

BETWEEN LIVED HISTORY AND NARRATED HISTORY: REPRESENTATIONS OF SPACE, SOCIAL RELATIONS AND MANIFESTATIONS OF LOVE IN TIMES OF WAR

Abstract: This article valorises testimonies about World War II, focusing on identifying the outlooks of two distinct types of informants: married vs. unmarried soldiers. Resorting to mirror or individual testimonies, depending on the subject under consideration, this study approaches: the soldiers' relation to their area of origin during the war, the evolution of inter-human and love relationships in the context of war, and the marital choices that are available to unmarried soldiers after their return from the front. The preference for oral history sources and the interdisciplinary perspective from which the researcher's analysis is conducted represent the specific coordinates of this study, which is projected at the interface between lived history and narrated history.

Keywords: World War II, at-homeness, battlefield, God, marriage.

Directions of research, conceptual benchmarks

This study joins previous attempts to render the experience of war, emphasising aspects pertaining to World War II and valorising the testimonies of two informants, G.N. and G.I., coming from two villages located in the commune of Șinca-Veche from Brașov County: Perșani and, respectively, Șercăița. At the time of his departure to war, the informant G.N. was unmarried and left his widowed mother and his one year and a half younger sister at home, while G.I., who was already married, went to war leaving his wife and new-born daughter at home. The study aims to highlight the particular manner in which the unmarried and, respectively, the married soldier approached war. These mirror testimonies retrieve details concerning the manner in which the two types of soldiers related affectively and effectively to the world back home - their vision of their space of origin - and the manner in which human and family relationships were maintained during wartime. In addition to these, love in time of war - from the point of view of the unmarried soldier - and the consequences of war on the young man's marital options represent perspectives rendering the way in which the war reconfigures social space and human relations.

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History, as an official or pragmatic entity, is joined by oral history, which makes use of the possibilities of memory and testimony. Oral history pays attention to "the individual historical experience caused by History with a capital H,"² valorising lived history and shared (narrated) history. Lived history is the actual experience of an

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² Doru Radosav, "Editorial," in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Orală*, Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Presa Universitară Clujeană, vol. 5, no. 1, 2004, p. 5.

individual, an existential path superimposed upon history, a voyage through history that may be accompanied or not by an actual awareness of its great founding events. Narrated history is the discourse an individual adopts towards certain historical events, relying, in its construction, on the resources of lived history, which are regarded as discursive points of reference.

If memory is a process that involves imprinting, maintaining and refreshing information, then the role it plays is both that of a storage space and of a channel that mediates the exchange between lived history and the concrete practice of testimony. Testimony, in turn, may influence memory, for repeatedly talking about a lived experience can reinforce certain manifestations of memory and obliterate others.

Oral sources represent, however, “a subjective production of documents (through interviews, provoked dialogue, questionnaires, etc.),” serving not only as a pretext for a series of interpretations that the interviewed subject engages in, but also “underlying the discursive innovation that the historian sets forth in deconstructing by-gone reality.”³ It should be noted that individuals who are placed in a position where they recount their own past tend to produce a self-discourse that tallies with their current role in the community and is in line with their present-day values and interests. Participants in World War II take on, above all, the position of grandparents and great-grandparents and their entire discourse undergoes considerable mutations for the sake of preserving a self-image that may be set as an example for the younger generations. As Smaranda Vultur also contends, “we are dealing here with more general mechanisms of memory, which is always selective and undergoes reconstruction based on the ‘social frameworks’ of the present.”⁴ Oral history, however, does not belong only to the interviewee, but also to the interviewer - the oral historian who observes, throughout the interview, adopting the position of an anthropologist⁵ and enhancing each testimony with his own interpretation.

It is this subjectivity of the sources that is specific to oral history, which stands apart in that it is concerned less with the event itself than with the meaning or the sense of that event⁶ - the echo it leaves among those who experienced it.

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Those left at home: the perspective upon the space of origin

If a battlefield also lends itself to metaphorical meanings, as a metaphor-concept that encompasses both its own significance of a “territory on which military action is waged in time of war”⁷ and the figurative sense of a context that determines and

³ Idem, “Istoria orală și etnotextul: afinități subiective,” in *Anuarul de Istorie Orală*, Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Presa Universitară Clujeană, XII, 2010, pp. 5-6.

⁴ Smaranda Vultur (coord.), “Postfață. Memorie și identitate,” in *op. cit.*, p. 334 *apud* Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris: PUF, 1950.

⁵ Luisa Passerini (a cura di), *Storia orale: vita quotidiana e cultura materiale delle classi subalterne*, Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1978, p. XVII.

⁶ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories. Form and Meaning in Oral History*, Albany State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 50.

⁷ Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică „Iorgu Iordan”, *Dicționarul Explicativ al Limbii Române*, second edition, Bucharest: Ed. Univers Enciclopedic, 1998, p. 400.

augments the soldiers' life struggles and inner conflicts, then we can similarly build the semantic sphere of the word "at-homeness." To a soldier's mind, at-homeness becomes an idealised space, constructed in antithesis with the concrete space of the battlefield, a place that is almost immaterial, transferred onto the mental level, a product of the soldiers' memories and aspirations of returning to the familial space. At-homeness acts as a motivator when it overlaps with those left back home - the family - those in relation to whom the struggle for survival acquires meaning. As Caracostea intimates regarding the soldiers' determination during the Battle of Mărășești, in World War I, "the spiritual grounds of resistance and offence" rest on "the feelings of ownership and family as the prime support"⁸ - in other words, feelings derived from the soldiers' representation of the space back home. While the battlefield dehumanises, home is the space in which humanity made sense. In relation to home, man is crowned with a story, with a past, the individual acquires a shape and a personality - that is, an individuality;⁹ by contrast, the war intensifies the "collective spirit," the uniform representing "an important means not only of recognition, but also of internal standardisation"¹⁰ - an attempt to create a common mentality around the battlefield. On the frontline, a soldier's status is assigned from a numerical perspective, as he is part of a military unit's total manpower, or from a technical standpoint, it is a space where his strength and ability to execute tasks are valorised; *at home*, however, he is valued for his human side and the role he plays in the family.

Another nuance that is necessary at this stage of the analysis is that, as viewed by a war participant, the World is divided into two main zones: the area of the battlefield and that of the outside world. There is, however, another, primordial distinction with which traditional man operates: that between the world of the living and the world of the dead, a classifying tendency that is particularly noticeable on the front, where one is "subject to death at any moment."¹¹ This need to divide the realities with which humans operate is specific to traditional cultures, in which man is less attached to the idea of homogeneity, as for him "the primary representation of reality requires an awareness that there exist an inside and an outside, the latter both opposing and representing an extension of the former."¹²

Ernest Bernea proposes the following representation of space: space seen as a place (the concrete, surrounding space) and space regarded as a horizon (an expression that can have both a geographical and a symbolical meaning) or as the world (the space

⁸ Dumitru Caracostea, *Aspectul psihologic al rasboiului*, Bucharest: Ed. Cartea Românească, 1922, p. 110.

⁹ See Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția, *Gospodăria în credințele și riturile magice ale femeilor din Drăguș (Făgăraș)*, third edition, Bucharest: Ed. Paideia, 2002, pp. 44-45: "we consider that an analysis of the structure of the family group as an expression of the spiritual function (component) of the household cannot be devoid of interest. In this group of restricted social life, each member has not only his or her own ancient work purpose, but also his or her own deep and, perhaps, just as ancient spiritual life purpose."

¹⁰ Dumitru Caracostea, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-227.

¹¹ Informant: G.N., Perșani village, the commune of Șinca-Veche, Brașov County. See Iulia Stanciu, "Al Doilea Război Mondial - între memoria afectivă și cercetarea etnologică," in Alina Branda, Ion Cuceu, Cosmina Timoce (ed.), *Teme actuale în cercetarea etnologică și antropologică*, Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Fundației pentru Studii Europene, 2011, p. 81.

¹² Adrian Crupa, *Identitate și alteritate în cultura tradițională. Realitatea tradițională*, Iași: Ed. Tehnopress, 2011, p. 185.

in its largest acceptance).¹³ Based on this interpretation, we may infer that going to war is likely to overturn a soldier's horizon; moreover, the battlefield becomes the concrete space of reference, the place, while what used to be the place takes on the shape of the world.

At the same time, a soldier tends to correlate spatial reality with an inner reality, which he experiences within himself. Thus, while the battlefield is a determined (by conflict), artificially created, forcibly constructed reality, the world outside the front is personal reality in a state of stagnation, a reality he abandoned when he departed from the village and subsequently transferred into his mind. For every soldier, the outer reality of the front is different, it is constructed differently. It starts from the exact layout of the house (household) from the space of origin, but is built under the aegis of the imagination, as long as the soldier, who is now away, no longer has concrete references about the situation back home. It is essential to understand the unbreakable bond that the soldier maintains with the space of origin, which is equally a representation of the image that the individual has created about himself. Beyond the material coordinates of the household, it also retains "a clearly spiritual aspect, whose support is the family group as an expression of human life and spiritual activity."¹⁴ The emotional connection with the home space is very strong for a soldier who goes to war, especially since the distance leads him to retrieve only the positive valences of the place of origin, rendering it as a compensatory space in relation to the brutalising space of the battlefield. However, there are also moments where the two levels intersect, and the real poses a threat to what the imaginary might wish to preserve unaltered:

"We were in Hungary and, at night, these guys ripp'd off the Hungarian women, 'cause they were asleep, poor, wretched things, and one of 'em notic'd the bacon and nabb'd the bacon. Now, what was the deal? Who was in this? The group commander and two, three others, if ya know what I mean? For, to tell ya the truth, I wouldn't have done this for what's in the world, ya know? And they grabb'd the bacon from a Hungarian house, ya know, we used to make bacon like they made it, 'cause if we were ahead of the Wallachians and the Oltenians, 'twas because of the Hungarians or the Austro-Hungarians, 'cause they were more advanc'd than we were. And as I came out from a narrow alley, that was in Hungary, I ran across one of us, a Romanian, and he says: "Jes', run G., 'cause they're catchin' up with you!" There were two women, 'twas, for example, either a daughter- and a mother-in-law, or a daughter and her mother, or... well, ya could see there was a gap of one generation, ya know? And I felt so bad 'bout it that... Why? Why will you point a gun to a woman who's never seen a weapon before?! And I say to him: 'Listen, here, if this girl was ya sister and this woman was ya mother, what would ya do? Seein' someone goin' after them with a rifle, would ya stomach that, huh? Well, aren't ya asham'd of ya'self? They may have no bite left for tomorrow! And where could they find grub to give ya some too! Ya, for better or worse, have three meals a day!, 'cause ya should know that we had good food. He lower'd his eyes and left."¹⁵

¹³ Ernest Bernea, *Spațiu, timp și cauzalitate la poporul român*, second revised edition, Bucharest: Ed. Humanitas, 2005, pp. 101-103.

¹⁴ Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁵ Informant: G.N., Perșani village, the commune of Șinca-Veche, Brașov County.

The image of women against whom acts of violence are perpetrated is revealing for our informant, forcing him to acknowledge the vulnerability of the women in his family, who were left home alone. The unmarried soldier's imaginary tends to recuperate the stances of his mother and sister, while the married informant tends to be sensitised by the presence of young children:

“We us'd to barge into houses to see if we could find somethin', we would go into houses like this... And where we could see women with children, we would ask for food. Those who had gave us some, those who didn't, wouldn't... If the wench had nothin' and started to cry, sayin' 'I got nothin'' and 'kids' in Russian, we would leave and let her be... I really didn't fancy just takin' stuff, ya know! If she gave me some, I took it, said thanks, but wouldn't grab it by force, no sirree...”¹⁶

These possible representations of women in wartime lead the soldiers to become aware of the social threats endangering the women they left home alone. It's a game of imaginary substitution, which increases their sensitiveness, but we are also dealing with certain norms, expressions of popular wisdom, which are deeply entrenched in our traditional collective mentality. Expressions like “one good turn deserves another,” “no good deed goes unpunished” or “he who steals will get his deserts” are products of folk wisdom, which has an important role in regulating behaviour. These moral norms may have influenced the behaviour of the interviewed soldiers.

Based on a religious perspective, the traditional vocabulary also retains proverbs such as “God cometh with leaden feet, but striketh with iron hands,”¹⁷ “Whom God will destroy, He first makes mad,”¹⁸ “God stays long, but strikes at last,”¹⁹ “God's mill grinds slow but sure,”²⁰ all of these being complementary to the idea that everyone will get what they deserve. These latter expressions may be seen as vulgarised interpretations of rudimentary religious knowledge and reinforce the assumption that the Christian undertones of Romanian traditional culture are derived from dogmatic Christianity, in the sense of following the spirit rather than the letter of the Law.²¹ The reinterpretation of the Christian teaching, with the aim of developing rules that may also function as social, secular guidelines and regulate the conduct of traditional man can go sometimes so far as to overthrow religious paradigms, leading to even more explicit expressions than the above, such as: “If you do wrong, be afraid of God”²² or “God's debt remains outstanding to no one.”²³ This image of a punishing God is a misrepresentation of the Christian teaching, set amid the tendencies of the peasants' mentality to change, refine or distort traditional religious motifs according to the laws of collective psychology,

¹⁶ Informant: G.I., Șercăița village, the commune of Șinca-Veche, Brașov County.

¹⁷ I.A. Candrea, *Dicționar de proverbe și zicători*, second edition, Târgoviște: Ed. Bibliotheca, 2002, p. 72, item 1182.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 25, item 1002.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 24, item 989.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 52, item 2578.

²¹ Adrian Crupa, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

²² I.A. Candrea, *op. cit.*, p. 71, item 3686.

²³ I.A. Candrea, *op. cit.*, p. 72, item 3704.

integrating these data within their mental horizon and quotidian life,²⁴ according to their possibilities of comprehension.

From the perspective of the situations described above by the two informants, we incline to believe that the emotional impact produced by correlating the images of the foreign women with those of their own mothers, wives or daughters left back home has sensitised the actants, causing their self-censorship. What is created thus is, in Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția's terms, "adherence to superstition"²⁵: in an attempt to avoid a similar fate befalling the women back home, the soldiers repress their own impulses. This is verified by the fact that even the proverbs that seem to be tributary to a religious sentiment ("If you do wrong, be afraid of God" or "God's debt remains outstanding to no one") are essentially forecasts concerning a potential fatality, which demands that individuals should remain compliant with this entire system of superstitious beliefs.

An easily foreseeable dilemma crops up here: could attachment to a divine force and the regulation of behaviour in keeping with the norms of religious morality also be meanings that are subsequently added to certain actions? In the act of evoking, the informant re-lives his own self from the perspective of the man he is at present and of his current outlook on life, and it is not always the case that his perspective from the past was sifted through a religious conscience.²⁶ Still, there are many authors who have deemed that man has a privileged relationship with God in time of war. For instance, as regards the psychological aspects entailed by World War I, Dumitru Caracostea showed that the disquietude of one who was in the immediate proximity of death would instinctively lead the one who was overwhelmed with fear toward God.²⁷ Caracostea nuanced his interpretation, launching the idea that the war and its convulsions actualised certain spiritual needs that could emerge as critical determinants of the religious experience.²⁸

Ernest Bernea also proposed the following grid for understanding popular religiosity: since religion had a dominant function in the life of Romanian villages, it had the role of organising village life, social unity and, above all, spiritual order, in all its forms and meanings.²⁹ According to the Romanian peasants, the portrait of God was structured around the idea that "God is always the meaning of that which is

²⁴ Toader Nicoară, "Repere ale unei istorii a sentimentului religios," in Sorin Mitu, Florin Gogâltan, *Viață privată, mentalități colective și imaginar social în Transilvania*, Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1996, p. 171.

²⁵ Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

²⁶ See Florentina Scârnci, Ștefan Ungureanu, *op. cit.*, p. 24: "Different from exterior, conventional, uniform and static time, our interviewees have their own time, an inner, subjective time, measurable in emotions, experiences, without a concrete duration. (...) Memory plays a leading role in determining this time. It is a psychological, qualitative, colourful time, placed under the sign of a human consciousness, which can really be stopped with the power of the mind. Time appears thus as a result of the interviewees' spiritual development. It is also a circular time, in which all things have their own time (even if the subjects state this *a posteriori*, as a possible justification for the manner in which the events occurred), thus giving time a regulatory sense too."

²⁷ Dumitru Caracostea, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 244.

²⁹ Ernest Bernea, *Civilizația română sătească*, Bucharest: Ed. Vreamea, 2006, p. 65.

unchangeable and that which is changeable, it is the cause of all things.”³⁰ We may assume that the Romanian soldiers who went to war were likely to take with them this manner of relating to God from their place of origin, and that during wartime this outlook could be intensified, magnified or enhanced.

This is the opinion upheld by the historian Doru Radosav, in his book entitled *Sentimentul religios la români* [*Religious Sentiment among the Romanians*], according to whom: “the death event causes a ‘deeply religious reflex,’ which ultimately fuels Christian sensibility”³¹.

Whereas the soldiers mentally reconstruct the outside world based on their memories and amid confrontations with situations of the type described above, those left back home are considerably deprived of imagination sources, the limited possibilities of maintaining a correspondence with their sons or husbands who left for war thwarting almost any attempt to get in touch with their world:

“We were conscripted on 1 March, they took us to Făgăraș, but we only stayed there a month, after that they shipp’d us to the Mountain Huntsmen and took us there, in Moldova, between Suceava and Rădăuți. I was with a guy from ‘round here, P. T. I., that one, he died, he was two years older than me, yes, he was very scrawny and they’d only just then conscripted him... ‘cause I was at, I was with the antitank guns and he was on the same cannon as I was, and the platoon commander remov’d him from position ‘cause he had an appendectomy and then he came back to the country and I was left alone. He died here, at Hoghiz. They knew nothin’ ‘bout me, if I was still alive, for three years or so. I wrote a letter from captivity, I wrote two, but I know one got home. A letter could take 5-6 months to get there. ‘Cause I wrote a letter just before we were set free from the camp, there, with... not a month before, and I sent it and then I came home in the fall and the letter came, it came only in the spring. But I’d been at home since the fall.”³²

This perspective upon the symbolic space of at-homeness, which becomes, once again, a concrete space, and upon this letter that traverses, somewhat anachronistically, reality sheds light upon the manner in which the war marks, even retroactively, the families of those who left for the front.

Even military cadences or jody calls, products of the village world, attest to the meagre knowledge that those who are left back home have about the situation on the front. In the descriptions embedded in these songs, the focus tends to be on the space of origin, in a time of war; references to war highlight the impact this has on village life, in general, and on the young people who were forced to leave, in particular. These songs express pain and allude to the death of those who departed, being accompanied to the “station, a place that had become synonymous with the point of crossing over to the

³⁰ Ernest Bernea, *Timpul la țaranul român: contribuție la problemele timpului în religie și magie*, Bucharest: Ed. “Bucovina” I.E. Torouțiu, 1940, p. 23.

³¹ Doru Radosav, *Sentimentul religios la români. O perspectivă istorică (sec. XVII-XX)*, Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Dacia, 1997, p. 155 *apud* J. Toussaert, *Le sentiment religieux en Flandre à la Fin du Moyen Âge*, Paris, 1963, p. 205.

³² Informant: G.I., Șercăița village, the commune of Șinca-Veche, Brașov County.

other world.”³³ But these songs accompany, to an equal extent, the women’s rite of passage into the other world, into the other social space that is recreated immediately after the men leave for war. On the other hand, there is a question of a transfer of the men from one world into another, from the world of the living into the world of possible dead, confirmed by the traditional sensitivity through the performance of these military chants, grafted upon the scheme of funeral laments: “And I have today, and I have tomorrow, / And I’ll leave you, village, no matter the sorrow. / And the enemies rejoice will, thorough / and the enemies rejoice will, thorough. / Only I will grieve the knowledge / That I have to leave my village. / Come, my lassie, to the station / See the train take us in some direction. / Carry us from station to station, / Away from our country, into action. / Wail for me, mother, with longing / For I’ve been your worthy offspring. / And took the bull by the horn / and ploughed all your field with corn. / And when all the field I’d ploughed, / The Germans took me anyhow. / And do turn, lassie, into clouds of stars / Above my barracks, seen from quite afar / And do talk to the colonel / Lest he should beat the boy infernal. / Lest he should put the boy on guard, / For he’s so youngish and sleeps quite hard.”³⁴

In funeral rituals, dirges are a form of communication between the living and the dead, just like jody calls are a form of communication between those who stay at home and those who go to war - an expression of pain. It is interesting that through the theme they propose, these ritual markings work simultaneously as disjunctive and conjunctive elements, emphasising, on the one hand, the rift that emerges between the two worlds, but creating, on the other hand, a link between them.

Ultimately, like funeral dirges, jody calls represent a ritualistic obligation, as Gail Kligman contends, communication between the living and the dead becoming possible through these “mediated forms,” which include wailing, almsgiving, dreaming. These interactions mark the hierarchical relations between the living and the dead, in which the former have to fulfil certain obligations towards the departed.³⁵ In the traditional space, as Gail Kligman has shown, it is deemed that “not mourning the dead is a sin,” every person buried without being mourned amounting to a gesture of “a defiance towards God.”³⁶

Another similarity with the wailing of funeral rituals may be detected at the level of the thematic elements: the mother’s weeping or wailing (“Wail for me, mother, with

³³ Eugenia Bârlea, *Perspectiva lumii rurale asupra primului război mondial*, Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, p. 173.

³⁴ Informant: T.I., Șinca-Nouă village, the commune of Șinca-Nouă, Brașov County. We may find different versions of this soldiers’ chant in the collection coordinated by the Directorate for Social Services and Military Traditions, the Folklore Archive Institute of the Romanian Academy, the Department of Military History and the Military Circle of Cluj-Napoca, *Cântecul de cătănie. Repertoriu și marginalii la primele două ediții ale Festivalului Național al Cântecului Popular de Cătănie (1994-1995)*, Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Dacia, 1997, p. 49; See, for instance: “Wail for me, mother, with longing / For I have been your worthy offspring / Handsome, mother, you did make me / But no avail would come or glee / Though you were fond, mother, of me / For I was sworn to fight under the Germans, see” (Băița, Bihor).

³⁵ Gail Kligman, *Nunta mortului. Ritual, poetică și cultură populară în Transilvania*, second edition, Iași: Ed. Polirom, 2005, p. 110.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 110. See Teodor T. Burada, *Datinile poporului român la înmormântări*, Bucharest: Ed. Saeculum I.O., 2006, p. 131.

longing”), accompanying the dead on the last road (“Come, my lassie, to the station / See the train take us in some direction”), cosmic space - as the space of connection, both between the living and the dead, and between those situated at great distances from one another but united by the celestial horizon - (“And do turn, lassie, into clouds of stars / Above my barracks, seen from quite afar”), the meditation on life, articulated by the virtue of worthiness (“For I’ve been your worthy offspring”), etc.

If we related to the scheme proposed by Philippe Ariés, we might say that the traditional society feels the need to tame wild - brutalising, fearful, unjust - death, which it correlates with the concept of war and which men are faced with from the moment they leave the village, composing, therefore, jody chants as a sort of funeral dirge *avant la lettre*, designed to appease both the suffering of those left behind and the fears of those who go away. A jody chant is, thus, a text with a twofold referentiality, which involves a traditional solemnity, specific to the peasantry who take care to mark every great passage, every voyage to another space through such a versified talisman (this is also the case of wedding chants or funeral lyrics).

If, typically, the “terror of death is overcome by the ensemble of gestures and beliefs focusing on the eternity of the soul and the afterlife, which is reiterated by the priest and the wailers on the occasion of every death,”³⁷ a possible death on the front, away from the possibilities of those left back home to intervene, can only be tamed in advance, making use of the imaginative resources of the space of origin, the sole space that the people back home can master and represent to themselves. What should also not be overlooked is the fact that for the one who has left for war, the possibility of performing a jody chant - with specific reference to the place of origin - is an extremely beneficent gesture of release and liberation. Jody chants are thus reinforced and replenished every time they are performed by soldiers going to war, which keeps them connected to the world of home and strengthens their imaginative resources.

In contrast to the moment of departure to war, the episode of returning from the front, seen as a route at the end of which the symbolic space re-acquires concrete meaning, is an episode dedicated entirely to those left behind. The soldier dedicates himself to concrete reality again, an effort that involves an exercise of social, family reintegration, of psychological and emotional recovery. The return back home comprises at least four distinct phases: the triggering element - news of the end of the war, the return journey to the homeland (the place of origin), re-entry into the community of origin (the reception that the returning soldier gets from the villagers, whom he encounters on the village border - reconfirmation received from the community) and family reintegration (most of the time, this coincides with an emotional moment, like getting reunited with a loved one). In the narrative of the next informant, all four stages are identifiable:³⁸

1) “He came, t’was in the evenin’, the camp commander, who was Romanian, was a very smart man.... And he’d chat with us in the evenin’, like this: ‘Listen, he says, I’d tell you something, but I’m not going to, ‘cause you won’t keep ya mouths shut!’.

³⁷ Bârlea, Eugenia, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

³⁸ We have chosen to present this testimony excerpt by excerpt in order to highlight more clearly the four specified stages.

‘Sir, we... do tell, for we won’t let anyone know!’ He says: “Ya oughtta know that we’ll soon be going home!’ We were dumbfounded... And so it happened that in the morning the order came: Everyone in the shower, we took a shower, they chang’d all our gear and the other mornin’ they took us out and the Russians came with the table and roll-called us: such-and-such, gave us a certificate... And there was 2,000 of us, took a while until they call’d all our names, linin’ us there, givin’ us food for a day and some money too, some money... And then they made us walk in a line and took us to the train station, took us to the train station...”

²⁾ “And there also came [people] from Sevastopole and they brought us into the country, down to Focșani. It was a large camp and that’s where they took us. They kept us there overnight, ‘cause they said they’d keep us in quarantine, but they didn’t. In the mornin’ the Romanian officers came and took us out into the yard and to the station and from there everyone made a run for wherever. I came to Ploiești and from Ploiești here, towards Brașov, just that I was on my own, there was no other from around here. And there was 2,000 of us who came and I was the only one. I arrived in Brașov at dusk and spent the night there ‘cause my train was only leavin’ in the mornin’. In Brașov I went to the cafeteria there, to that cook, I asked for a portion of food ‘cause I had the money, I gave it to her... And she saw me dress’d like that, I was wearin’ a German overcoat, with like clothes. ‘Where ya comin’ from?’ I say ‘See, I was a prisoner in Russia.’ Then she let me have another servin’ of food.”

³⁾ “And then in the mornin’ I took the train, came up to Pierșani, when I got off at Pierșani, there were about five men who’d come from Bucharest. I then I came to Șinca - at Șinca, there, at the end of Șinca, there was a tavern, and there was one who was my neighbour here! ‘Com’ on,’ he says, ‘let’s have a brandy!’ So, I went with him, if he took me! There were another four of ‘em, but they wouldn’t stay. I stayed there with that guy, had a brandy and then headed home. I know that here, at the village end, it was autumn time, 23 November, there were several people with cattle over there and we chatted for a while.”

⁴⁾ “I came home, in the village, and when I got home, my wife was comin’ from the valley. She’d been at my mom’s, doing the laundry. And when she saw me, there was S., my daughter, and M., I’s girl, they were friends. I went there, talk’d to them: ‘Which one is she?’ I couldn’t tell which one it was, ‘cause when I left she was little... ‘This is she!’ In the end, I recognis’d her! I stay’d there a bit and I came home. She was seven... I was 26 then, I’d got married when I was 19...”

While the married soldier may experience this reunion at a very deep emotional level, for the unmarried soldier, returning home is not necessarily laden with so much significance:

“Yea, well, she wasn’t expectin’ me. But there was great joy. Ya can imagine compared to the poor ones who’d died. Death was around the corner at all times.”³⁹

While the previous informant described his return to the village from an intrinsic perspective, presenting the sensations of one who had to rediscover, step by step, the world of home, this latter informant describes, in particular, the others’ reactions to his

³⁹ Informant: G.N., Perșani village, the commune of Șinca-Veche, Brașov County. See Iulia Stanciu, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

return - the world of home rediscovers him, but here the changes imposed by the war have become the norm, and it is a world that is in equal measure sceptical and dismayed. The two elements neutralise each other: “she wasn’t expectin’ me,” but “there was great joy,” describing the precarious spiritual condition and the low enthusiasm of the mother and the sister he’d left back home: they prefer somehow no longer to fuel their expectations about G.’s return and consider his absence as a natural given. Still, on the other hand, we indirectly understand that the difficulty of keeping the household, the daily concerns and the many roles assumed, including that of the dead husband and of the son who went to war, do not allow G.’s mother to express her suffering destructively, but lead her to channel it into work:

“Well, now, we had plenty of work back home. Poor mother, God forgive her, what a good mother I had! I mean, good... others might have said she was bad! Do you get it? But she was a hard-workin’ woman, worthy, worthy...”

From the same cycle of the others’ reactions to a soldier’s return home, we understand that interacting with the people in the village is somewhat conditioned by the relationships that existed before his leaving for war. After coming back home, the same attitudes tend to be resumed, for his departure may not be sufficient reason for cancelling out certain differences:

“These are things that, that some look happy to see ya, and there are others who are sorry to see you. And they say ‘why didn’t he stay there, damn him?!’ Yea, really. Such is the world. Such is the world.”

We noticed above that although the concrete manifestations at the level of the battlefield appeared hard to be grasped by those at home, the war - as a general context - is perceptible. War produces radical changes in the existence of the families of those departed, in terms of their roles and the pace of their work:⁴⁰ women assume many of the household duties normally reserved to men, as well as their social responsibilities. War dismantles a given reality and reorganises the social space, and women, who are traditionally projected as symbols of the interior and internalised space of the house, have to go out into the exterior space, that of the farm stead or the field - which, traditionally, belong to men.⁴¹ At the same time, war determines them to reconsider their relationship with those who are away, their longing and suffering being replaced by an

⁴⁰ Eugenia Birlea, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

⁴¹ See Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția, *op. cit.*, p. 45: “In today’s social life of a village-based family group there is a certain division of labour which should be regarded, perhaps more so than anything else, as the true foundation underlying this division of spiritual purposes. In the economic life of the household, it is the woman who has the most difficult role, of course. Although she works in the field next to and almost equally hard as the man, her work does not end here. It is primarily she who has to do the other labour, inside the house: preparing the food, washing, sewing, weaving, tending to the poultry and the animals in the yard, etc. Almost the entire household is in her hands. The work that is indeed specific to a woman is that inside the household, that which is called domestic activity. This makes the woman more closely related to the whole household, as an organic unity, and to its central hub, the home, than the man, whose key concern is for the field, a reality that is somewhat exterior to the home, even though it is an essential element for the material life unit of the household. This particular way of differently centring life, with the man more likely to stay in the field - hence, outside - and the woman more likely to remain at home - hence, inside - as the result of an elementary division of labour, has also directed their spiritual life in distinct manner.”

almost ostentatiously displayed immunity, as a response to the need of these women, who were left alone, to support themselves.

Social relationships - love affairs: before and after the war

Immediately after returning home, the young men are usually faced with the problem of resuming their social roles. It is natural that the priority of the unmarried soldier should be re-assuming the role of an eligible young man. Closely related to the issue of marriage is the problem of the group of friends with whom he identifies on account of their similar expectations. The unmarried soldier's circle of friends undergoes changes during the war, and on his return, he is forced to rethink his social strategies. He may be confronted with the changes that the world back home has suffered (the disappearance of the former bonds of friendship and, sometimes, of former marital options) and have difficulty reintegrating himself in the specific traditional world, where solutions to problems may also be sought in the sphere of magic - unlike on the front, where such solutions were always practical, concrete. Thus, a soldier returning to the village may adopt an objective perspective upon things and become a keen observer of village life:

"I had two friends in the village. One was two years older than me and the other one year my senior. I was the youngest of them. I was also of a shorter build than 'em, yea, shorter and... And now, one of 'em, poor guy, died on the front... And... one of 'em stayed here, got married, he was married. And now, well, I would go out on the street in the village at dusk and I was all alone, I had no one and I made friends with that S. He's three years younger than me and I made friends with him. He was 'bout to go in the army and he would by all means get married and have his wife stay at home with his parents till he serv'd in the army. The parents wouldn't agree. They weren't against his marryin' A., but they were against it 'cause they knew they wouldn't be able to live with her until he came back. Well, there was a fair in Șercaia, it was in the autumn, like now, 'cause it's just two weeks since the Șercaia fair. There was a fair in Șercaia and his father went with some oxen, or I don't know what, he went to the fair and the mother went too. So, he and I, we got into a car and drove there. His mother and father went on foot, with the cattle. And he says to me: 'Hey, let's go see the Saxon woman! Let's go see the Saxon woman... let's see what the Saxon woman has to say!' Okay, we're goin' to the Saxon woman! No, when his turn came... "My boy, go and do your military service! And forget about getting' married! For look, you may get married now, and when you come from the army, you'll have to divorce her, take another one, and have kids with her! With the second one.' I asked the questions that had to be asked, he was not able to... he was shatter'd! I asked her that... if she would stay..., I mean if he didn't marry her now and married her after comin' back from the army, what did she think about it. That 'This is it!', she says, 'They can live together! But he shouldn't marry her before the army.' Now, do ya get it? And we went to the fair with his mother and father. He said so to me, he says, 'G., ya mustn't tell anyone anythin', but I'm gonna marry her even if I were to spend only two weeks with her.' 'Gee, why should I say anythin'? What's in it for me if I tell about this stuff?' Well... 'Ya shouldn't have to worry about me... 'cause I won't, I'm not doin' anythin' silly like that.' That's what I've always been in my life, I didn't like it, I didn't like foul things: lyin', stealin'... not those! I lov'd

bein' a fair man! And God has help'd me in this! No, what the Saxon woman said, that came true! Oh, he serv'd in the military and when he came back... can't help it, ya know, some people are wicked, ya see? There was one who, well, he put on airs that his father own'd a pub and what not, and he put on airs and boasted, well, in the village, he talk'd to the people in the village, ya know, sayin' that he did this, he did that, he..."⁴²

An objective, impartial observer of village life ("Gee, why should I say anythin'? What's in it for me if I tell about this stuff?"), "Ya shouldn't have to worry about me... 'cause I won't, I'm not doin' anythin' silly like that," "can't help it, ya know, some people are wicked, ya see?"), the soldier adopts a behaviour that is based on the same principles he referred to when he evoked his situation during the war: "That's what I've always been in my life, I didn't like it, I didn't like foul things: lyin', stealin'... not those! I lov'd bein' a fair man! And God has help'd me in this!" This self-characterisation resumes leit-motifs used in describing his status on the battlefield:

"In war it's exactly like durin' conscription. So if you're zappy, you're doin' honourably; I told the sub-lieutenant I'd done the job and he said, 'Well done, Nicălu! Good for you!'; Lord, thank you, Lord, thank you, 'cause God helped me, yes, but I also did my best to do well. I did my very best... from all points of view."⁴³

The testimony preceding the last is enlightening for the manner in which traditional society functioned, allowing magical rites and religious beliefs to coexist in a close, complementary relationship. Hence, the assumption of a double role, which our informant is aware of: on the one hand, he is the agent of superstitious practices and stays attune to ominous signs and, on the other, he is a man who seeks and appreciates God's help in his life.

Noting the religious manifestations of the villagers from Drăguș, Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția points out the same tendency of people to merge the religious and the magical and emphasises that they experience religion "as a custom and not as a rigid and abstract dogma."⁴⁴

Ernest Bernea also provides references to the mysticity that is inherent in the Romanian peasants' general mentality, which he describes as "cohesive and organic" but defined by its "mystical character," since, indeed, the magical and religious activity "reigns supreme in the innermost recesses of the Romanian peasant's soul, colouring, therefore, all his other activities."⁴⁵ Bernea also contends that "religion and magic appear and function together in the village life because they have the same nature: a mystical nature."⁴⁶

"That's what I've always been in my life, I didn't like it, I didn't like foul things: lyin', stealin'... not those! I lov'd bein' a fair man! And God has help'd me in this!" - this is a reiterative statement of a personal moral, as long as this informant, as we shall see, negotiates even the choice of his wife in the same terms, emphasising the

⁴² Informant: G.N., Peșani village, the commune of Șinca-Veche, Brașov County.

⁴³ Informant: G.N., Peșani village, the commune of Șinca-Veche, Brașov County. See Iulia Stanciu, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

⁴⁴ Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁴⁵ Ernest Bernea, *Timpul...*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ Ernest Bernea, *Civilizația...*, p. 66.

importance of humaneness, determination and character - a set of positive qualities. At the same time, reiterating these values at various stages of the interview can function as a summary statement of the informant's existential journey. There is this typical recipe, of a man who is attached to the traditional environment, structured on a series of desirable qualities, as Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția also notices in her study dedicated to the villagers from Drăguș; according to this recipe, "diligence, skill and knowledge are required for success in life," these aspects being derived from traditional moral or wisdom. On the other hand, traditional wisdom retains the sense that "man does not depend solely on himself, but on the unseen forces of nature, which must be won in his favour through the very ancient customs the ancestors also complied with"; these invisible powers add an "extra quality to diligence, skill and human knowledge"⁴⁷ - an aspect that highlights traditional man's propensity towards the magical universe. Yet there is a perpetual syncretism between the magical and the religious elements, a syncretism created by the peasant himself and leading him towards "adherence to superstition,"⁴⁸ as we have previously shown.

The episode in which the two young eligible men go to the Saxon woman - who could cast lots with beans - in order to receive confirmation or refutation of the marital directions they wanted to embark on is also part of an attempt to "adhere to superstition." The two prove to trust the Saxon woman's possibilities of foretelling the future, but their subsequent behaviour differs. While S. rebels against fate, disobeying his parents and disregarding the augury received from the fortune-teller, our informant corroborates the information received from the Saxon woman and his mother's opinion, passing them through the filter of his own conscience, which renders his personal moral, derived from folk wisdom and personal experience, as the ultimate and most important decision factor:

"I was talkin' to M., the wife, and there was also a wife who'd been married and liv'd with her husband for only three months. But the people didn't blame her for this. They blam'd him. And she comes to me, and says: 'Look, it shows up here, here's a girl and a wife!' Listen to that, and a wife! How could she have known T. of I.? But I say to her: 'But as it's shown there, with whom could set up better house? The girl or the wife? Ya see? I say to her. And she says: 'With either, 'cause they both look like decent girls.' Now, let me tell you honestly that my mother insisted much on... That T. of I. had a lot of land... She had a whole lot of land and well, she tended, tended to more wealth, ya know? I, well, she told me that and I told my mother, ya know: 'Mom, here's the deal: as long as I am alive, I can make a fortune, but a fortune can't make a man!' If I want to... and eventually, I did!"

It is actually possible that the experience of war outlined, in the mind of the soldier, this deep understanding of his mission in the world, of his existential purpose. We may detect, thus, a reorganisation of the value system of the young man, freshly returned from the front, and, even more, the development of a much stronger sense of self: he knows now not just his aspirations but also his limits ("I can make a fortune").

⁴⁷ Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

Equally interesting is the perspective that this informant provides as regards the circumstantial possibilities of the unmarried soldier to indulge in certain love affairs during wartime. From his point of view, love during war is, rather, an exercise in repression, as the young men demonstrate a programmatic rejection of stories they cannot ensure continuity:

“When I got out of the army in Budapest, we got off for I don’t know how long and I found her... I don’t know if she was Hungarian, but she spoke perfect Romanian. She kept insistin’ that I go with her. (...) And well, I didn’t want to go. I kept thinkin’ about it, it was like a comfort to me: “Ya know, I walk’d among bullets and cartridges for two years and God gave me health, there’s no point in getting involv’d with anyone, ‘cause I don’t know who she is.’ I thank’d her and said I didn’t have time, ‘cause the train was about to leave. And I turn’d her down.”⁴⁹

The same informant remembers another date, another possible love story, cut short by the same principles:

“I was on the front line and what did we do? The five of us set off with some cans, some rectangular pots, and we went to get some milk. Of course, we tried to do this about the unit, lest we should do something stupid. And there was a girl with some sheep, so beautiful, God bless her. She came with us and these guys went: ‘Hey, this one will stick to ya, ya’ll have to take her to Romania!’ (...) We talk’d by signs mostly. And like I said before, I never thought about things like that, gettin’ involved with anyone.”

These testimonies illustrate the difficulties inherent in the amorous choices these young men had to make and the dysfunctionality war had brought about in the sphere of their matrimonial options. Besides the examples presented above, indebted to morality, there will have been many other, clearly immoral situations. However, our attention should be focused on the elements that, even in such cases, determined self-control and self-censorship. God, one’s mother and sister remain the three primordial representations the soldier’s consciousness clings to, but there are also cultural or linguistic barriers that crop up in the context of love and/or marital options, which, at that time, were insuperable. On the other hand, these relations arising during times of war, in spaces that are foreign to the soldiers, are impossible to be continued on the level of reality, as long as the soldiers’ state of mind is extremely vulnerable and their psychological well-being is profoundly affected. Preferring to return home to the detriment of romance is, ultimately, the sign of maturing and developing a sense of responsibility to the world back home.

Conclusions

Our undertaking was intended as an exercise of bringing together several testimonials that would function as a bridge between the past and the present, in order to observe and valorise both the manner in which the traditional mind-set worked in the context of World War II and the perspective from which people describe and perceive themselves at present, as a result of the experiences that have defined them.

⁴⁹ Informant: G.N., Perșani village, the commune of Șinca-Veche, Brașov County. See Iulia Stanciu, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

Those presented above reveal a propensity towards making use of the vast possibilities of oral history in shaping a concurrently historical, cultural and identitarian discourse.

This study, which privileges oral sources, with interpretations veering towards the field of anthropology, proposes, therefore, an interdisciplinary perspective on a reality that straddles the boundary between pragmatic history and lived histories. Starting from the considerations of Luisa Passerini, according to whom oral history has the merit of confirming that there is no historical production outside the action of concrete individuals,⁵⁰ the present study outlines a framework for the manifestation of personal, internalised perspectives, which, at the same time, create history.

⁵⁰ Luisa Passerini, *Storia e soggettività: le fonti orali, la memoria*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1988, p. 58.