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# Childhood in 2 Mai. An *Insider's* Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The holiday community established in the village of 2 Mai has always been a unique one, owing to the number of artists and intellectuals who chose this secluded beach settlement due to the sense of freedom it conveys, especially during the communist regime. This paper aims to provide an analysis of the writer's childhood in 2 Mai, through the lens of auto-anthropology. The main perspective of this paper is that of an insider, as I was born and raised in the village of 2 Mai. My childhood was marked by the experience of working for the small seashore restaurant owned by my parents from the early age of 12. The theoretical basis of this paper is rooted in social psychology, by means of which I set out to provide insights into how I interacted with the adult world and how I perceived this particular universe as a child.

## KEYWORDS

childhood, 2 Mai community, auto-anthropology, insider-outsider, Transactional Analysis.

## 2 Mai, summer of 1997

At noon the beach isn't such a friendly place, unless you get a bit of shade. It feels like being in an oven, getting seared on all sides. Lodging tourists leave as soon as it gets too hot. Honestly, I envy them. I know how cool my house is at this time of day. Whoever's around the camping must do all it takes not to die of heat stroke. Shade is in great demand here and our shaded terrace is full at lunchtime. The atmosphere is great – bohemian, as they say. Everybody says the food is awesome and that they're having a great time. My folks like it when it's crowded, I...not that much. The only reason I don't like it is because I have to work all day long. I don't want people to know I'm the bosses' daughter, so I call my folks Nuți and Gelu. They're fine with it. I've asked them.

Mornings are the hardest for me because everyone is agitated and impatient until the coffee is ready. Especially those who had a few drinks the night before. They're always whin-

ing about headaches, feeling sick and not being able to wait any longer. Well...stop drinking, I tell them, and they say I'm too young to know anything about parties. They tell me I'll see how it feels to be hungover and in pain when I grow older. When coffee takes long to prepare, some become rather rude, get angry and yell at me. When they do that, I get my mom to yell back at them. But most tourists are polite and friendly. A lot of them talk to me and tell me tons of stories. And they also leave tips. This is what I love the most.

Noon is the best time for me because everyone cools off with their coffee. They sit on the terrace, but they switch to beer, they chat, they read and even play cards now and then. Some watch TV inside, at the bar. We have a parabolic antenna, so we get many foreign channels. We were the first in the village to have a parabolic antenna. Sometimes, it's really awesome here on the terrace. I get to meet a lot of interesting people. A couple of days ago I saw a guy from the band Vama Veche. I made my mom ask for an autograph. I got the autograph on a tape of theirs. I was really happy.

Everybody's relaxed and they look like



Tina Terrace. Interior.  
August 1993.  
You can see the bar –  
made of wood – in the  
back.

they know one another. It's not much of a terrace, as in it's not too modern, but people enjoy themselves here. As Răzvan - a guy I talk to a lot - puts it: people like their freedom. Meaning, they like not having to dress up to eat or drink here. Some don't dress at all; they just show up in their swimsuits or speedos. There's always sand on the terrace. It's only natural as the beach is right across the street. Mom doesn't even bother sweeping anymore; anyway, the cement looks better covered in sand. You feel like you're at the seaside. There are some people who spend their entire day on the terrace. They come in the morning, drink their coffee, have their breakfast, go for a dip in the sea, come back, have another beer, go swim again. And it goes on until the sun sets.

Usually, when the lunchtime hustle and bustle quiets down, I also go for a dip in the sea. I've been taking swimming lessons for two weeks now. My swimming coach is a guy my dad knows from the camping. I love swimming, but it's kinda difficult. It's good that Gigi is patient and, anyway, he's at the seaside almost all summer, so we've got time. By the end

of the season, I will have learned to swim really well.

After swimming, I always have two ice-creams. Mom allows me one a day, but I take two. She says instead of selling them, dad and I eat all of them. Truth is I'm not allowed to have that much ice-cream; I'm fat anyway and can't lose the weight. I throw the wraps behind the booth so mom won't notice them in the garbage can. I've told my dad and now he throws them there too. I hope she won't figure it out, cause then I'm gonna be in real trouble. It's full, full of wraps there, I have to somehow get rid of them.

A few days ago Cristina, some girl, came by. I knew her by sight; she had bought coffee with lots of sugar for her dad. She brought a game her grandma had sent her from Germany and wanted us to play together. I didn't feel like playing. I told her I was busy. But she wouldn't go and started asking me loads of questions. She asked me why I worked, if I worked every day. I answered yes, because I work for the family and because my folks need help. Besides, I cannot hand over the coffee

and ice-cream stocks so easily. She asked if I had 4 toes. That seemed really weird, but, looking down, I realized my pinkie toe wasn't visible because of my shoes. We both laughed. She asked how winter was at the seaside. Everybody is asking me about that!!! How else can it be but cold and deserted? And I get dead bored in winter and cannot wait for summer to come.

From then on, Cristina came to see me every day at lunchtime. We'd hide in that little wooden booth and talk about anything and everything. We'd draw the curtain mom had brought from home and talk about her school, how she had fun going on camping trips, about our favourite bands because I had glued posters on the walls of the booth. Cristina was amused by the entrance made of coloured plastic ribbons, as it reminded her of her grandma who lived in the countryside.

Though Cristina is kinda weird, meaning she's a chatterbox, I like spending time with her. She's coming today after she has finished reading, to talk some more. She's got a summer reading list for school and her dad won't let her leave the tent until she has finished. I

have promised that tomorrow evening, when I get off from work, we'll go for a walk in the village. I hope she'll like the promenade in 2 Mai. So far I haven't been on a walk with anyone in the village, it's gonna be interesting to see my home village through her eyes.

16 years later, Cristina and I are still friends. Since '97 we've spent our summers in 2 Mai. We wrote each other letters for about 6 years, until our parents gave us cell phones and we switched to text messaging. Now we see each other almost daily and have "grown-up" talks: about doctoral theses and organizing thematic conferences.

For many people with whom I come into daily contact in the academia and not only, the fact that I was born and raised in the village of 2 Mai seems truly special and, in most cases, it stirs exclamations of surprise and pleasure, since it's the place where many spent their summer holidays, in a bohemian and unusual place, a place they feel attached to and which bears pleasant memories.

2 Mai represents a space of cultural encounter; the „public" and, of course, the tourist, of 2 Mai generally comes from this



Tina Terrace. Exterior. August 1997. The entrance to the terrace. There were tables on the right and left. The terrace was covered by a tarpaulin that would never hold back the rain, though my father would often patch it up.

background. In the research I've done so far about the place (my bachelor's degree, my dissertation paper and now my doctorate) I have tried and still am trying to analyze the community of 2 Mai, from and through these actors' perspective, to understand the specific characteristics of the village and how it has become a brand community as memorial time and space.

This is the first endeavour to analyze the village of 2 Mai from my perspective, that of an insider, of a person born and raised there. I spent all the seasons in the village, but once I got into the Faculty of Sociology, Human Communities Department, I started to grasp the socio-anthropological view of the systems behind such a special community as that of 2 Mai.

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### Brief monograph of the village of 2 Mai and of the village camping

The village of 2 Mai was founded after the Independence War (1877-1878) when, following the Berlin Peace Treaty, Dobrogea was returned to Romania. Apparently, the village was

named 2 Mai (2nd May) in memory of the coup d'état of 2 May 1864 which resulted in the dissolution of the Romanian Parliament by Alexandru Ioan Cuza, since the legislative was against the Agrarian Law.<sup>1</sup>

The research for the dissertation paper required documentation from several sources and materials, some published, others not. Irina Costache's essay, *From the Party to the Beach Party: Nudism and Artistic Expression in the People's Republic of Romania*, credits King Carol I of Romania as baptizer of the village. During his Majesty's inspection in Dobrogea, a recently-added region after the War of Independence, the King discovers a „mob” of people and houses whose name was unknown to those present. He decided to name the place based on the date of his visit, i.e. 2 Mai (“May 2nd”) (Costache 2013, 3).

Another version - found on the Internet - regarding the village name is connected to „maiuri”, tools used in the old days in the household for various daily activities. The definition provided by dexonline.ro is the following: „MAI3 máiuri n. 1) Big wooden hammer used mainly in carpentry and cartwrighting. 2) Manual or mechanic tool used in the construction of roads to compact the soil or

1) There are several versions regarding the origin of the village name. I am personally attached to the version I have chosen to present first, as I came across it in my childhood, thanks to the village history teacher. During the lesson, the emphasis was on Alexandru Ioan Cuza's reign and Mihail Kogălniceanu's visit to the village; the story about the ruler's power to be against the Agrarian Law was presented in a rather romantic vein.



1 – in the middle, on the sand. Cristina – on the right, holding me by the neck. Ana Dinescu – painter, on the left. And Luiza, a.k.a. Lula (Cristina's friend). On the right you can see our tent and on the left the separation done by Apele Române (little iron pillars, dyed in yellow and blue).

other earthwork materials. /<lat. Malleus". Personally, I do not credit this version found on Wikipedia, but it cannot be overlooked since it is the closest information at hand, for the wide public, and can easily impose itself in the collective imagination.

law. From my grandmother's stories I found out that the Skoptsy would get castrated after having a baby that would later inherit everything.

At the beginning of the 1900s, the first families of Lipovans came to the village. Since



In the background, the coffee booth. In the foreground, from left to right: my mother, Ela Zeller-Constantinescu, Mişu-my cousin who helped my folks around the camping, Rodica Constantinescu and Dan, a tourist from the camping.

In its beginnings, the village of 2 Mai was populated by families of Skoptsy from the Raskol sect (castrated Russians) gathered from around the country (Bucharest, Iaşi, Galaţi). The Skoptsy had opposed the religious reforms implemented by Patriarch Nikon during the reign of Tsar Peter the Great, so they left Russia and, thus, a part of them ended up on what is today Romanian territory.

More information about the Skoptsy from Southern Dobrogea and, more precisely, from the village, can be found in Swiss anthropologist Eugene Pittard's book, *La Roumanie, Valachie- Moldavie- Dobrudja*, published in Paris in 1917 (Pittard 1917, 302). The Skoptsy would adopt the poor, but hard-working children of large families and would leave them their entire fortune on the condition that the children marry, get castrated and live together as brother and sister, according to the Skoptsy

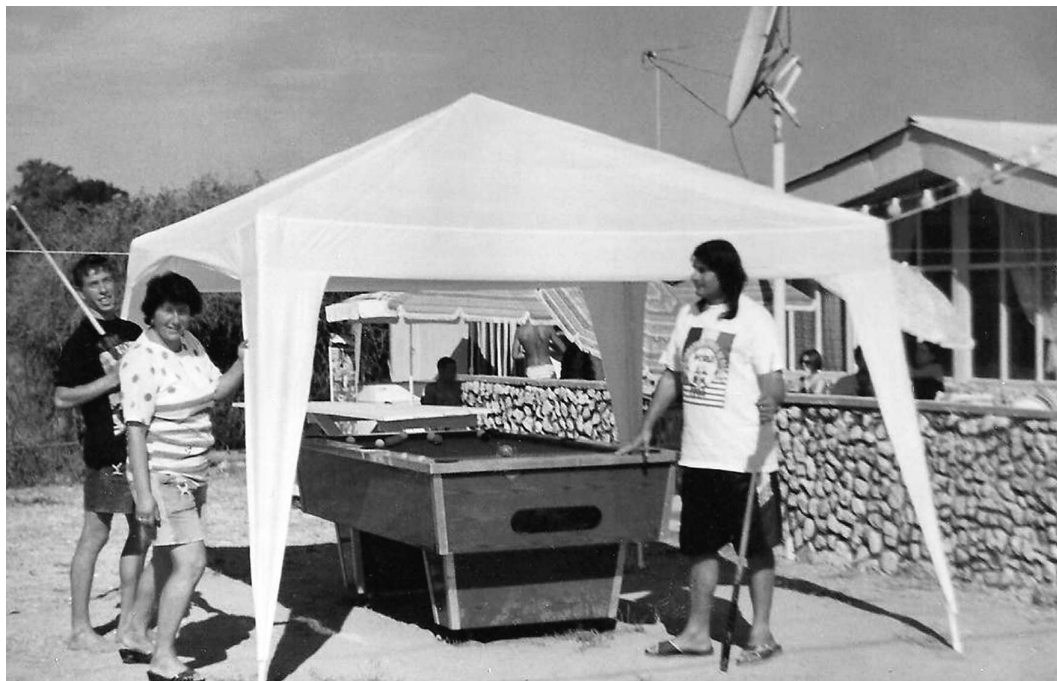
1920 the colonisation of 2 Mai was made with families from Argeş, who had received land and a plot for their homes (Dogar 2010).

Nowadays, 2 Mai, together with the villages of Limanu, Vama Veche and Hagieni, is part of the commune of Limanu. The results of the 2012 census show that this region is populated by several ethnicities. The regular population of the commune is of 6120 inhabitants, of which 5445 are Romanian.

The most visible and active minorities are the Tatars / Turks (183) and the Russian-Lipovans (173).

The Lipovans are a small ethnic group of Russian origin who emigrated from Russia over 200 years ago, because they were dissatisfied with the changes within the Orthodox Church. The Lipovans, most of who come from Sarichioi, Jurilovca or Slava Rusă, have added an exotic air to the village. Tourists have

My mother (left) and father (right) together with Marian, my cousin, who would help them around the camping and in the terrace. The pool table my father had purchased was the tourist attraction, along with the satellite (parabolic antenna) which is on the upper right corner.



always been fascinated by their customs, their skills to catch and cook fish, their endurance to alcohol, their traditions and music, in other words, their Slavic soul.

The Turkish-Tatar community of 2 Mai is famous among tourists for their traditional foods: chiburekki and baklava, which can be found in the village pastry shop. In my childhood, there was a booth downtown, on the school street, on the corner of the main road, where they sold the best chiburekki; there was always a long line at that booth. On the corner, next to the chiburekki, lived Mr. Pereat, my neighbour, who sold melons and watermelons. The various types of melons he cultivated were highly appreciated by everyone.

All these ethnicities of 2 Mai have their own churches and cemeteries, which serves as yet another proof of the multicultural spirit characterized by acceptance and integration.

In the communist period, the village of 2 Mai represented a special world. Along the years, the name of the village came to be associated with freedom, relaxation and there was this feeling of “je ne sais quoi”.

The underground culture, poetry, music, tea parties, bridge and canasta games were at

home in 2 Mai. This area of the Romanian seaside was the most libertine, the one which lacked the constraints of the communist system the most. Well, this is why 2 Mai was fascinating, because the party activists did not get here, and when they did, they were not taken seriously (Kivu 2011).

People from the world of art – music and theatre – or even of philosophy would go to 2 Mai to spend their holidays in a very bohemian way, without the constraint of fixed meals or other rigours of hotel holidays. They preferred to read, write, discuss taboo issues, have tea parties and raves in their hosts’ yards or soirées where discussions revolved around a theme, play cards or simply lay in the sun (Ciachir 2010, 3).

During the communist period, the beach was split into two: on one side, the nudists, on the other, the fabric fans. The nudists were tourists who preferred to sunbathe naked; it was a liberty of the time in 2 Mai, which literally expressed the freedom people felt in this place<sup>2</sup>. As the name says, fabric fans preferred to wear fabric, meaning swimming suits. Even if they did not express their sense of freedom through the lack of swimming suits, it does

2) Mircea Kivu in the interview given for my dissertation paper on 25th May 2012: “those who practised nudism were the artists, the urchins, those who expressed themselves freely”.

not mean they did not have it; only the means of expressing it was different.

The current location of the Shipyard, nowadays known as DMHI, was the nudists' preferred spot in the '60s. When the construction of the shipyard began, the nudists moved to the little bay south of the beach, from Vamă. The work on the Shipyard, which began at the end of the '70s, had drastic consequences on the beach which stretched from Mangalia to Vamă. Its sectioning led to the visible division between the nudist beach and the one for the fabric fans. In addition, the two dams were constructed in the '70s, which, according to people who frequented the area, led to the current shortening of the beach (Kivu 2011).

In that period there were very few tents on the beach, most tourists preferring to stay in the villagers' gardens as they had access to the improvised shower and the toilets in the back of the yard. Mr. Cristian Goran (speologist), a long-run tourist of the village (his first visit to 2 Mai was in 1972), told me in an interview that he preferred to stay in people's homes because, in his opinion, the ad-hoc camping on the beach was not safe. In those times, most people who populated the camping were foreign tourists, mainly Polish and Czech. Since 1976, the numbers of campers on the beach started to rise, which led to the official establishment of the camping and to camping in the villagers' gardens becoming illegal.

The increase in the number of tourists on the beach led to an increase in the interest for the place, so that the beach was taken over by the organization which also managed the hotels and restaurants in Mangalia during the communist period - *Întreprinderi, Hoteluri și Restaurante Mangalia*,<sup>3</sup> meaning IHR - and, together with it, also the camping. This takeover led to the improvement of conditions. Therefore, cold-water showers were installed, but even so, that meant a lot for the people who chose to stay in tents. Simultaneously with the take-over, street lighting appeared, i.e. 5 posts with big light bulbs. One of the posts is still in the camping today. It was basically an acknowledgement and a guarantee

for those who had become „loyal clients” that what had formed there was going to be permanent.

The improvement of the conditions led to the levy of a camping tax by the IHR Mangalia administration. IHR handed this task over to the manager of the Dobrogeanu restaurant. Behind the restaurant, a small house appeared serving as a reception desk, where the tourists would pay their camping tax. In the '90s, when the manager changed, the reception was moved closer to the beach.

At the beginning of the '80s, the camping could boast a minimum development and a growing number of visitors. The increasing number of campers might have been a direct consequence of the measures adopted by the communist regime, which was desperately trying to economize. Food was becoming scarcer and scarcer, so the tourists had to bring food from home. The hosts who cooked and had this advantage - unlike the campers - also found themselves unable to serve their clients like they used to.

After the revolution, the camping was still managed by the Dobrogeanu restaurant. Eugen Dumitru, a.k.a. Gioni, was the manager of the restaurant and, later on, of the camping. In December 1991, when Gioni passed away, the restaurant and camping were left without a manager. In the summer of 1992, Gheorghe Dumitru, my father, began running the camping because he worked there as an electrician and a jack-of-all-trades. He knew how everything was running, he would guard the place at night, he would connect the tents to the power network and make sure everyone was pleased. Moreover, he knew the beach of his childhood like the back of his hand and most clients knew him as a “local”. The resemblance in names is purely random, as Gioni was from the county of Călărași. Gioni and my father were great friends, trusted one another, a trust also grounded in their passion for the game of rummikub.

My father, a.k.a. Gelu, was born in 2 Mai, just like his father, Vasile Dumitru. His grandfather, Dumitru Gheorghe, a.k.a. Mitea The

3) Companies, Hotels and Restaurants

Bulgarian, arrived in 2 Mai in 1913 because people received land from the state and he needed a place where he and Rada, his wife, could build a house. Somehow, in time, my great-grandfather's first name became a family name, most likely because of a clerk's carelessness. The house they built 100 years ago is the house in which my grandfather, together with his 9 siblings, my father and his 6 siblings, my brother and I lived and now, my 2 nephews live.

Gelu spent his entire childhood on the beach of 2 Mai. His favourite activities were picking shells and frying European anchovies on the board together with the village gang. He finished secondary school in 2 Mai and went to the electrician trade school of Mangalia. He says he did not like the school system because it was not lenient. The fact that he wrote with

When they met, Elena, my mother, was working as a waitress at a restaurant. She comes from the village of Nisipari, close to Medgidia. She finished secondary school in the village and then attended a waiters' training school. She was living in a hostel and in one of her free evenings she and her roommate went to a nearby disco. That is where she met Gelu who invited her to dance with his army buddy. A year later, in July 1978, Marius, my brother, was born in 2 Mai. Seven years later, in March 1985, I was born. During that period, my father was working as an electrician in the harbor and my mother was working only summers at the Dobrogeanu restaurant. Mother continued to work at Dobrogeanu restaurant until the summer of 1993 when she decided to join my father in the camping.

Since 1993, the beach and the camping



My father in the camping.

his left hand - a thing forbidden in the communist system - often led to corporal punishment. He wore his hair long even before enrolling in the army and continued to do it even after he returned. He worked as an electrician in beach resorts and that is where he met Elena, my mother, who became his wife only a few months after they had met.

have been managed by the Town Hall of Limanu Commune, which offered the renting of this space via public bid. The bid was open only to firms, which significantly lowered the number of bidders, since at the time tourism outside the system was still practiced in the village. With the financial help of an Italian friend, whom my family calls "mother" Tina,

my father managed to set up a firm and take over the management of the camping and beach. Obviously, the firm is called Tina and this year we are celebrating 20 years since its establishment and since he has been managing the camping of 2 Mai.

Along the years, many things have changed. The beach was transferred from the management of the Town Hall of Limanu Commune to that of Apele Române<sup>4</sup> and in the summer time it is subtle to any firm that can afford the price. The camping area has been diminished twice, once in 1998 when camping on the beach was restricted, and in 2002 when camping on the sand was prohibited. Therefore, the camping currently stretches on 4900 sqm, on a portion of grass, between the road and the beach.

Despite all these „obstacles”, those who love their tent life have not given up the camping and still spend their summer holidays here. The stories and the energy of the old clients were the factors that convinced me to write my diploma thesis on this brand community of the village of 2 Mai.

Most clients have known my father for over 20 years, ever since their tents were „surreptitiously” connected to the power system. Mr. Băltăţeanu, an old client of the camping, told me in the interview about the importance of continuity and how the 20 years of continual management have had a positive influence on the place, as it provided coherence.

The reason I mentioned Gelu, my father, is not for family reasons, but because he truly represents an important pillar for the culture of 2 Mai, especially for the camping. He is an interesting character, who has fought many „battles” in order to preserve the camping formed on the beach of 2 Mai.

He has preserved his celebrity through time due to his consistency, due to the role of „soldier” he has assumed and due to the fact that not even at his age has he given up his long hair. As my dad would often say: „It does not matter how long my hair is, what is important is how much I think.” (Pasărea Colibiri, *Vinovații fără vină*,<sup>5</sup> 1992). Tourists who come

each year or who have not come in a while always ask me: „Does Gelu / your dad still have long hair?”

The positive reply calms them and assures them that, although 2 Mai may have changed its architecture or economy, some things stay the same. Everyone knows Gelu as the camping manager and they are very happy about the restrooms he rebuilt 10 years ago. The most important thing is that the tourists feel safe here as nothing has been stolen since he has been manager.

The tales of Gelu's generosity, who let the young people who serenaded him stay for 2 more days at the seaside for free, gives flavour to the camping and bears legendary stories.

And because every story with a „hero” must also have a „villain”, Nuți, my mother, is the villain in our story. She has been the manager of the firm and has made sure my dad's generosity was limited to only a couple of days. My mother was the „iron rod” who managed to run the camping and, afterwards, the terrace, the one who had to temper and organize us all, the one who cheerfully managed to serve lunch to all present in the terrace.

Nuți is not as loved as Gelu, because she tells it as it is; despite this, she is highly respected. Everybody thought she was Mrs. Tina. So as not to go into too much detail, mother preferred to answer to this name. Even today, though she has stopped working in the camping, there are still people who ask: „How is Mrs. Tina doing?”

In my memories, mom is always wearing a fanny pack. It was an integrant part of her daily outfit. I remember I loved her fanny pack. It was made of leather, half green, half brown. I had several fanny packs, I would change them daily as they were considered an interesting accessory at that age, but I dreamt of having my mother's fanny pack.

My research on 2 Mai is deeply personal and helps me understand my own condition as member of its community.

4) The “Romanian Waters” National Administration

5) Pasărea Colibri is a Romanian folk group. The Innocent Guilty is one of their most famous singles.



## Auto-anthropology

Auto-anthropology (Strathern 1987, 39) is a concept defined - amongst others - by Marilyn Strathern in 1987, referring to the anthropological study of one's body, one's home or one's person, and exploring the physical, mental and personal field anthropology offers.

The premise is that, the moment one's own person or society becomes the subject of one's study, one becomes increasingly more aware and observant of the research methods and instruments. Thus, the researcher will gain a much deeper insight into the researched field as there are no more linguistic and cultural barriers. However, anything arising before the researcher's keen eye will turn from something common into something complex. This is the point in which the researcher, ethnographer / anthropologist should become much more receptive and sensitive to the way in which he / she does the research.

Auto-anthropology implies a double positioning of the researcher in regards to his / her own person. Firstly, analytically, the subject of the research represents the researcher's environment and, secondly, contextually, the case in which one's own person becomes a category of knowledge. In other words, auto-anthropology is the research where the researcher and the social group that is researched share the premises and concepts of the social life and culture that underlie anthropological studies.

When anthropologists / ethnographers study someone else's culture, they perceive it from the locals' and that culture's perspective. Many a time the locals will provide their own views on the culture that is studied. When they study their own culture or their own space, researches must distance themselves and not presume they already hold all the answers. The position of insider / outsider has often been a challenge for me as I have had to constantly choose between being an objective researcher or a "spokesperson" of the culture I am studying and in which I grew up.

Marylin Strathern emphasises the fact that in auto-anthropology it is paramount that the author's interpretation be completed also by other subjects' interpretations; this way, the similarities between subjects and researcher will be highlighted. During the research I have done so far, many childhood memories are the same as the interviewees' memories, whether they were children or adults at the time: feelings about a place, beach parties, fleeting love, taking a dip at night. The only difference is that I was home, while they were on vacation, meaning far away from home, in an "exotic" place. I was an insider of the village, I was a local, but an outsider of the community formed on the beach.

At 14, when I also started to spend my nights in the camping, I began to feel more like an insider of the community. Along with moving into a tent within the camping, I was able to experience feelings similar to theirs: the discomfort created by the morning heat which shortens the sleep time, the unpleasant noise during the night, the fact that one cannot enter the tent at noon because of the high temperature, the cold at night, etc. However, I did remain an outsider, because I could return home anytime I wanted, I did not need traveling money or too much time to get to the beach.

The main objective of this auto-anthropological research is to have a better grasp of my position and role in this community. As I feel privileged in my affiliation to this special group, I feel the need to give back to the community which helped me in my personal and professional development. Most of them were my teachers, but without knowing or willing it. I have been guided and helped in my research and many a time I have come across people I knew from 2 Mai and who have helped me evolve.

I feel that my childhood, when I would spend my summers working in my parents' terrace, has helped me become an adult who carries out projects and respects her decisions. I learned to be responsible at an age when responsibility meant not losing your allowance or personal items when going on school trips.



The reception my father rebuilt in 1993.

According to Freud, the way in which we perceive ourselves in our childhood has repercussions on our entire lifetime as childhood experiences determine our development as adults. What happens in our childhood can define our future, how we choose to act or our perception of the world. The fact that even at this age I continue to research the image and imagination of the village of 2 Mai, my birthplace and where I developed as an adult is no mere coincidence, but a consequence of the environment I grew up in. It is my need to have a better understanding of what happened there, to my family and I and to the people I met on the beach and in the camping of 2 Mai.

The methods by which research on childhood has been approached so far are related to: childhood as a social phenomenon and the biological maturity that is invested with various social meanings depending on the cultural background (Montgomery 2009, 9). Childhood is a complex phenomenon which cannot be described only from the perspective of a single discipline and it requires a profound comprehension. The study of childhood is mostly approached by means of an interdisciplinary framework.

In the paper *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies*, Allison and Adrian James bring into discussion Arie's perspective (1962) who speaks about the term "child" as being unre-

lated to age, but to the social dependence on an adult person (James 2008, 7).

Taking this perspective into account, I can understand from my own experience that I became an "adult" at the age of 12, the moment I started earning my allowance, meaning when I became independent financially. Even if I was not supporting myself fully, after my first work year I managed to buy the clothes I wanted on my own. Therefore, I could have a say about my wardrobe since I had bought it with my own resources. That was the moment I stopped depending on my parents, at least with respect to obtaining certain goods that prove crucial for the shaping of one's identity. In addition, I was really happy because my tastes did not match my mother's in the least.

In the chapter related to age, authors Allison and Adrian James remind their readers of Solberg's 1997 study on children who have various responsibilities around the house and who proved their parents that they could be trusted. This demonstration made the parents' perspective on how the children lived up to their responsibilities change, which, in turn, made the children seem more mature and, thus, changed the adults' perspective on their age. I would say this happened in my case also; the moment I began to manage myself, I did not feel like I was 12 anymore.

Although there were moments when I

needed the help of an adult (a parent, in my case), most times I still behaved and acted like an adult. Therefore, in my daily activities, age turned into a relative concept, becoming a simple number. In most cases it was a reason of surprise for those who knew me and a reason of pride for my parents.

Children who work carry out various tasks or have various responsibilities depending on their age. Therefore, they become more responsible and more resourceful. In most cases age is the only criterion taken into account the moment the child is given responsibilities, although this criterion should not be the only one. Most often than not, it is the adults who refuse to give children responsibilities, the only reason invoked being the children's age. This lack of confidence in their chances of success may limit the children's capacity to learn, to become more competent or manage to develop certain abilities.

The authors of *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies* believe that if children were given certain responsibilities and, especially, if they were guided in their completion, they would demonstrate a higher level of competence than the one anticipated by the adults. Following studies done throughout the years, it has been ascertained that little children learn

the fastest through experimentation and the improvement of competences happens faster via experiment, meaning they are not based solely on age advancement.

Gerison Lansdown, international consultant for children's rights, maintains that adults permanently underestimate children's abilities. This way, children are denied certain opportunities or participation in decision-making that might influence their life. Poor communication between adults and children can lead to decision-making actions that might affect the children's future and the relationships between parents and children. The main problem of a shaky communication is that, in most cases, adults make decisions on their own, without taking the children's ideas or wishes into account.

Eric Berne is the founder of the Transactional Analysis, one of the most used methods in the branch of social psychology, since the end of the '50s. The method is widely used because it can easily be applied in clinical and therapeutic therapy, personal development, interpersonal relationships and behaviours.

The Transactional Analysis refers to the communication exchange between individuals and the three states of the self: of parent, adult and child. As parents, we integrate the voice of authority, the one we learned from our parents, teachers or other adults. We will assume behaviours and thoughts from people who are not necessarily related to us, but whose influence we have felt deeply. The state of adult is an accumulation of feelings, thoughts and habits which manifest themselves in relation to "here" and "now" and have no direct connection with age, as it can be experienced also by children. The state of child implies a series of records formed of ideas, feelings or behaviours that comprise childhood experiences and the way in which we respond to them (Berne 1961, 10). I have chosen to use the Transactional Analysis as an analysis instrument of my childhood experiences.

In my childhood, there was always an exchange of roles between me and my parents. Precisely because I had responsibilities, I could



Mother and I in front of the terrace. You can see my mother's fanny pack, the object of my desires.

communicate with my parents as an adult. I also adopted the state of adult in communicating with my parents the moment I decided to call them by their first name. However, when I would have some sort of difficulties and ask for my mother's help, I would instantly get back to the state of child. The same thing happened when mother would not allow me to have more than one ice-cream a day; she would be authoritarian, but I would not listen to her, I would "revolt". With my father, because we had our little secrets, the interaction was mostly "child to child", as if we were hiding something from a parent. There were, however, moments when I would become a parent in my communication with my parents, as I was authoritarian and imposed certain issues.

The adults' perception of me was that of a competent and responsible person, not a child. The concept of competence pertains to a person's culture, in addition to his / her psychological, cognitive, emotional, social or moral attributes, which do not develop uniformly, but chronologically or depending on the cultural context (James 2008, 12). Anthropologists consider that the most important "influence on human development is the cultural environment in which a child grows up" (Weisner 2001, p. 1697-1701).

These theoretical approaches shed new light on the moment I was with my parents at a table and decided to spend my summer working at the terrace. My father told me I should be serious when making decisions, because once I had said "Yes", I could not abandon them when they needed me the most. I had to choose between a school trip and work. Although I had never been on a school trip before, I chose to work because I loved the idea of spending the entire day on the beach and meeting new people.

The idea that children can be independent social actors is considered the new paradigm in the study of childhood. The issue that is posed is the "child's voice", his / her perspective and vision of the world. In 1973 Hardman wrote about the children's forced silence be-

cause the adults would not listen to their perspective on things (James 2008, 34). Recently, research has been emphasizing the children's viewpoint as highly valuable because it can help develop realistic policies which can defend their rights and well-being. Although the children's voice has started to be heard, there is always the chance it will not be listened to or taken into account. However, there are more and more children who participate or are encouraged to participate in research, especially the ones which deal with the subject of their own childhood. The research methods are child-friendly and approach the subject of the research via direct discussion with the children.

When I was a child, in the camping, I always felt I was being heard, but mostly by those outside my family. I always felt that those who spent time talking to me were really interested in what I had to say. I felt very well in this position, I felt I was important and what I had to say mattered. People admired the way I was doing my job and the most important was that they would actually voice it, they'd encourage me either verbally or financially.

Răzvan Ț. was one of those adults who always encouraged me, either verbally or financially. He had been self-appointed to bring the coffee to his gang because he considered it a good opportunity to chat. When we met we happened to be reading the same book: *Mary Poppins* by P.L.Travers. This led to a series of jokes and comparisons related to the fact that I was reading the book at 12 and he at 30. The relationship with Răzvan was "adult to adult", though, from time to time, we would turn into children talking about their favorite ice-cream. Most of our conversations were book-related, what we had read and what we were going to read next. He was the first adult outside the family who treated me as his equal and who often told me that what I was doing was going to come in handy when I would be a grown-up.

There were others like Răzvan who would spend a few minutes talking to me. The topics varied: how winter was at the seaside, school,



what I wanted to do when I would grow up, music or fun and parties. There were many who pitied me, who found it unfair that I had to work as they thought I was too young for such a responsibility. There were days when their compassion felt good as I was exhausted, but most times I'd try to convince them that I was happy and that working had a lot of perks.

I liked my privileged position, but it was a card I did not want to play all the time. Many times I would not reveal my "identity" from the first conversation; it was a sort of test I would apply to new people. I liked my position of insider, of a person who holds the answer to the question: "How is winter at the seaside?" But, unfortunately, I did not enjoy spending winter at the seaside that much. That is why I learned, from an early age, that the best solution would be to spend my winters somewhere else. At 14, when I first visited Cristina, I decided that no matter what college I would attend, it would have to be in Bucharest.

That is how I ended up living 9 months a year in Bucharest and spending 3 months of summer in 2 Mai, working in the camping; this has been going on for 8 years now. Now I feel like an outsider in 2 Mai. I cannot answer to how winter is at the seaside anymore, because I rarely get to go back home throughout the year, and most times I do not stay too long. Gradually, I am becoming more an insider of Bucharest, as I have wanted to ever since I was a child. Nevertheless, 2 Mai has never "left" me; it has always been in my thoughts and research.

I was pleasantly surprised to find out that some of the people who used to come or are still coming to 2 Mai, in the camping or on the beach, still ask about me and how I am doing. They are really pleased with my research on 2 Mai, they want to find out as much as possible, they pass my paper over from one to the other and take pride in my work.

This "pride" they feel is very important to me as it encourages me to move forward, to "delve" even deeper. I often wonder if all the things I do are not for "them", for those who were looking at me and still look at me, in order to be accepted into "their" community,

to satisfy their curiosity or their "craving" for 2 Mai. Are my attempts to preserve the "memory" of the village alive actually my wish not to lose my audience? Is it the need to justify my affiliation to this community? Does this affiliation which I inherited from my parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents have to be proven? No matter the answers to these questions, one thing is certain: in 2 Mai everyone has their "place under the sun", which is a key element substantiating the essence of this space that seems to offer everyone the right "to exist"; to exist in pure form, to exist before "to be", "to have", "to do".

*Translated by Alina-Olimpia Miron*

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