

The Role of the Romanian Film in Correcting Juvenile Delinquency during the Socialist Regime

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Abstract. Feature-length fiction movies were an important instrument of propaganda during Romania's communist regime. As cinema was financed exclusively and controlled by the state between 1948 and 1989, motion pictures were used to convey socialist policies—of course, packaged as fictional drama—to make ideological or regulatory information more easily accepted by society. One of the messages intended to be conveyed in this way was that although the state was looking after the welfare of all citizens, especially the young, families often undermined this effort by neglecting their children, who would end up becoming delinquents. If, on one hand, rules and laws were effective means to control individuals' actions, on the other hand, motion pictures proved to be a powerful tool to shape consciousness and to induce certain beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Films dealing with certain cases of juvenile delinquency, or which brought before the public the stories of crimes, large or small, are also part of this line of prevention and the construction of civic behaviour. In this paper, to explore how the anti-crime message was constructed and what ideas were conveyed, I have set out to analyse three such film productions, from different periods of the communist regime, each of them featuring as a main character a young person who had slipped into deviant behaviour.

Keywords: film, communism, children, teenager, crime, delinquency

1. Introduction

In Romania, the issue of juvenile delinquents—their maltreatment and malnutrition, as well as the failed attempts to re-educate them—was not specific to the communist period. Even before 1948, there were so-called re-education institutes for minors, in practice institutions of detention for those

who had not yet turned 18 and who had been convicted by a court for anti-social acts, theft, or even murder. As various media reports of the time attest to, institutionalization as a result of court sentencing spelled a dire fate for minors. In fact, these accounts are sometimes much more generous with details of the lives of these young people than archival documents. For instance, a newspaper article, published in 1933, described the conditions in which juvenile delinquents were held at one of these re-education institutes, explaining how they lived, cramped in dormitories that were too small for their numbers and wearing worn-out clothes. Furthermore, sanitary rules were non-existent, and the food rations were entirely insufficient. The quote below illustrates life in a re-education institute, located at 10 Kogălniceanu Street, in Cluj:

“The minors do not sleep in separate rooms, meaning that there are no individual cells; instead, 20 or so detainees are piled up in rooms of 4-5 beds. Because of the lack of beds, many slept on the floor” (Lupta 1933:2).

A decade later, the situation was just as problematic. In 1946, as the country's capital, Bucharest, was “besieged by pickpockets”, another article published by the newspaper *România liberă*, sounded the alarm that the number of juvenile delinquents was on the rise and claimed that there was a „strong demand for the establishment of re-education schools” (Cobar 1946:3). In another article, the same author states that on a single day, in the autumn of 1946, 80 vagrants were picked up by the police from Bucharest's North Train Station area, including 35 children. Among them, there were young children, teenage boys, and some girls aged 13-15 who were prostitutes. The article goes on to explain that one of the children, a 10-year-old girl, had been abandoned at the train station by her father who wanted to remarry without any hassle (N.C. 1976:1).

Once the communist regime came into power in 1948, it dealt with this issue by strongly denouncing the “disaster” left behind by their predecessors—the bourgeois system - and claiming that the state would take responsibility for finding solutions. To address the issue of juvenile delinquency post-WWII, the communists prioritised setting up more re-education schools during the first decade after assuming power. Then, in 1951, the reform schools for juvenile offenders were transferred under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, commonly known as the "Militia" (national police force, since 1951). If these means of guiding minors to the right path failed, they would be sentenced to correctional prison.

“The militia, among the many activities it has to perform, also works to supervise the way children are guided, so that the youth receive a new, appropriate education, to become useful to our society” argued the militia lieutenant Ion Berte in the press at the time (Berte 1961:2). Re-education schools that were lacking at the end of the war were set up during the first decade of communism, and when all means of guiding the minor to the right path had been exhausted, minors were sentenced to correctional prison. At the same time the newspapers - also under state control, like the cinema - started featuring articles authored by figures of authority: employees of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice mostly, in order to reinforce the message that the school, the society, and especially the family, bears responsibility for the correct education of the child. The model of the communist ideal citizen, the *new man*, was to be embraced by the socialist society as a whole, including its youngest generation:

“It must be remembered that if from the starting point of the educational work, in the family, the necessary care has not been taken to instill into the child the skills, habits, and customs corresponding to the moral traits of the new man, then the educational work of all the other factors is greatly hampered, because in this situation the question of re-education arises, with all the difficulties that this presents” (Doltu 1968: 3).

However, the institutionalisation of minors had limited effects; sending minors to correctional prisons did not solve the issue, but on the contrary, introduced them to an unhealthy, promiscuous environment that fostered anti-social behaviour, which only kept them trapped in a vicious circle.

Despite this evidence, a scientific analysis based on systematic data on juvenile delinquency during the communist regime is difficult to carry out, as sociologists Dan Banciu and Sorin M. Rădulescu found out, for two reasons. First, the secrecy of statistical data in order to deny that juvenile delinquency existed and, second, the so-called “legislative manipulation”, another means of hiding the real dimension of the phenomenon (Banciu, Rădulescu 2002: 239). According to an analysis carried out by the authors of the book *Evolutions of juvenile delinquency in Romania: research and social prevention*, between 1980 and 1989, approximately 3,800 minors were sentenced annually by the Romanian courts (Banciu, Rădulescu 2002: 240).

During the communist regime, the main ideological approach to fight against crime among adolescents and young people was to educate them in the spirit of the revolution and promote a new type of consciousness, following the New-Soviet Man model. As one of the key elements of the Soviet Union

Communist Party Programme is the importance given to the formation of the communist *consciousness* of the people, the achievement of this ethical ideal by the individual was a priority for the Romanian state, or, more precisely, for the two communist parties that governed the country during the regime – Romanian Workers' Party (1948-1965) and Romanian Communist Party (1965-1989). As Marxist-Leninist instructions stipulated, to promote these concepts and ideas, the state conducted massive public education and mass communication campaigns. The state-controlled media, as well as most literature and art, were also subject to strong ideological pressures, and turned into instruments of promoting the *new man* model, which individuals were to adopt by any means necessary. Communist propaganda thus no longer had the sole purpose of convincing people of a certain truth outside themselves, which they did not see or experience, but precisely to alter their innermost being and beliefs about themselves.

“The natural condition of the individual, that of accepting his limitations and predispositions, was disregarded and brutally replaced by a fiction (i.e. perfection through depersonalization), which tended to become state policy”(Neagoe 2015: 23).

In the Soviet Union, from the outset, the task of conveying the most refined propaganda message fell to literature, as this was regarded as the most complex means of communication, even when it began to be seriously challenged by film, because works of literature were capable of creating deep connections with the reader. By subjugating all artistic creation to *socialist realism*, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union secured control over content, even in the face of the diversity of writers' creative spirit:

“What is socialist realism? It is first of all the skill of showing the truthful man as he is and at the same time as he ought to be. The question may be asked: is it possible to show man simultaneously as he is and as he ought to be? Yes, it is possible, even in the field of nature. The apple as it is in nature is a berry that is sufficiently sour. But the apple obtained by the skilful horticulturist Miciurin expresses the essence of the apple to a greater extent than the wild fruit of the forest. Socialist realism in creation enriches life, showing the progressive, guiding features, the features of tomorrow” (Carp 1947:1).

In his article entitled “*Towards a New Humanism*”, Carp Dimov points out, as early as 1947, that the role of literature is to present the ideal model, but at the same time not to bypass the difficulties and shortcomings of life which prevent man from attaining that ideal. This is done precisely so that through this virtual experience mediated by literature the individual can, without losing his existence, choose for himself a path by which he can reach his full potential and come closer to the model of the new man, popularized by the Party through all types of media. The role of the message-creating artist thus becomes, in the author's view that of a leader who positions himself ahead of times, so that through his understanding he can show the people the way forward. The model of socialist realism was also swiftly adopted in Romanian literature, as happened in all the countries of the Eastern Bloc.

As far as the Romanian cinema is concerned, *the topical film* became the preferred way of expression of socialist realism, accompanying communist production right from the beginning. The film *Răsună Valea* [*The Valley Echoes*] made in 1949 by director Paul Călinescu, based on a screenplay by Mircea Ștefănescu, was not only the first feature-length fiction film of the communist era, but also the first topical film in Romania. The films of the first communist decade, through characters such as the young peasant Măteia Cocor in the homonymous film (1952), the fisherman Adam Jora in *Pasărea furtunii*, from 1957 [*Storm Bird*] or the main character, a miner, in *Brigada lui Ionuț* [*Ionuț's Brigade*] produced in 1954, faithfully reproduce the model of the *new man*—strong, handsome, and optimistic. In fact, all the heroes who evoke the *new man* in the first Romanian communist films are young militants who discover in the communist ideology the salvation from a life full of hardships and injustices. All these characters also have in common the struggle to defend their new life in communism, which they propose and explain to others.

However, as a consequence of the Romanian communism moving away from the Stalinist model in 1953, the Romanian cinema started to feature a diverse range of characters. Even if the message remained broadly the same, a diversification in the types of characters, as well as in the stories presented to the public occurred. These reflect the socio-political relaxation that followed destalinisation, movie structure becoming more flexible and richer in how it depicted human nature. This enriched representation of the human condition naturally involves leaning towards less perfect models. If the viewer was initially shown the *new man* as he was meant to be, as Carp Dimov, author of the article *Towards a New Humanism*, put it, cinema had the power to show the face of man as he was, in a less idealised version, and then to focus on his becoming and the obstacles he had to overcome.

2. The child abandoned by the family, a sure victim

Against this backdrop, it was only a matter of time before the delinquent child or teenager in an unfortunate situation became the subject of an educational film. For the purpose of this article, which aims to assess negative illustrations of young people in the Romanian socialist cinema, I will discuss three films produced in different decades, to follow not only distinct characters, but also a historical perspective of the character type, whose traits were certainly influenced by the context in which it was created.

Who Will Open the Door? (Cine va deschide ușa?) is a film directed by Gheorghe Naghi, based on a screenplay by Alexandru Andrițoiu and Nicolae Ștefănescu, released in 1967. The main character is a 13-year-old boy – until 1969, when a new Penal Code came into force, the minimum legal age for minors to be held criminally liable was 12 – Ovidiu Codrescu (performed by Armand Oprescu), who has ended up in reform school. The moment the film captures is just before Christmas, two years after Ovidiu's arrival at the establishment. At the time, reform schools had a bad reputation in the Romanian society, which is reflected in the attitudes of some characters, but the film strives to show that, in fact, the young men live in decent conditions, almost as they would have at home. They have access to showers, hot food and clean bedrooms, with the only rough time being when they do their calisthenics in the cold, winter-morning air. The teachers are also depicted as no less than teachers in a regular school, who show understanding and empathy towards their students. In this film, the main character's good behaviour—being quiet and obeying the rules—is acknowledged and the headmistress, nicknamed Tiger, tells Ovidiu that he can go home. “The reform school is not a prison... nor, of course, a pioneer camp” she tells the teenager. Her comment points at the identity and behaviour model the Communists had created for children, *the pioneer*, who encompassed all the aspirational qualities of the new man, a model the character was expected to follow once released from the facility.

The reform school is presented as a re-education school with strict discipline and rules resembling those of a military unit. However, the film illustrates that the children were not subjected to abuse, only re-educated through physical exercise and work. For instance, as Ovidiu is taken by the school van to the train station, other vans are transporting his classmates to their job for the day—shovelling the snow off a public road.

Of course, Ovidiu's journey is just the beginning, a journey on which he is accompanied by the audience and, through his memories and his experiences, the public understands that he is merely a lost child. Through this film, director Gheorghe Nagy is claiming children's right to childhood.

As the school van was driving to the train station, a loud woman (played by Draga Olteanu Matei) jumps in front of it agitating her arms, forcing the driver to stop. She explained that she needed a ride to the station, too. After some convincing, she was allowed on the van. This was going to prove a life-changing coincidence for our character.

On the train, the woman and Ovidiu find themselves in the same compartment, along with a group of pioneers on their way to summer camp, crammed together with scores of other travellers. As the woman desperately tries to get on the train with her seven pieces of luggage, she starts being suspicious of Ovidiu, and even tries to warn everyone that he was released from the reform school. In this moment, Ovidiu understands that the stigma of having been sentenced to reform school would follow him for the rest of his life. This triggers a series of memories, which allow the viewer to gain some insight into his life story.

Ovidiu was the son of a married couple who couldn't get along anymore, and he had greatly suffered from abuse at home before being sent to reform school. His father (performed by actor Ștefan Mihăilescu Brăila) often directed his anger to the child, beating him, while his mother (Corina Constantinescu) would try helplessly to defend her son. In time, the more violent the father became, the more absent the mother became, escaping to rehearsals at the amateur theatre she attended. To avoid the father's wrath, the mother would even leave the boy little notes on the main door, warning him not to enter the house when he got back from school and not to eat until they returned from work. But Ovidiu had a secret refuge: in the attic, he set up a small workshop full of tools and broken appliances he was fixing, as well as an amateur radio station. Florica, his neighbour and childhood friend, would often hang out with him and would be the only one who understood and felt for him. Despite their friendship, he had mixed feelings about the girl; just the thought that she had high marks in school and a home where she could eat whenever she wanted would anger him deeply. As the character still recalls his life before reform school, the film features a scene where the two children imitate a dispassionate married couple, where he pretended to be reading the newspaper absorbedly and flicking a cigarette, and she pretended to be heating a non-existent pot of food, until Ovidiu bursts harshly, "Watch out, woman, it's overflowing"! This scene provides the viewer with an insight into the life

of some/many couples at the time. As Florica tries to understand what was going on in Ovidiu's life, the boy lies, to cover the parents' quarrels, and tells her that his mother sometimes shouts around the house because she is rehearsing for a play, "they are artistic screams", he would explain.

The film then shifts back to the train scene, where the loud-mouthed woman pulls aside a young man travelling with his wife and baby, warns him that Ovidiu is out of reform school, and asks him to watch her luggage because she wants to go to the dining car for a beer. In the meantime, Ovidiu socialises with the pioneers on the train, reminiscing the times he used to play with his friends back home. Unfortunately, one of those adventures ended badly; they were playing swordsmen in a museum, and one of the children was injured. The sequence is unrealistic, it's not explained what they were doing there alone and why they had access to exhibits that should have been guarded. Following this incident, Ovidiu's case was discussed in the school's chancellery, an opportunity for the writers to use the written dialogues to outline the mentality of the various actors in society towards the issue of the responsibility of raising children. We are in an era that was not far from the inter-war period, when it was not uncommon for teenagers to leave their homes and go to the city on their own in search of a better life. Also, in the era in which the film was created, busy parents could quite easily let a child out of their sight, and after school they could still wander the streets unsupervised, getting involved in various activities.

The teachers blame the street crowd and various other explanations, but the problem remains unanswered. Who is to blame, who is responsible for the child's education: the child himself, the parents, the school, the entourage, society?

Because he couldn't find a place at home and had no support, Ovidiu left and became involved in thefts with two individuals, who were later caught by the militia and the boy ended up in reform school.

On the train, the agitated and talkative woman returns from the dining car two hours later to find a suitcase missing. She makes a big fuss and loudly accuses Ovidiu of stealing her luggage and threatens to send it back to reform school. In a scene similar to the one in which the teachers at the school discussed who is to blame for the children's negative development, the travellers, who are practically a metaphor for society, start to give their opinions: one says that if the child has been released it is not fair to assume that he is still a criminal, another says that he knows better how it is with such individuals, while the pioneers defend Ovidiu, because they had been with him all along and knew what he had done. The ticket inspector is summoned as a

representative of the authority, and at the destination the witnesses, the woman who claims her suitcase was stolen and Ovidiu are taken to the stationmaster's office. It is also the representatives of the state who act wisely (which is one of the basic features of the socialist film) and release Ovidiu, thus calming the whole situation. Even the aggressive woman comes out of the stationmaster's office reconciled to the decision imposed on her. The boy leaves for home with the ticket inspector, Alecu, who watches over the last hours of Ovidiu's childhood. The teenager swings on the swings with gusto, while the driver explains that he is no longer a child, he must take responsibility for his actions and understand that he has been given a second chance.

The film in fact holds society as a whole responsible for the fate of children — careless and indolent individuals such as the woman with a lot of luggage who lost her suitcase solely through her own negligence (there is also the possibility that the individual who took it from her, who is shown in the film but remains unknown until the end, to have mistaken it for his own), even teachers seem guilty of not paying enough attention to the act of education (teachers at the reform school are shown as being much more involved in the children's welfare), but primarily the parents. The film illustrates the official policy, in which the state is the guarantor of an individual's rights. The state appears to be the sole actor acting correctly, through the teachers at the reform school and the figure of the train conductor, who responsibly watches over the boy's last steps home, like a friend.

3. Re-education in employment, the second chance for young people

Cine va deschide ușa? [*Who Will Open the Door?*] is a film that pleads for the defence of childhood, for their right not to lose it because of the mistakes of those who are supposed to protect them:

Don't look for black and white in my film. It opens doors to discuss situations where children are the victims and asks questions not only of parents but of everyone around them. I would like this film to convince us grown-ups that any mistake we make towards our children can turn their whole universe upside down and change their whole life” (Naghi 1967:29).

About a decade later, in 1979, Letitia Popa's film *Cine mă strigă?* [*Who is calling me?*] appeared, which is also a film in which children suffer because of their parents, but this time the parents are almost non-existent, which is also due to the fact that the heroine is slightly older, being over 18 and of age. The film

therefore deals with a different age and therefore a different legal framework - Ina Albu (performed by debutant Mărioara Sterian) would be liable to a prison sentence as she is of age.

The film starts abruptly, directly in the halls of the imposing Palace of Justice in Bucharest, where the 19-year-old Ina appears in front of the court, dressed in the infamous striped coat. As on other occasions, the Romanian topical film is very generous in providing some very technical details. While from films set in the countryside we learn that the furrow must be 35 centimetres deep for the cultivation of crops and not 18, as the tractor driver used to do, while films dedicated to industrialisation showcase the whole process of steel production or oil extraction, from this film we learn precisely, right from the start, what the law is that Ina is convicted under:

Sentences the defendant Albu Ina, on the basis of Article 328 of the Criminal Code, to six months' imprisonment. In accordance with the provisions of Article 86, index 1 of the Criminal Code, orders that the sentence be served without deprivation of liberty, by work in a productive unit", says the sentencing judge just at the beginning at the film.

The legal provisions cited by the judge are part of the Penal Code of 1968, adopted after Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power in 1965. According to the press at the time, Ceaușescu was personally involved in the drafting and adoption of the body of laws of the Socialist Republic of Romania.

Thus, in 1977, two years before the production of the film, following a Decision of the Political Executive Committee of the Central Committee of Romanian Communist Party, the Decree of the Council of State No. 147 of 1 June was adopted on the amnesty of certain crimes committed by minors and young people aged 18-21. It follows from these pieces of legislation that if the young person is a first-time offender and has not been sentenced to more than two years imprisonment, then they may be sent to serve their sentence in the labour market.

As Prof. Grigore Theodoru, President of the Romanian Society of Criminal Law, member of the Committee of the International Association of Criminal Law, explained at the time, Romania had thus aligned itself with international guidelines, proceeding with more lenient punishments for young people. But he also noted that in Western countries the youth were left to fend for themselves, with the community not involved in the rehabilitation process. As the criminal law specialist explained, if a young person with a suspended sentence was left unsupervised, unemployed and undirected, the chances of

recidivism were very high. This is precisely the aspect that the Romanian Communist Party was correcting, Theodoru argued, by entrusting the young person's fate to the labour collectives, who thus became responsible factors in the re-education of first-time offenders.

“Socialist countries — including Romania — have also experimented with other criminal legal means, such as correctional work in freedom, trial of certain acts by labour committees, and the guarantee of the labour collective, means which are based on the force of education of the collective, but which are conceived as simple legal means, applied by specialised bodies”
(Theodoru 1977: 2).

It is from this “profoundly humanist” perspective that the film *Cine mă strigă?* should be interpreted. Despite the fact that the screenplay is written by Rodica Padina, a representative of the legal system, we do not find out until the end of the film exactly what Ina is guilty of, what she was convicted of. Rather, we discover a well-behaved girl, who had been raised by her grandmother, as her parents had divorced when she was young and her mother abandoned her for the various pleasures of life. Reaching her teenage years, Ina, not having become a bad and irredeemable person, but rather a lively and fun-loving young woman, has an escapade with a boy her own age. But his parents come to retrieve him from their aunt's boarding house in Sibiu, where the youngsters had taken refuge, while Ina's parents are non-existent. Left at the mercy of her friend's aunt, who gives her some money to return home, Ina is too ashamed and chooses to go to the seaside with a stranger she meets along the way, thus straying further from the straight and narrow.

The film begins with the scene of her conviction and the viewer learns all these things about her past one by one, from the confidences that Ina makes to Anica (Tora Vasilescu), the girl's young roommate from the construction site where she was sent to re-education.

From the moment she arrives on site, the beautiful Ina attracts the attention of the team of workers, most of whom are only slightly older than her. The youngsters start making jokes, some of them even naughty, when they find out that the girl has a sentence to serve and one of them refers to her as a “parachute”. The team leader, played by the middle-aged craftsman, puts the boys on the spot and points out that the girl has been entrusted to them as a team to supervise and teach her the trade. One can feel the hand of the film's female crew here, though. Basically, this sequence and even others in the film

propose a two-way re-education — both of Ina and of the boys who make up the collective.

“This girl was wrong. It's her first offence. She's been given to us to keep her from going crazy. Let's teach her a trade”, the master builder tells the boys the day Ina shows up on the site, breaking everyone's peace.

Perhaps the Party's interest was that the film should show the “profoundly humanistic” importance of re-education carried out with the help of the working men's collective, but director Letitia Popa also talks in this film about the importance of the collective's recognition of this role... which here seems to miss, at first, the great task given to it. Basically, the film shows how the re-education of the girl and the creation of the collective's conscience are achieved at the same time, especially since this time the collective was also young. The film thus takes a slightly more realistic approach than the ideology of the time imposed, pointing out that Romania is not populated only by collectives of responsible people.

Everyone on the site greets Ina with fear and even contempt, fearing first and foremost that they will be robbed. Anchoring Ina in this landscape that seems hostile, cold and lacking in opportunities for fun is Anica, who wakes up first at five in the morning, makes Ina her coffee, takes care to bring her food and taking care of her when she is sick, and is also a university student. With her help and that of her neighbour Adina (Tatiana Iekel), a woman past her prime who preaches the benefits of the fun she once had, but who is now alone in the world, Ina begins to realise her situation and to want to build another path.

The girl's interaction with the group of boys is initially confusing. When she arrives at the construction site for the first dance, the girl dances with everyone, upsetting the whole community, as many of the workers had wives or fiancées there. Ina's foreman even tries to ask the girl to be moved elsewhere, because the boys had been fighting in the bedroom over her, and he felt that this was a threshold of behaviour that could not be crossed. Later Ina accepts the attention of one of the boys, and spirits in the boys' bedroom subside, and under the power of “recovering love” (Sîrbu 1980:24), Ina manages to overcome the obstacles she faces.

The ending is, as the critic Eva Sîrbu remarks, of a pathetic 1950s style, most likely imposed by the censorship. Ina begs the craftsman to let her weld with him at a height of 40 metres above the ground to demonstrate her skills acquired on the construction site. The crane operator's misjudgement causes

the footbridge on which the two are standing to be knocked over and the craftsman is trapped under the iron. Tudor, the young man in love with Ina, starts shouting instructions downstairs in a desperate attempt to get her to regain her composure, which she does, and Ina starts using the welding machine to cut through the irons holding the foreman pinned down. Eventually, through everyone's efforts, things end well in the aftermath of this accident, which perhaps metaphors other, more personal accidents that people can get out of if they are helped:

The sociological study of the film threatens to become more interesting than the story itself. It is also the reproach we bring to the director, for having dealt with the freshness of the setting to the detriment of the determinations, shall we say, of conscience of the heroine. Not in the sense that it didn't deal with them, not in the sense that the ending doesn't 'solve', as they say, the heroine's problem. What was important was that the girl be awakened to a new reality, that she be involved and integrated into the new community”(Lazăr 1980: 2).

The last film chosen in this short series of socialist film productions that reflect the delinquency of young people presents a totally different perspective. However, it retains the idea of the causality between parental absence and the child's deviation from a successful human path to integration into society. This time, however, it is society that, instead of helping him, turns the young person into a criminal.

4. A hopeless delinquent

Faleză de nisip (1983), directed by Dan Pița, screenplay by Bojor Nedelcovici, Dan Pița [*Sand Cliffs*], is not only a banned film, but it's the film around which Nicolae Ceaușescu built, in August 1983, an entire discourse about the correctness of choosing the character who would embody the model of the new man in literature, poetry, film, theatre, in short, in art in general.

The subject of this controversial film is Vasile (performed by Gheorghe Visu), a 20-year-old boy whose father beat him, whose mother didn't take care of him, and who found refuge in his aunt's house and managed to qualify as a carpenter, working in a workshop in the harbour. The boy loves going to the beach to look at the sea, and on one of these days he is identified by a tourist as the thief of some things stolen the day before. The woman alerts the whole group of tourists, of which he was a member, along with the well-known doctor Theo Hristea (performed by Victor Rebengiuc), his girlfriend

Cristina (performed by Carmen Galin) and a friend of theirs, Stefan, who is a reporter (performed by Marin Moraru).

Vasile is cornered on the beach by all those who wanted to help the victim, doctor Hristea, to recover his belongings - a camera, a gold necklace, a tape recorder and several clothes - and is taken to the militia headquarters. The film takes the investigation step by step - interrogation, statements, confrontations - as if it were a popular guide to investigating a theft. The narrative follows the desperate attempts of the militiaman played by Valentin Uritescu to get Vasile to confess to the theft, but also the insistence of the doctor Hristea, who can't bear to have someone steal from under his nose and not pay, or the reluctance of the journalist Ștefan, who confesses that he didn't actually get a good look at the thief and that resemblance doesn't mean identity, so he refuses to identify Vasile as the perpetrator of the theft.

The film follows the clash between the doctor Theo Hristea, an extremely proud, selfish and combative man who can't stand not being right, and the young Vasile who doesn't want to admit to a crime of which he is not guilty.

“I won't allow anyone to make me do anything other than what I want”, Theo Hristea tells his girlfriend Cristina when she tries to get him to drop the investigation, especially since he had declared that he didn't have a problem with losing the things, which he considers to be trinkets, but with the gesture itself. At each appearance at the police headquarters, he insists that Vasile admit to the theft, promising that once he has heard his admission, he will drop the complaint and ask the authorities to stop the investigation.

“I'm not allowed to defend myself!?”, Vasile rebels. “Well, I'm going out in the street and shouting: people, I didn't steal, and I didn't kill anyone!”.

Complications appear when investigators are told that the child who was found with a head injury on the beach on the day of the theft has died in hospital. Vasile is now under investigation not only for theft but also for murder. Seeing his life destroyed under the pressure of this event and realizing that every day of detention takes him further away from the possibility of returning to a normal life, Vasile confesses to the theft. But instead of dropping the charges, the doctor asks him to take the investigators to the beach where the items were hidden. Vasile accepts but, naturally, not knowing where the things are because he didn't steal them, he digs hole after hole, driving the whole team of investigators, including the Major, mad, and the proud doctor Theo Hristea, who breaks down angrily and beats the young man with his fists.

In the end, everyone is forced to resume their lives, except Vasile, whom Hristea called the Kid. Cristina is the first to go home, but she also decides to give up her relationship with Theo, whom she explicitly tells that he is selfish and only interested in his own self and his personal ambitions:

"I really like the way you beat the kid. You don't treat a thief like that, you treat everyone like that, when you get something in your head, that's it! Now, for example, you want to be hospital director, right? You've understood that without a political base you can't rise. And you have... high ideals!", Cristina portrays him, revealing to the viewer the doctor's true nature.

Theo Hristea also returns home to Bucharest, leaving the Constanta investigation to run its course and becoming, as Cristina had foreseen, director of the hospital. Months go by and everyone involved meets again, in court, after Vasile has spent all this time in prison. In the meantime, it is established that the child's death was accidental. The young man is released, but loses his job at the workshop, where he worked as a skilled carpenter, and is forced to take a job in a mill as an unskilled labourer, which seriously reduces his prospects for prosperity and a return. Still not at peace with the fact that he has not fully proved Vasile as the perpetrator of the theft, Doctor Hristea goes to his aunt's house, trying to meet him. Here, Vasile's cousin reproaches him for the bad state the young man has ended up in, but more important than this is the way the film's writers choose accusatory words, striking at the practices of the system.

"He is now an unskilled worker with vocational school. He's had nothing but mockery from the workshops. He's like a beaten dog. That's the truth! He doesn't trust anyone. Or maybe you're here to do a social survey? To see if the ex-con has integrated into our society? If he was employed in the same job and now he's a leader...", Vasile's cousin yells at the doctor.

Obsessed, Theo Hristea eventually finds Vasile in a workshop on the beach where he was working on a boat he wanted to repair. Trying again to extract a confession, he grabs the young man, shaking him into confessing. Vasile pushes him to get free, but he was holding the sharp chisel he was working with. He hurts the doctor and runs away. Theo, oblivious to the injury, starts to chase Vasile, but loses sight of him, reaches the beach and runs madly along the water's edge until he collapses.

According to critic and historian Călin Căliman, the film only ran for three days at the end of January 1983, then was pulled from cinemas following orders from the top (Căliman 1990: 4). In August of the same year, Nicolae Ceaușescu made *Faleză de nisip* [*Sand Cliffs*], without mentioning its name, the basis of a speech about deviations from the political message in art, and then retracted the right path on which literature, theatre and film should go.

“Cinematography has important tasks. We need good, revolutionary films that show the great achievements of our people, that mobilise and portray heroes who are a model of work and life. Comrades, we have seen some films that not only do not present models of heroes in life and work, but on the contrary, they present elements that are perhaps still to be found somewhere on the periphery of society, but these are not what our writers and directors or those who direct and organise film production should present. We need to completely eliminate this state of affairs. Not long ago I saw a film showing a young worker on the Black Sea. But the hero of this film is nothing like today's young worker. What does the young worker in our country look like and what does he represent? I meet, as you know, millions of young people all the time. I talk to them, I know them. You see in them a love for work, for the Party and the homeland, for socialism (...) But the writer and director who made the film and those who approved it clearly do not know the young people of our homeland. We can no longer allow such films to be produced” (Ceaușescu 1983: 3).

The head of state unleashed his anger at all the forums that should have been watching over the launch of ideologically correct stories on the screens and claimed that the film distorts the reality of Romanian society. Theatre and film, he insisted, must show through their characters the essence and the model of the man needed in society, even if this means embellishing things, so that young people know what they should become.

Faleză de nisip, says critic Ștefan Oprea, disturbed by the fact that he dared to bring on the screens a face other than that of the new man, exposing “a lamentable moral condition of a Romanian society adrift” (Oprea 1990:9).

5. Conclusions

Films about juvenile delinquency or young characters who stray from the straight path towards the new man model and end up on the verge of prison sentences, whether suspended or not, are few and far between in Romanian socialist cinema, precisely because of the difficulty of dealing with the subject under the conditions of censorship and respect for the ideological message.

Director Gheorghe Naghi attempts, in the 1960s, with *Cine va deschide ușa* [*Who Will Open the Door?*] an ideologically and politically correct approach and even succeeds in bringing to society a series of questions that are quite necessary for any community: who is to blame for the failure of children? His film is perhaps easier for viewers to digest also because the age of the character is younger, as at the time Ovidiu committed the crime he was under 14. Dealing with delinquency becomes somewhat more difficult in the next film, *Who's Calling Me* [*Cine mă strigă?*], because of Ina's older age, as she is already of age, but also because of the deeper implications of her actions. Though only hinted at, Ina's slip-ups could very easily have led to extremely severe complications, not just legally but also deeply personal — she's an inexperienced young woman, left without a mother's care, who may become a mother in turn, a mother without a husband, without qualifications, without a job.

If in the 1950s and 1960s Romanian cinema offered films such as *Dragoste lungă de-o seară* [*Long Love for One Evening*], 1963 — in which such a young woman, having just come out of hospital with a child unrecognised by her father in her arms — could find salvation in socialism and in the new order that had been in place for some years, Letitia Popa's 1979 film seems to tell us that the young woman must be saved before that moment, in order not to perpetuate the difficult life that such an option entails. This film's approach is also a positive one, even if this time Ina's character can be found more problematic than Ovidiu's, because she is older, more aware, but acts childishly, being concerned only with having fun. In both cases the ending is a positive, even happy one, in which the parents are not present — practically Ovidiu returns home, but the ending is more of a guess, as the parents no longer appear in the denouement, the focus falling on the importance of the role of the reform school and the state authorities who guided him towards recovery. In *Cine mă strigă?* [*Who's Calling Me?*] another step is taken on the road to “multilaterally developed socialist society” and the collective is involved in the process of recovery, of re-education of a young man and, we must remember, that always in the period 1948-1989 the Romanian cinema, having the Party as its sole producer, did not bring to the screens films that did not also have a deeply political message.

Bujor Nedelcovici started from a personal incident in creating the script for *Faleză de nisip* [*Sand Cliffs*]. Basically, it happened to him, like Dr. Hristea, that his clothes were stolen from the beach out of sight. In a 2018 article, he admits that he made an obsession of that incident in the late 1970s and that he decided to write the screenplay then, wanting to debunk the “obtuseness and laziness” of those times, as well as the arrogance of the

investigators who paid no attention to him (Nedelcovici 2018). According to the article signed by Adrian Epure in the daily *Adevărul*, the script and later the film benefited from the protection of Marin Theodorescu, director of „Casa de Filme 1”, which produced *Faleză de nisip* [*Sand Cliffs*], and who tried to use his knowledge of the system to protect this film, which managed to run on screens for a few days in January 1983.

“In fact, the problem of the film was the problem of the character I played, a doctor who abused his position as a party member and manipulated the police...”, the article says, quoting actor Victor Rebengiuc. In addition, his character, who was supposed to be positive, is an abuser, while that of the young man considered a thief seems to be not so negative. This confusing of the classic protagonist-antagonist system didn't sit well with the leader, who most likely preferred things to be uncluttered and the messages clear.

In one of the characterisations of Vasile in the film, by his workshop craftsman, he is said to be a withdrawn boy who “doesn't like the collective”. *Faleză de nisip* [*Sand Cliffs*] brought to the screen the model of a young man whom society not only failed to help, but turned from a gentle, devoted and hardworking man into a criminal. The regime could not accept this.

Ironically, on closer inspection we detect that Vasile was indeed a model of a new man in the sense desired by the Party, but at the beginning of the film, before he had been crushed by society. From this point of view, the film shows exactly what Prof. Grigore Theodoru, president of the Romanian Society of Criminal Law and member of the Committee of the International Association of Criminal Law, predicted, even in the years when the script was written (late 1970s): that a young man left without the protection of his parents, of the law, a young man who is incarcerated will not easily recover his interrupted life and will have no other fate than to reoffend. This was precisely the scenario, so to speak, for which the Party had decided that young first offenders for non-serious offences should be given a light sentence without being sent to prison. Basically, if we were to take the irony to the end, Bujor Nedelcovici and Dan Pița proved that Ceausescu's regime was right in this respect. But ideologically, the two did not use the model of the new man “correctly”, because it should have moved in a positive, not a negative direction.

As a general conclusion, what remains constant in these films is casting the blame against parents for the deviations of children and highlighting the role of beneficial supervisors played those characters who represent the authority of the state, as well as the importance of the involvement of the collective/society in the recovery of the delinquent.

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