

The workings of the humanitarian and human rights epistemologies,  
as they become visible in the archive's holdings:

Humanitarianism and human rights as mobilizing epistemologies around the end of the  
Cold War

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Research aims

My research project at OSA focused on understanding how human rights and humanitarianism operated as mobilizing epistemologies surrounding the end of the Cold War, by focusing on how these epistemologies acted upon and into closed asylary institutions for disabled (and other) children, as well as the mentally ill in Romania.

My research at OSA was part of a broader research project into understanding how different modalities of sense making shape the way in which populations of deserving (and undeserving) “victims” of biopolitical interventions are created. I developed the term modalities of sense making during my PhD research at Central European University, Budapest by adapting Ian Hacking’s concept of “styles of reasoning”<sup>1</sup> beyond its original purely scientific reach into the realm of practical reasoning, looking at how sense is actively made in everyday life. At OSA, I focused on how the humanitarian and the human rights modality of sense making became visible in the archive’s holdings.

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<sup>1</sup> For the styles project see Hacking, Ian (1982) *Language, truth and reason* in Hacking, Ian (2002) *Historical Ontology*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, pg.159-179; Hacking, Ian (1991) “style” for Historians and Philosophers in Hacking, Ian (2002) *Historical Ontology*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, pg.178- 199; Hacking, Ian (2012) “Language, Truth and Reason” 30 years later in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 43: pg. 599-609

The main goal of my research was to create a thick genealogy of each modality of sense making (human rights and humanitarianism) as it appeared in the particular context of the Open Society Archives by focusing on two intersections. The first intersection worked to reveal the workings of the human rights modality of sense making by looking at its intersections with the field of (political) psychiatry. The second was investigating the humanitarian modality of sense making as it intersected with the issue of child protection and (especially disabled) children's institutions.

## Research Strategies and Files/ Documents Consulted

### Human rights and psychiatry

In order to understand the way in which the human rights modality of sense making operated, I first focused on a broad approach to this question by looking into the way in which human rights were defined on the two sides of the Iron Curtain surrounding the 1975 Helsinki conference and Romania's participation in it.

I proceeded by contrasting press clippings from the Radio Free Europe research archives from the Cold War years (especially after the 1975 Helsinki conference) from Romanian publications (such as *Scântea*, *România Liberă*, *Femeia*, Romanian radio broadcast transcripts but also academic ones as far as they were available) to Western European and North American ones (German, English and French speaking daily and weekly newspapers, as well as the Radio's own research papers and reports, as well as Helsinki Committee reports).

The relevant files for this endeavor can be found in **the box 300 RFE/ RL Research Institute 60 Romanian Unit 1 subject Files Box 100** (short HU USA 300-60-1 box 100), especially files **800 Culture- Helsinki Humanism 1976- 1977 and 800 Culture Helsinki humanism 1977- 1978**. These files contained reports on political psychiatry in Romania, which will help me throw light on the processes of sense making related to this epistemology, as well as its broader contextualization within the post-Helsinki understanding of human rights.

To further explore this topic, I also consulted the (relatively thin) files on psychiatric confinement that can be found **300 RFE/RL Research Institute, 60 Romanian Unit, 1 Subject Files, Box 15, (short: HU OSA 300-60-1 Box 15)**, File 102 Administration: Justice: Psychiatric Confinement 1973-1980, as well as the file on undermining socialism: 102 Administration/ Justice/ Undermining socialism 1987-1989. Furthermore, I looked into the broader topics of intellectuals (**300-120-5-631: File Romania: Intellectuals 1982-1993 and Romania: literature 1960-1990**), as well as law and justice (**File Romania: Law and Justice, 1982-1992**) to see how the relationship between intellectuals and the state evolved from the banning of the transcendental movement to the early years of transition. This was also interesting to me, since the repression of the transcendental movement in the 1980s Romania had led to the closing of psychology, sociology and social work departments at universities causing a wide de-professionalization of asylums, giving me the possibility to explore the historical background of this process. Moreover, the file on literature alerted me to the publication of Octavian Paler's *Un om norocos* (A fortunate man) in the 1980s, a work of literature that deals with the lives of people in asylums (an elderly asylum, where the main character is called to carve the gravestones for those he lives with) that I was unaware of. This exploration of the topics of death and asylums during state socialism is highly interesting to my broader inquiry on the everyday life of biopolitics around asylums in Romania, so I plan to obtain and analyze the novel as soon as possible.

Finally, I also explored the unfortunately very thin file of dissident Vasile Paraschiv (to be found in **HU-OSA 205-4-70-73**), who was psychiatrized as a labor rights activist surrounding the Helsinki Accords and is still considered one of the most significant victims of political psychiatry in Romania, also following his autobiographic documentation of this process in his 2005 book<sup>2</sup>.

### Humanitarianism, Population and Children Asylums

The thread that I most thoroughly followed through the archive's holding was the relationship between the humanitarian modality of sense making, population and (especially disabled) children's asylums. I

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<sup>2</sup> Paraschiv, Vasile (2005) *Lupta mea pentru sindicate libere în România: terorismul politic organizat de statul communist*, Polirom, București

started documenting this thread first through looking into the different meanings the word humanitarianism held on the two sides of the Iron Curtain by looking into the Helsinki Humanism files quoted above.

In a next step, I looked at the extensive material available on population policies in Romania (**HU OSA 300-60-1 Box 654**, file 4200 Population 1951-1960; **HU OSA 300-60-1 Box 655**, File 4200 Population/ Aid, File 4200 Population/ Abortion 1990-1991, File 4200 Population/ Children 1984-1991; 4200 Population/ Adoption 1990-1991; 4200 Population/ Criticism 1991 (one document only), 4200 Population 1966 – 1972, 4200 Population 1961-1965; 4200 Population Demography; **HU OSA 300-60-1 Box 656**, **Files** 4200 Population/Handicapped 1990, 4200 Population/ Orphans 1990, 4200 Population/ UNICEF, 4200 Population/ Women 1981-1988, 4300 Corruption files). This allowed me to trace the demographic governing processes in Romania beyond the well-known and well-studied case of pronatalism<sup>3</sup> during Ceaușescu's time as head of state, as well as understanding subtle mechanisms operating during pronatalist policy times.

The most lucrative research thread were the files on children and institutions, as well as disabled people in the early 1990s (**205-4-70 box 241**, **Files** Social Issues Education special schools 1990.09, Social Issues Handicapped [general] 1984.03-1992.06, Social Issues Handicapped 1993.09-1996.03, **HU-OSA 205-4-70 box 232**, **Files** Social issues/ Children/ Adoption 1983-1989, **HU OSA 205-4-70 box 230**, **Files** Social Issues/ charity 1988.06-1998.08, Social Issues: Children 1989.06-1990.03, **HU-OSA 205-4-70 box 231** **Files**: Social Issues: Children 1990.04- 1990.06, Social Issues: Children 1990.07- 1990.09, **HU OSA 205-4-70 Box 232**, **HU OSA 205-4-70 Box 233** and **HU OSA 205-4-70 Box 234**). The vast majority of these numerous files was related to either children institutions or adoptions and allowed me to trace several things. On the one hand, I could trace the way in which Western humanitarian reporting

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<sup>3</sup> Kligman, Gail (1998) *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaucescu's Romania*, University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles and London and Dobos, Corina and Jinga, Luciana Marioara and Soare, Florin S and Roman, Cristina and Tarau, Virgiliu and Miroiu, Mihaela (2011) *Politica Pronatalistă a Regimului Ceaușescu: Volumul 2*, Polirom, Iași and Dobos, Corina and Jinga, Luciana Marioara and Soare, Florin S and (2010) *Politica pronatalistă a regimului Ceaușescu. Vol. I: O perspectivă comparativă*, Polirom, Iași

travelled into the questions that Romanian newspapers were asking about children's institutions and their past during the Ceaușescu regime, as well as their present during transition. It also allowed me to trace disabled people's movements in the early 1990s that became visible in the press clippings held in the archive. Moreover, it allowed to explore the phenomenon of international adoptions and its transnational ramifications, as well as the emergence and disappearance of the "baby market" in the early 1990s.

Another thread that I followed during my research at OSA was exploring the living conditions and political climate of the 1990s through the Western Press Files (**300-120-5-629**, **300-120-5-631** Files Romania: Intellectuals 1982-1993, File Romania: Law and Justice, 1982-1992, File: Romania: Literature 1960-1990, **HU-OSA-300-120-5-631**, files Romania: Law and Justice 1982-1992, Romania: literature 1960-1990, **300/120/5/632** , files Romania: Living Conditions 1982-1991, File Romania Living conditions Black Market 1983-1991, Romania: Living Conditions Consumer Goods 1982-1984, **300-120-5-633**, file Romania: Politics and Government: 1988-1993). This investigation allowed me to understand the dire conditions that lead to the deaths of many children and other people in asylums in the 1980s and 1990s in terms of their connections to the broader politics of austerity and the economic everyday life of the country at that time.

### (Preliminary) Research Findings

I have not yet gone through all the material gathered during my very intensive time at OSA, yet, there are a few discoveries that I would like to flag at this point. The first concerns the way in which different forms of reporting about the deaths and living conditions in asylums for children, the elderly and the disabled had circulated, albeit scarcely before December 1989. This comes to contradict the narrative of "discovery" of this state of affairs with the advent of the Revolution – pointing to the fact that although these conditions were known the conditions of possibility for them to become material for transnational scandals was not there before the beginning of the end of the Cold War.

Another point that significantly influenced my thinking was the thick documentation of disabled people's social movements in the 1990s that allowed me to develop a more complex understanding of

the discursive dynamics of autonomy and self-representation – since previously only accounts by Western European press had been available to me. These accounts strongly favored portraying foreign volunteers as the main agents of change and let little space for vernacular debates to become visible.

Moreover, documenting the international adoption processes allowed me to see how a humanitarian crisis is turned into an opportunity to ease on strict adoption regulations and to create incentives for biological parents to hand over their children to international adopting parents for various sums of money. It also allowed me to see how international adoptions had already been around during the 1980s and how transition, humanitarianism and the crisis of Romanian institutions only changed processes that were already (albeit on a much smaller scale) going on.

### Further Research Interests

My time at OSA also allowed me to start exploring a new topic for potential later research and writing. The topic concerns innovation and technology and the way in which the 1990s changed the invention patent culture of socialism as it adapted to market capitalism. I plan to work on this as a potential collective project with different researchers interested in technology. I also see this as a potentially comparative project, since I have already done research on entrepreneurship and technological innovation in Canada in the fall of 2016. The files I consulted for this very incipient project are **HU-OSA300-60-1-134/ 138/ 159/378/ 535/ 562**.

### Thank You

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