

Babeş-Bolyai - University of Cluj-Napoca  
Doctoral school of Political and Communication Sciences

# Romanian photography from cliché to sensor

(summary)

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2019

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**Keywords:** photography, press photography, photojournalism, camera, digital photography, cliché, newspapers, photojournalists, portrait photography, sports photography, event photography, news photography, photojournalism, editorial policy, censorship, photo printing, photo processing, manipulation by photo.

In the first chapter, the paper approaches the way photography was invented, how the photographic technique developed until the First World War and how photography reached the Romanian ground. Among the most interesting aspects presented in this chapter is the information regarding the first camera that appeared in Romania, the first photographer (a woman) in Romania, the first manuals for “taking photos” and the first photos published in Romanian newspapers. Since this paper focuses more on press photography, the publication of these photos in the pages of the newspapers are rare, until after the First World War, counting only two or three photos a year.

The second chapter of the paper refers to the period of the First World War. Until Romania joined the war, the newspapers had been published regularly, an aspect that changed starting with 1916, when most of the newspapers stopped their activity mainly because of the harsh conditions of war. In this paper, I chose to analyse three publications: *Gazeta de Transilvania*, *Neamul Romanesc* and *Razboiul Popoarelor*. It was the period before the Great Union of 1918, so when I chose these publications I had in mind all Romanian principalities: *Gazeta de Transilvania* was published in Transylvania, *Neamul Romanesc* in Moldavia and Wallachia, and *Razboiul Popoarelor* is a photo magazine dedicated to military actions taken on the battlefield.

Until the end of the First World War, *Gazeta de Transilvania* had published one photo only, a portrait of Simion Barnutiu. In *Neamul Romanesc* founded by Nicolae Iorga, portrait-photography showing peasants from different parts of the country were sometimes published. *Razboiul Popoarelor* was a very successful magazine in which dozens of photos from the battlefield were published, being, in fact, a photo magazine.

Without exceptions, the photojournalistic genre used was the portrait. This is justified by the fact that the photo technique was not very evolved, and capturing images having subjects in a continuous movement was hard to accomplish, so the portrait was the only type of image that the technique could accomplish in that period.

The third chapter is the most extensive. The interwar period was a golden period for the Romanian photojournalism. It is the period when the first field photojournalists appeared. The newspapers were publishing photos from events that had happened hours before. The typing technique was being improved and engraving was being entirely given up.

In this period, all the known photojournalistic types started to be used. Event photography, sports photography, lifestyle photography, fashion photography and even photojournalism appeared in that time.

Among the most impressive genres of photojournalism practiced was street photography which depicted very well the atmosphere of Bucharest in the interwar period, showing both the richness of the bourgeoisie and the poverty of the slums.

For the present study I decided to analyse the publications *Universul* and *Adevarul*. These were the most popular newspapers of the period, although they were opposed in what concerns the editorial politics (*Adevarul* was left-wing and *Universul* was centre-right). Both publications offered enough space to photography.

Browsing through these newspapers published in the interwar period, I discovered a particularity of the portrait that I did not notice in another period. It is the ID portrait illustrating celebrities in their coffins. It had almost become a competition: when famous persons died, newspapers would hurry to publish close-up shots of them lying in their coffins. Sometimes the shot was so important, that the photo legend gave details about how long after the death the photo had been taken.

Issues concerning moral ethics in photojournalism are found throughout this chapter, as well as some information about the special effects that were used in that period to edit photos. Photo legends/descriptions are thought to be an integral part of photojournalism in this study, so this aspect is detailed in each chapter of the paper. Since in this period the first photojournalists become known (Iosif Berman - the most famous), the first problems related to copyright arise. Thus, one of the subchapters approaches this aspect, too.

The fourth chapter refers to Romanian photojournalism during the Second World War. Even though it was a short period, Romania experienced three types of dictatorship: Carlist, legionary and Antonescian. Press was powerfully undermined in this period, with the freedom of speech being suppressed. Even press photos were used as propaganda, and during the Carlist dictatorship they served the cult of King Carol's personality.

The newspapers analysed in this period were *Timpul* and *Curentul*. I selected these two publications because they appeared throughout the whole period of the Second World War, thus covering the three dictatorships, and because they had opposing editorial politics, *Timpul* having political views that leaned to the centre-left, while *Curentul* was a centre-right wing newspaper. The photos published in this period were of a good quality but they were used as propaganda. Generally speaking, these were photos showing a positive image of the Romanian Army and its allies, and a negative one about the enemies of the country. In order to sow hate among the Romanian people towards their country's enemies, most of the photos published showed the atrocities committed by the latter.

In the fifth chapter, the present paper tackles the problem of the press photography published by the newspapers *Scanteia* and *Romania Libera*, during the Gheorghiu-Dej regime. Starting with the beginning of the communist regime in Romania, press photography became limited to serving the doctrine of the party. If the news was about the industrialisation of agriculture, then all the photos contained smoking tractors (to show that they work); if the news was about the leaders at work, then the photographers were certainly there, with them, at the workplace. We can say that photography disappeared as a genre and turned into a pattern. All photos of miners showed miners looking at a lamp, news about lathe operators contained photos which showed the latter using callipers, news about women that manufacture cotton included photos of such women holding a spool and the examples can go on.

Photography lacked emotion, mainly showing agricultural machines, blocks of flats, concrete buildings, factories, plants and people looking happy.

It is important to note, though not in a positive way, the fact that the communist party understood the power of photography and did not hesitate to use it as propaganda.

The sixth chapter is a wide one, containing the analysis of the period of Nicolae Ceausescu's dictatorship. The newspapers in which I observed the way press photography was used were *Scanteia* and *Romania Libera*, as those were the most popular publications of the time.

The photos, as well as the texts published by the communist press were harshly filtered. Nothing of the facts that could damage the image of Ceausescu's leaders was published. If a photography was not favourable to the presidential couple, it was modified and published only after it had



obtained consent. Many times the consent for publishing photos was given by Elena Ceausescu herself.

Photojournalism in this period was reduced to two simple aspects, the welfare of the Romanian people and the geniality of the state leaders. The photos published in these newspapers showed only positive images. There were only two exceptions to this euphoric state of well-being, the earthquake of 1977 and the floods of 1970.

The cult of personality imposed by the couple Elena and Nicolae Ceausescu was reflected in photography, as well. There was not even one edition of a published newspaper *Scanteia* or *Romania Libera* that lacked a photography of the two leaders. Besides the pictures of the presidential couple, there were other photos of cranes, tractors, meters, screws, corn, wheat and public meetings. All of them followed a certain pattern.

Unfortunately, even though camera cannot lie, in the communist period photography fully supported the ideology spread by the newspapers of the time.

The seventh chapter ends the chronological research of this paper. Digital photography was invented in 1975, and in 1990 it became accessible worldwide. The technological development after 1990 makes press photography essential to any publication. After 2000, when almost all gadgets have a camera incorporated, a new form of photojournalism appears, called citizen photojournalism. This type of photojournalism refers to the fact that any citizen can take pictures of an event that can turn into news. This research does not focus on digital photography because the idea was to analyse photojournalism until the appearance of digital photography. This new beginning of photography deserves a separated study.

The last chapter of the paper refers to the methods and techniques of manipulation through press photography. It is a chapter that approaches different practices through which the message of a photography can be distorted, even though it was not directly modified by means of special digital editing programs.

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