025].

Brown, K. (2020). Women, Work, and Abortion in Communist Hungary, 1948–56. *Journal of Contemporary History*, [online] 55(3), pp. 602–621. <https://doi.org/10.2307/27067643>.

Brunnbauer, U. and Taylor, K. (2004). Creating a 'socialist way of life': family and reproduction policies in Bulgaria, 1944–1989. *Continuity and Change*, 19(2), pp. 283–312. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0268416004005004>.

Bucur, M. (2008). An Archipelago of Stories: Gender History in Eastern Europe. *The American Historical Review*, [online] 113(5), pp. 1375–1389. <https://doi.org/10.2307/30223447>.

Butler, J. (1994). Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'. In: *The Postmodern Turn. New Perspectives on Social Theory*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 153–170. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511570940.011>.

Butler, J. (1997). *The Psychic Life of Power : Theories in Subjection*. [online] Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54889e73e4b0a2c1f9891289/t/565f4384e4b0ff840708662a/1449083780254/Judith+Butler+-+The+Psychic+Life+of+Power+Introduction.pdf>.

Butler, J. (2002). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge.

Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Chivu, M. (2020). *Cronica unui avort neanunțat*. [online] Dilemaveche.ro. Available at: <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/la-zi-in-cultura/carte/cronica-unui-avort-neanuntat-629623.html> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2025].

Cixous, H. (1975). The Laugh of the Medusa. *Signs*, [online] 1(4), pp. 875–893. Available at: https://artandobjecthood.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/cixous_the_laugh_of_the_medusa.pdf.

Cohen, J.J. ed., (1996). *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. University of Minnesota Press.

Creed, B. (1986). Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection. *Screen*, 27(1), pp. 44–71.

Creed, B. (1993). *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.

David, H.P. (1982). Eastern Europe: Pronatalist Policies and Private Behavior. *Population Bulletin*, [online] 36(6), pp. 1–49. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12338315/>.

David, H.P. and Wright, N.H. (1971). Abortion Legislation: The Romanian Experience. *Studies in Family Planning*, 2(10), p. 205. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1964930>.

David, M. (2022). The Representation of the Socialist Abortion Ban as Women's Reproductive Burden in Postsocialist Romanian Cinema. *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, 15(1), pp. 20–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2040350x.2022.2087342>.

Dima, F. (2023). *Omniprezenta Violență Împotriva Femeilor Din Noul Cinema Românesc—Films in Frame*. [online]

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

Films in Frame. Available at: <https://www.filmsinframe.com/ro/editorial/violenta-impotriva-femeilor-noul-cinema-romanesc/>.

Dobos, C. (2010). *Politica pronatalistă a regimului Ceaușescu, Vol. 1: O perspectivă comparativă*. Iași: Polirom.

Doczy, G. (2010). Children of the Decree: How the Romanian Abortion Ban Affected Labor Market Success and Health. *Central European University*. [online] Available at: https://www.etd.ceu.edu/2010/doczy_gergely.pdf.

Einhorn, B. (1993). *Cinderella Goes to Market*. Verso.

Facebook (n.d.). *Jurnalul Decretului*. [online] Facebook.com. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/jurnaluldecretului/videos?locale=en_GB.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Foucault, M. (1975). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, p. 95.

Foucault, M. (2014). *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1979-1980*. 1st ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 93.

Fulop, L. (2015). 'Funny' Naturalism in the Romanian New Wave. *Excavatio*, [online] 26. Available at: <http://aizen.zolanaturalismassoc.org/excavatio/articles/v26/Fulop.pdf>.

Gannon, S. (2008). *Messing with Memories: Feminist Poststructuralism and Memory work*. [online] Academia.edu. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/179246/Messing_with_memories_Feminist_poststructuralism_and_memory_work.

Githens, M. and McBride Stetson, D. (1996). *Abortion Politics: Public Policy in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. London: Routledge.

Glasper, E.A. (2020). Romania's Forgotten Children: Sensory Deprivation Revisited. *Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Nursing*, 43(2), pp. 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694193.2020.1735250>.

Gonick, M. and Gannon, S. (2015). *Becoming Girl: Collective Biography and the Production of Girlhood*. Toronto: Women's Press.

Gradea, A.C. (2018). A Psychoanalytical Approach to Cristian Mungiu's 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days. *Journal of European Studies*, 48(3-4), pp. 295–307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047244118801684>.

Haliliuc, A. (2013). Who Is a Victim of Communism? Gender and Public Memory in the Sighet Museum, Romania. *Aspasia*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2013.070107>.

Hansen, L. (2013). *Security as Practice : Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. 1st ed. [online] Taylor & Francis. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203236338>.

Hirsch, M. (2008). The Generation of Postmemory. *Poetics Today*, 29(1), pp. 103–128. <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-019>.

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

Hirsch, M. and Smith, V. (2002). Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(1), pp. 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1086/340890>.

Hord, C., David, H.P., Donnay, F. and Wolf, M. (1991). Reproductive health in Romania: reversing the Ceausescu legacy. *Studies in Family Planning*, [online] 22(4), pp. 231–240. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/1949105/>.

Iovănel, M. (2020). *Un corp care a pierdut prea mult sânge*. [online] Scena9.ro. Available at: <https://www.scena9.ro/article/recenzie-corina-sabau-si-se-auzeau-greierii>. [Accessed 21 Apr. 2025].

Kasman, D. (2008). *Review: '4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days' (Mungiu, Romania)*. [online] Mubi. Available at: <https://mubi.com/en/notebook/posts/now-in-theaters-4-months-3-weeks-and-2-days-mungiu-romania>.

Kligman, G. (1998). *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania*. Univ of California Press.

Kolozova, K. (2021). Poststructuralism. In: K.Q. Hall and Ásta, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Philosophy*. [online] Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190628925.013.8>.

Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. [online] *EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES: A Series of the Columbia University Press*. New York: Columbia University Press. Available at: <https://www.thing.net/~rdom/ucsd/Zombies/Powers%20of%20Horror.pdf>.

Kuhn, A. (2000). A Journey through Memory. In: S. Radstone, ed., *Memory and Methodology*. Oxford: Berg.

Lacan, J. (2018). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Routledge.

Marinescu, R.-E. (2022a). Aborted Motherhood and Traumatic History. An Analysis of Some Contemporary Romanian Novels by Women Writers. *SYNERGY*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.24818/syn/2022/18/1.05>.

Marinescu, R.-E. (2022b). Aborted Motherhood and Traumatic History. An Analysis of Some Contemporary Romanian Novels by Women Writers. *SYNERGY*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.24818/syn/2022/18/1.05>.

Massino, J. (2019). *Ambiguous Transitions : Gender, the State, and Everyday Life in Socialist and Postsocialist Romania*. New York: Berghahn Books.

mediaTRUST (2023). *Cele mai citate surse media din România*. [online] Available at: <https://www.mediatrust.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Cele-mai-citate-surse-media-din-Rom%C3%A2nia.pdf> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2025].

Mesanan, D. (2021). 'Our Sex Life Was an Ordeal' [online]. *Decree Chronicles*. Available at: <https://decreechronicles.com/our-sex-life-was-an-ordeal/> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2025].

Milani, T.M. and Richardson, J.E. (2023). Discourses of Collective remembering: contestation, politics, Affect. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 20(5), pp. 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2022.2090979>.

Miroiu, M. (2004). *Drumul către autonomie : teorii politice feministe*. [online] *Academia.edu*. Iași: Polirom. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/1541266/Drumul_catre_autonomie.

Miroiu, M. (2006). *Neprețuitele femei*. Polirom.

Mitroiu, S. (2016). Recuperative Memory in Romanian post-Communist Society. *Nationalities Papers*, 44(5), pp. 751–771. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2016.1182144>.

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

Nasta, D. (2016). Contemporary Romanian Auteurs: Politics, Irony, and Reflexivity. In: *The Global Auteur: The Politics of Authorship in 21st Century Cinema*. Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 159–178.

Observator Cultural (2021). *Și se auzeau greierii, tradus în Franța*. [online] Observator Cultural. Available at: <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/si-se-auzeau-greierii-tradus-in-franta/>.

Odobescu, V. (2015). Half a Million Kids Survived Romania's 'slaughterhouses of souls.' Now They Want justice. [online] The World. Available at: <https://theworld.org/stories/2015/12/28/half-million-kids-survived-romanas-slaughterhouses-souls-will-they-ever-heal> [Accessed 17 Apr. 2024].

Oprea, D.-A. (2015). Between the heroine mother and the absent woman: Motherhood and womanhood in the communist magazine Femeia. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 23(3), pp. 281–296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506815585177>.

Pălășan, C. (2009). Caracterul profund restrictiv al politicii nataliste românești. In: *Transformarea socialistă. Politici ale regimului comunist între ideologie și administrație*. [online] Iași: Polirom, pp. 146–170. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/45450315/Transformarea_socialist%C4%83_Politici_ale_regimului_comunist_%C3%AEntre_ideologie_%C8%99i_administra%C8%9Bie.

Parvulescu, C. (2009). The Cold World Behind the Window: 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days and Romanian Cinema's Return to Real-existing Communism. *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, [online] 51. Available at: <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/4months/text.html> [Accessed 22 Jan. 2021].

Petre, Z. (1995). Promovarea femeii sau despre destructurarea sexului feminine. In: L. Boia, ed., *Miturile comunismului românesc*. Bucharest: Editura Universitatii din Bucuresti, pp. 22–38.

Pop-Eleches, C. (2005). *The Impact of an Abortion Ban on Socio-Economic Outcomes of Children: Evidence from Romania* *. [online] Available at: https://www.columbia.edu/~cp2124/papers/unwanted_latest.pdf [Accessed 18 Mar. 2024].

Popa, R.M. (2006). Corpuri femeiești, putere bărbătească. Studiu de caz asupra adoptării reglementărilor legislative de interdicere a avortului în România comunistă (1966). In: *Gen și putere. Partea leului în politica românească*. Iași: Polirom.

Popovici, I. (2017). „De mult vreau să te fut”. Sexul Femeilor Si Puterea Bărbaților în Filmul de Tranziție. In: A. Gorzo and G. Filippi, eds., *Filmul Tranziției. Contribuții La Interpretarea Cinemaului Românesc „Nouăzecist”*. [online] TACT. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/38277054/Sexul_femeilor_%C8%99i_puterea_b%C4%83rba%C8%9Bilor_%C3%AEEn_filmul_de_tranzi%C8%9Bie.

Prodan, L. (2021). Memory and Fiction: Trauma in Contemporary Romanian Literature. *Transilvania*, [online] 11-12, pp. 74–80. <https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2021.11-12.11>.

Puscas, V. (2006). *European Negotiations—A Case Study: Romanian Accession to the European Union*. [online] Ssrn.com. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2242882> [Accessed 4 Apr. 2025].

Randall, A.E. (2011). 'Abortion Will Deprive You of Happiness!': Soviet Reproductive Politics in the Post-Stalin Era. *Journal of Women's History*, [online] 23(3), pp. 13–38. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2011.0027>.

Rose, R. (2008). *Understanding Post-Communist Transformation. A Bottom-Up Approach*. Routledge.

Sabau, C. (2019). *Si se auzeau greierii*. Humanitas SA.

Bodies of Resistance: Visibilising Women's Lives Under Romania's Abortion Ban

Written by Ioana Paun

Scarry, E. (1985). *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. [online] *Philpapers.org*. New York: Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://philpapers.org/rec/SCATBI-2> [Accessed 11 Nov. 2024].

Șerban, A. (2021). Pronatalist Operating Procedure in Communist Romania. A Femicide Case. *Romanian Journal of Sociological Studies*, [online] 2, pp. 156–166. Available at: <https://journalofsociology.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/5-Adela.pdf> [Accessed 10 Apr. 2025].

Stenvoll, D. (2006). Contraception, Abortion and State Socialism: Categories in Birth Control Discourses and Policies. *Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies*. [online] Available at: https://norcerearch.brage.unit.no/norcerearch-xmlui/bitstream/handle/1956/2224/article_stenvoll.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [Accessed 27 Nov. 2023].

Stoicescu, V. and Oncioiu, D. (2021). 'I Secretly Performed Over 100 Abortions on Kitchen Tables'. [online] Decree Chronicles. Available at: <https://decreechronicles.com/i-secretly-performed-over-100-abortions-on-kitchen-tables/>.

Teampău, p. (2024). 'A Modest Soldier in the Great Army of Communists': Visual Representations of Women in Ceaușescu's Romania. *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, [online] 11(2). <https://doi.org/DOI%2010.25364/02.11:2024.2.5>.

The Decree Chronicles (2019). *Un scriitor a învățat să facă avorturi pentru a-și salva prietenele de la o viață pe care atunci nu și-o doreau*. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/jurnaluldecretului/videos/344758376458540>.

The Decree Chronicles (2021). *Amintiri din epoca Decretului*. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/jurnaluldecretului/videos/1059712541460656>.

Tismăneanu, V. (2006). *Raport Final*. [online] București: Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România. Available at: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/article/RAPORT%20FINAL_%20CADCR.pdf.

Törnquist-Plewa, B. and Stala, K. (2011). *Cultural Transformations after Communism: Central and Eastern Europe in Focus*. [online] Nordic Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.919478>.

Trebici, V. (1991). *Genocid și Demografie*. București: Humanitas.

TVR (2017). *Adevăruri despre trecut: Copiii patriei (@TVR1)*. [online] YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5lYIn1YKro>.

Verdery, K. (1996). *What Was socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Wright, N.H. (1975). Restricting Legal Abortion: Some Maternal and Child Health Effects in Romania. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 121(2), pp. 246–256. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0002-9378\(75\)90649-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0002-9378(75)90649-3).

Zielinska, E. (1987). European Socialist Countries. In: *Abortion and Protection of the Human Fetus: Legal Problems in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.