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**A DOG, A CAT, A
GUINUEA PIG.
AND A WAR**

Adrian Cătu



It was February 26, 2022 and I was on a ferry crossing the Danube from Orlivka to Isaccea, Romania. I had spent just a couple of hours on the Ukrainian side of the border. People and cars lined up for miles, waiting as much as twenty hours to board the ferry towards the safety of the Romanian territory. The border police kindly asked me to avoid taking pictures because they feared an aerial attack on the border post. So I just watched the flow of refugees before boarding the ferry back to Isaccea.

The ferry was packed. Women and children. Improvised bags. Pets. Sadness, shock and worry on their faces. I was walking among them wondering how I could even ask them to talk with me and painfully recall the trauma they had just experienced.

Then a man approached me. 'Are you a journalist?' he asked. 'If you want, I can talk. I want to tell you everything.' This is how I met Andreyi.

'This is our second time,' he told me, his blue eyes looking towards the shiny Romanian shore of the Danube. 'We used to live in Donbas. But in 2013 when the conflict started, we relocated to Odessa.'

'We', I would find out, meant Andreyi, his wife Tatyiana and their three children. The youngest one is five years old. They only have some backpacks with their clothes. But they could not leave behind their pets: a dog, a cat and a guinea pig.

'I used to work as a corporate lawyer,' Andreyi told me. 'I don't see how I could practise law in another country. But I don't mind, I would accept any kind of work. We will not return to Ukraine. As long as Russia is our neighbour, it will never be safe for us [Ukraine].'

His wife looks absent, alone with her thoughts, while the elder children stay close to her. I take a few pictures then we exchange contact details. The ferry

docks and the crowd of people starts flowing towards the border control. Volunteers offer hot tea, water and food. They are not very well organised but there are so many and everyone wants to help. Food and basic commodities, formula, cosmetics offered for free. Accommodation. Transportation. Translators. Andreyi is asking for accommodation. I see him and his family boarding a car. He waves me goodbye.

One month later, I received a phone call from him. 'Could you help? My wife... she is not good. She has PTSD attacks. Her parents are in the sieged Mariupol and she lost contact with them five days ago. She needs help but I don't know what to do.' I suggested that he call the emergency services. He messaged me later saying she was better after a doctor helped her.

A few days later I am again at the border and I message him, hoping to pay a visit. He shows me the location of a boarding house in the Danube Delta. I drive there and find the whole house full with Ukrainians. The owner offered them accommodation and food for free. They have been living there for one month already. Children are playing. His youngest daughter is playing with her father, her happy face contrasting with his worried one. He is evaluating options: leave to Canada, or leave to another European country. But the whole process is cumbersome and unfamiliar to him.

Last time we spoke, he called me. 'Hey', he said. 'We were lucky. An NGO helped us and we moved to Denmark. They helped with papers and relocation. It's good here so far. And as I told you, we will not return to Ukraine. We won't risk being refugees for a third time.'

















AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Adrian Catu

Adrian Catu's transition from the IT industry to the realms of anthropology and photography in 2014 marked the beginning of a remarkable journey. Having graduated a master's degree in anthropology, he embarked on a career as a commercial and documentary photographer, with his work gracing the pages of prestigious publications such as National Geographic, The New York Times, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, The Guardian. Adrian has been a compelling and committed storyteller, his long term projects covering coal mining, floods, human trafficking or refugees. His 2020 portrait of a child who survived heart surgery earned him an Award of Excellence at Picture of the Year Intl. Beyond photography, he delved into filmmaking, with his debut documentary, 'My Socialist Home', premiering in London in 2021. In tandem with his artistic endeavours, Adrian completed a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology in 2021, exploring human-animal relationships in Burkina Faso. His personal projects have been exhibited in art galleries and acquired by private collectors, showcasing his ability to capture the intricate facets of the human experience in a powerful and intimate visual language.