MARTOR

Title: "Theories and methods of studying everyday life. Everyday life during communism"

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How to cite this article: Mateoniu, Maria and Mihai Gheorghiu. 2012. "Theories and methods of studying everyday life. Everyday life during communism". *Martor* 17: 7-18.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

Theories and methods of studying everyday life. Everyday life during communism

Maria Mateoniu, Mihai Gheorghiu

Communist everyday life is paradoxical and miraculous in the extreme. Communist everyday life is constantly in a state of unsolvable tension that nonetheless always finds a solution, an incontestable impossibility of survival that always, inevitably, ends in survival, continuity, the vital gesture of resistance as a human being confronted with mechanisms of dissolution, of terror or carceral discipline, of a society that aims to transform the human being into a biological mechanism, a soldier fighting for the cause of the apocalyptic victory of the communist-proletarian economy and justice.

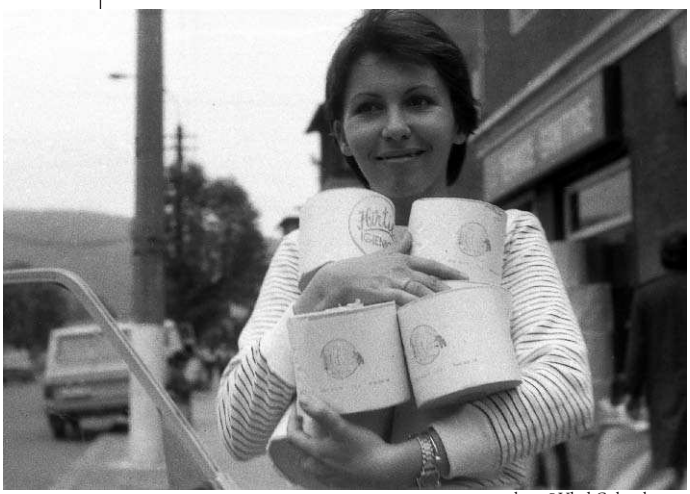
Communist everyday life is the space-time continuum of an eternal counterfeiting of all authentic existence, of all moral, ethical authenticity. However, not in the least paradoxically, communist everyday life is the error that becomes truth, the counterfeit that is authenticated, the compromise that succeeds. The gesture of everyday existence, everyday survival, everyday deceit, everyday heroism – all combine in the indescribable reality of a doomed society. Day by day, each person's existence impels towards survival, the fight for survival, for freedom, for the abolition of fear and social and political terror; day by day, it impels towards humanity, normality, decency.

Among the ruins of the system, among its pillars of glory, among its forced labour camps, man, people beat a path, a path of their own, of resistance, of lies, dissimulation or heroism. In his "struggle" with the system, with the others, who hold and exercise power, man in turn exercises his own imprescriptible power: the power to resist, not to become an innocent victim of the devouring mechanism of the political world. Even those who allow themselves to become instruments of the system or those who merely cooperate with it seek the solution of "humanisation", the softening of the rules and their application. Social life, that is communist everyday life as governed by the rules of the system, continues to subsist, to affirm itself as life. Naturally, everything is in a state of permanent tension, a permanent equilibrium of opposing tensions. In essence, we must understand, with hindsight, what has been tried and experienced directly, namely that this society existed, functioned and resisted historically and succumbed, that ideological abstraction was transformed into the daily exercise of power, of annihilation as well as cooperation and survival.

Characterised by fear, subversion, domination, salvation and submission, but also alignment and social and economic success, communist everyday life must be examined closely if we are to uncover the miraculous or merely the wretched humanity of the man subjected to this historical experiment. Looking back, we cannot fail to note the absolute mystery of the existence of communist society, an achieved utopia, a carceral society which resists, which defeats its citizens and controls them, which ensures its historical survival and only collapses because of a malfunctioning of the leading elite. A terrible and frightening spectacle of human nature (Sophocles, Antigone, v. 332-374).

Everyday life, theories and methods

Daily life implies both a reference to a singularity, but also a group, the relationship with oneself and the other, and is always governed by relationships of identity, power and domi-



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nation. Nonetheless, despite the tendency of everyday life to expand horizontally, enveloping almost all aspects of an existential nature, the sphere of ordinary, everyday life can only exist in direct relation with an extraordinary life, with that which exists beyond quotidianity. That said, we would be profoundly mistaken if we were to view everyday life as being that which is left over of our distinct and specialised activities, with everyday life being rather the link between them, their place of meeting.

Everyday life is often mistakenly confused with private life, which ignores the fact that private life is that form of existence defined by its private, reserved, closed nature. Always connected to public life, which takes place in broad daylight, in full view, for all to see, the rationale of private life is, on the contrary, a retreat into an intimate space, shielded from general curiosity. Yet daily life transcends the boundary between public and private, comprising both activities that take place in full view – performed in the street, forming part of the general realm of quotidianity – and special, reserved activities, removed from this general realm, affording them a strictly private nature. One might say that everyday life is expansive, devoid of restrictions, present in all spheres of existence and with a clear tendency to disregard all conventions and restrictions.

Anthropology as a discipline is based on the direct gathering of testimonies about life and experience as well as the participant observation of daily life, with the aim of disseminating what is permanent and unconscious on a cultural level (Augé, 1994). While this focus on permanences has been abandoned along the way, anthropology has nonetheless not done away with the ethnographic method of gathering data and direct observation of everyday life. For that matter, as with the other humanist disciplines, anthropology is evolving from an analysis of the structures and frameworks of everyday life towards a focus on its subjects, the individual experiences of everyday life.

Starting with the 1960s, the new history of everyday life, renamed historical anthropology, moved in the direction of recording collective attitudes and behaviour with the aim of highlighting certain processes and tendencies based on a model borrowed from the social sciences. Sensitive to groups and their representations, historical anthropology, however, ignores the tangible nature of subjective experience. It is precisely this that the history of everyday life subsequently tries to recover by abandoning the deep frameworks and structures of everyday life in favour of an analysis of the biographies of ordinary people (Sharpe, 1991: 25)

We can speak here of a change of paradigm, occurring in particular after the Second World War, that reorientated the humanist disciplines towards what might be called the "human reality". Where is the "human reality" to be found, asks Lefebvre in his Critique of Everyday Life. Is this "human reality" all around us or is it hidden in mysterious depths? In Marxist tradition, Lefebvre attempts to answer this question. Human reality is to be found in everyday life. Everyday life is perceived as a totality, as the sum total of relations that make what is human, in general, as well as every human being, in particular, a whole (Lefebvre:109). It is as part of everyday life that the relationships exist that express the totality of the "real" – even if certain aspects are partial or incomplete – such as friendship, comradeship, love, the need to communicate, etc. (Idem.) Lefebvre proposes a new form of rationality that is related to the field of philoso-

phy only in a broad sense, reversing the superior-inferior type relationship representing a defining element of traditional philosophy. In keeping with dialectic materialism, the forms of human activity, considered inferior by traditional philosophy, become, in Lefebvre's theory, the sources fuelling "reason" and "real social life".

One of the fundamental questions Michel de Certeau in particular, though also Michel Foucault, attempted to answer is to what extent does everyday life manifest itself as an arena for the reproduction of relations of power or, on the contrary, as a field of invention, creation and resistance to forms of power?

The particular aspects of everyday life relating to a tenacious resistance to power are analysed systematically in the work of Michel de Certeau. Questioning the relationship between everyday life and culture, Certeau attempts to indentify the mechanisms individuals use to present themselves as autonomous persons in the consumer economy and the practices of their everyday lives (Giard, 1990: 6-7). Certeau swaps the idea of consumer passivity for the well-argued conviction that there exists a creativity among ordinary people by means of which each invents his or her own way of following a pre-established path among the multitude of imposed products (De Certeau, 1980: title page). Far from being amorphous entities, consumers develop their own forms of resistance vis-à-vis the instituted order.

In trying to identify a logic particular to everyday practices, Michel de Certeau defines what he calls the "science of the singular", a grammar of everyday practices analysed from the perspective of the specificity of their form (Cf. Highmor, op. cit.: 14). However, far from limiting himself to a psychologising approach exclusively related to people's individual paths, Certeau reanalyses their utilitarian, presumed passive and disciplined actions. Each individual retains an incoherent and often contradictory plurality of relational determinations (De Certeau, 1990: 36). Certeau's aim is to show the operational logic of everyday practices, and as such he gives priority to the modus operandi or schema of human actions that constitute a culture and not directly to the subjects or persons who perform them (cf. Highmor, op. cit.: 64). This "operational art" consists of action by consumers that differs from that expected by the producers of the consumer goods, a freedom that allows them to retain a certain equilibrium, to transform and invent themselves in an environment made up of a multitude of heterogeneous elements.


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Using the same approach of questioning minuscule and everyday processes, in Surveiller et punir Michel Foucault analyses the apparatus of institutional power by means of a painstaking examination of the miniscule technical procedures (devices) that govern discourses and contribute to the redistribution of space such that it is subject to generalised "surveillance" (Foucault, 1975). Whereas Michel Foucault, through an analysis of miniscule practices from the perspective of the anonymity of the masses, favours the means of producing discipline and the interiorisation of the order by individuals, Certeau, on the other hand, attempts to identify the miniscule and everyday procedures that only conform to the mechanism of discipline in order to undermine them (De Certeau, 1990: 40). In his

analysis of everyday practices, Certeau indentifies what neither Foucault nor Pierre Bourdieu, another great theoretician of everyday practices, are able to identify, namely a movement of micro-resistance which in turn leads to micro-liberty, mobilising the insurmountable, hidden resources of ordinary people (Cf. Proulx, 1994: 193-194).

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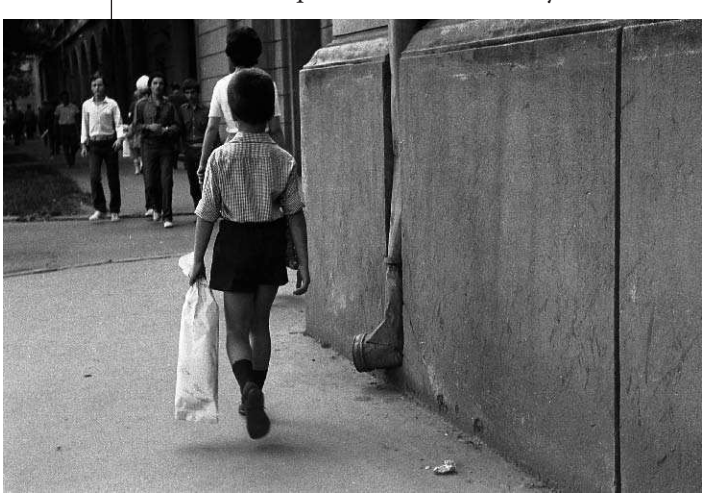
Everyday life during communism in light of the existing research

The insurmountable relationship between ordinary people and institutions, whether one of power and the reproduction of power or, on the contrary, of resistance, in practice and in spirit, proves essential to the understanding of everyday life in former communist societies. From the perspective of the reference point of power, in the countries of the former communist bloc, the state, the party and the secret services were all synonymous. The state is personalised, self-presented as possessing a physical entity that is one with the people (Lefort, 1986: 292-307). By means of rhetorical, institutional and disciplinary strategies, the state subjugates its own citizens and speaks on their behalf, defining the parameters of what is and is not permitted, tolerated.

The question that naturally arises is to what extent can we speak of a domination tout court of the state over its citizens or, similarly, the existence of forms of resistance, of redirecting power in favour of individuals and their personal interests?



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Studies of the societies of the former communist bloc (see Fitzpatrick, 2000; 2002) with a focus on everyday life are still few in number, especially if we compare them with those that seek to explain the rise, persistence and fall of socialism by reference to practices at the level of the state. Individual lives, where mentioned at all, are perceived as homogeneous masses fighting to become free from the constraints imposed by a totalitarian state and assert their human nature (Kideckel, 2006 (1993): 17; Sampson and Kideckel, 1989).

From the perspective of the studies focusing on the political aspect, the communist regime is a regime of occupation that was imposed by force by the Soviet army and maintained its dominance by the use of force and terror. "Communism would thus have been tolerated, not embraced; disavowed, not permitted; rejected (as far as possible), not supported. In other words, it would have always been a reality that was foreign to our collective being" (Platon, 2004: 31).

In this context, the aim of studies of everyday life is precisely to provide a more nuanced description of the position of the state vis-à-vis its citizens, essentially to show the level of adherence of the majority to the system imposed by force.

Particularly interesting in this respect are the studies of everyday life from the time of the communist regime in the GDR performed by researches such as Thomas Lindenberger, Michel Christian, Sandrine Kott and Jay Rowell. Lindenberger proposes a relational approach to power concentrated on the role of individuals viewed as actors in an interactional environment. Domination implies not only a monopoly of power, but also the minimal and often passive acceptance of the dominated (Christian and Droit, 2003: 122-123). Thomas Lindengerger focuses on everyday police practices, the police officer as a key player in main-

taining the regime (Lindenberger, 2003). The police together with the most active party members (Christian 2002) are no longer viewed as simple external structures of society, but, on the contrary, are analysed from the perspective of the individual actors among their ranks.

Coming from the field of social history, but having recently become interested in the historical sociology of politics, Sandrine Kott chooses the communist state enterprise as a place for the close observation of and reflection on how the communist regime manifested itself (Kott, 2001). Adopting a micro-analytic approach, the author studies the everyday reality of political domination observed as directly as possible within the state enterprise. Influenced by Michel Foucault's thoughts on the relational nature of power, Sandrine Kott analyses the way in which individual identities are defined; even where these do not correspond with the model established by the regime, they are nonetheless a product of it. The official discourse is individualised, appropriated by ordinary people, who highjack its meaning. This individualisation of the political does not, however, also imply the destruction of the system – on the contrary, it contributes to its reproduction and stabilisation.

Jay Rowell's studies help sketch a history of statist government with a focus on the actors involved in the government, the interaction between public and government power, and the governed, the latter never hesitating, in their relationship with the state, to make use of their room for manoeuvre (Rowell, 2005 a, b).

The society of the communist regime is not amorphous, and in so sense in opposition to the state, with both individuals and compact groups constantly attempting to adapt, to resist, to survive and even to become part of the system (Christian and Kott, 2009).

Based on his own field work, performed in Romania in a number of villages in the Țara Oltului region, the anthropologist David Kideckel in turn observes how the relationship between the state and the people is far from dichotomous. The practices of everyday life and institutional reproduction facilitated the domination of the state, just as they also created the conditions for its destruction and death (Kideckel, 2006 (1993): 18).

Returning to the early days of the regime, Adrian Niculau provides a psychological explanation for the process by which the majority identifies itself with the new system of beliefs and representations of the social established after the Second World War. In order to create a new, positive social identity, the representatives of the regime that came to power after the war proceeded to label the old social classes and categories in negative terms. They decreed only those groups that had previously had no access to power, wealth or recognised position to be the only "healthy" social categories (Niculau, 2004: 16-17).

The most convenient strategy for individuals was to "become part of the context", to make themselves be accepted by the system. (Niculau, 2004: 17). "You realise that the old ways no longer have any value, you compare and see that the new cultural values and normative models are not difficult to adopt, you desire to be assimilated and integrated and you make your choice" (Niculau, 2004: 17). The choice of the vast majority was "reconciliation with the system" and, not infrequently, an attempt to manipulate it to one's own benefit. In order to integrate themselves, most citizens self-censored their own behaviour, dissimulating on a communicational level (Kligman, op. cit.: 18).

Duplicity and complicity become the two main features of everyday life under communism. It is of this dual personality of the man living under communism, a personality split between a "false", public self that meets the imposed requirements, and a "true" self, retreated into the depths of its being, that Czesław Miłosz speaks in his famous *The Captive Mind* (Miłosz, 2008).

Viewed from within, with hindsight, from the perspective of one's own existence, communism is a source of immorality through the

inequitable distribution of resources; it is a regime of generalised dissimulation and deceit, of an everyday life played out in parallel to the public realm as controlled by the agents of power. Communist everyday life is a space for expressing the delight of owning and sharing with one's nearest and dearest that which is rare or forbidden in the official market, the pleasure of meetings and discussions held in small groups (Liiceanu, 2004: 71-78).

Authors like Katherine Verdery and Janos Kornai analyse everyday life under communism from the perspective of the economy of shortage generated by the state's accumulation of the means of production (Kornai, 1992 Verdery, 2003). The socialist state is a centralising, bureaucratic state that favours the appearance of informal relations and the second economy (Humphrey, 1998, Lampland, 1995, Berdahl, 1999, Verdery, 2003; Chelcea and Lățea, 2004). The socialist system tends constantly to increase its power over the allocation of resources, investing primarily in the production of material means, in particular the means of production, with a lesser focus on services or consumer goods.

The scarcity of goods and the appearance of queues represent the "visible side of the bankruptcy of the economic field resulting from the tendency to expropriate its purpose and only appears in crisis situations, at the extreme point of the system, which oscillates between the danger of revolt due to malnutrition and the danger of revolt due to liberalisation/emancipation. Most frequently, in Romania, the appearance of queues is associated with the growth in the role of propaganda as a means of social control (which seeks to define the needs and aspirations of the population in a manner that is convenient to the power), the tightening of social and political disciplinary measures, the drop in the quality of goods, the increased social prestige of those in charge, etc." (Lungu, 2004: 181).

As Pavel Câmpeanu shows, the "queue" known to the majority of the population can only be understood in direct relation to the special shops from which the nomenclature in particular were allowed to purchase goods. In other words, in the socialist-type system the economic decisions are directly subordinated to the political, with all relations of exchange containing extra-economic elements. In order to obtain products by standing in line, the only thing you need apart from money is time; in order to have access to the special shops required a special ID that proved one's loyalty to the regime. The only sector in which the purely economic aspect of exchange is retained is the "black market" (Câmpeanu, 1994: 160).

Collectivism, beside economic production, also sought to impose other practices, such as the adoption of the same architectural style, the standardisation of the school curriculum, the obligation to wear a school uniform, the corporate organisation of social life and, last but not least, birth control and the banning of abortion. In the socialist Romania of Nicolae Ceaușescu, demographic policy was used to legitimise state intervention in the everyday lives of its citizens, in births, work, schooling, sexuality and the lives of couples. (Kligman, 2000: 18).

Nonetheless, the centralising and monopolising state was far from achieving absolute control over everyday life. The socialist state, the "supreme entity", as Pavel Câmpeanu (Câmpeanu, 1988) called it, was designed to serve the interests of a small group, albeit this did not deny many other individuals the opportunity to engage in a fierce competition for power and the control of resources.

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Some added colour and detail. About this issue

The current edition of Martor magazine provides a necessary contribution to the study of everyday life under the communist regime in Romania, the articles it contains bringing some extra colour and clarity to what constituted day-to-day life under communism and what constitutes our lives today, more than twenty years after the fall of the regime. The different

themes and case studies will help us gain a better understanding of both past and present. Without fear of exaggeration, many things will be said about the origin of deeper and more "eternal" structures, about a cultural peculiarity that neither begins nor ends with communism, but which the communist habitus served to entrench.

The issue begins with Mihai Gheorghiu's essay on survival in communism. Sharing Berdyaev's conviction that communism is more a metaphysical than a strictly economic or political phenomenon, by recourse to a rich philosophical bibliography as well as his personal experience the author sketches an entirely original scenario of life under communism. "Communism was a colossal force of human self-destruction." What occurs in communism is a taking of possession of the human being through terror, "evil, becomes mechanised, becomes the mechanism and basis of social existence." The everyday life of ordinary man is a life spent in servitude and falsity. This "existence in the underground" or "pseudo-existence", as the author describes it, is not, however, devoid of man's hope of salvation. Under communism man subsists, suffers, but is nonetheless able to discover how to save his own humanity through a hidden relationship with a close other with whom he shares his underground existence and especially through the joy of rediscovering God. What remains of the apocalyptic scenario of life under communism is man's freedom to choose "transcendence as fundament", freedom shared and rediscovered.

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Paradoxically, man rediscovers his freedom, in particular in the harsh conditions of the underground, in an existence between life and death. The experience of prison tells us this very thing. Claudia Dobre's article paints a complex and moving picture of the daily lives of women in communist prisons in Romania. It contains fragments of life histories of an utmost intimacy that reveal the ability of the former inmates to survive in the harsh conditions of incarceration. Familiar with the theoretical studies on everyday life, Claudia Dobre focuses on the ability of those subject to an inhumane prison regime to survive, to oppose subversively the relations of power and the systematic programme of destruction. The author reconstructs the day-to-day life of prisons, the living conditions, the food, the clothing, hygiene and the ordeals the inmates were subjected to, while also managing to capture the meaning this underground existence acquires in time, during the long and painful efforts of the former inmates to reconstruct the self.

Where Mihai Gheorghiu and Claudia Dobre deal with the existence of fear and terror in the underground, Maria Mateoniu mainly focuses on social and economic aspects. The aim of her article is to reconstruct everyday life starting with the dynamic relationship between public and private, in particular that between public and private property. She bases her work on oral testimonies recorded over the course of two years, from 2010 to 2011, as part of a group field research project carried out with the support of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant. This study paints a complex and chronological picture, from the attack on private space through collectivisation and abusive expropriation, to the appearance and development of practices of symbolic re-appropriation of the public realm, generalised theft of state property as a form of re-

appropriating "collective property".

The oral testimonies provide the basis for a faithful reconstruction of everyday life under communism, while also containing sufficient indications of the relationship between past and present, with the article succeeding in convincing us of the utopian and bankrupt nature of the regime. We find a considerable number of similarities in terms of subject matter in Oana Mateescu's article, published fairly recently as part of a group study of the informal economy in post-communist Romania. (Chelcea, Mateescu, 2005). Starting from a dynamic definition of property, Oana Mateescu shows how for the inhabitants of a village in Oltenia stealing from a state enterprise becomes a form of taking possession of the factory, which until the fall of communism represented their main source of existence (Mateescu, 2005: 83-113). Stealing from "collective property", which during communism meant the "taking" of what was rightfully yours (for it was taking from what was "common", as one of Maria Mateoniu's interviewees put it), during post-communism became "smart theft", meaning "only from the state", where the financial gains were far larger and the risks minimal (Mateescu, op. cit.: 84-85).

Returning to the current issue of Martor magazine, Petru Negură offers a consistent and pertinent analysis of how the first generation of Bessarabian students in Romania (1990-1991) indentifies with the commercial practices that arose following the liberalisation of borders and Romania's closer ties with Bessarabia. "Bișniță" (black marketeering) is more than merely a survival strategy or a way of amassing wealth; it is also a means of affirming their identity for the students vis-à-vis the communist discourse, which preached the common good, and the "idealist" values of their parents, inherited from their family and native community. The article discusses the following aspects: the "realisation of difference" by the first students to arrive in Romania; the transition from black marketeering as a means of survival to black marketeering as a means of amassing wealth; different types or differences between "big time black marketeering" and "small time black marketeering"; the students' relationship with the state and authority and their organisation into a distinct groups characterised by specific relations of solidarity and power.

This is followed by two articles, by Ana Pascu and Laura Jerca, respectively, which look at everyday life from the perspective of the interethnic relations between the ethnic Saxons and the Romanians. In a case study carried out in the village of Alțâna, in Sibiu county, Ana Pascu first studies the memory of said two ethnic groups in order to establish how the communities have viewed each other over time. The author describes how, in relatively calm conditions (in the period before the installation of communism), the interethnic relations were predominantly governed by custom, that is the peaceful cohabitation of the two communities based on mutual respect, but with limited interaction. The dismantling of this well-regulated world occurred with the outbreak of the war, the detention and deportation of the Saxons to the USSR, and the confiscation of property following the installation of the communist regime. All this leads to an equalisation of suffering as well as the appearance of various forms of relative solidarity vis-à-vis the common enemy that is the communist state. The collectivisation of agriculture produces, on the one hand, a dismantling of the old order and, on the other hand, a "reconciliation" between the two communities. The situation changes with the fall communism, when the common enemy disappears, giving free reign to disputes and endeavours of reclaiming identity.

While Ana Pascu relies mainly on oral sources and field observations, meaning her study could easily be classified as ethnology, Laura Jerca focuses exclusively on written, mainly archive material. In predominantly analysing aspects relating to the repression of the ethnic German population in Romania between 1945 and 1949, the forced expropriation of assets and the colonisation of the rural Saxon communities by members of other com-

munities, Laura Jerca's article also reveals the way these rural communities survived the repression and the everyday lives of ordinary people in trying and dangerous times. In exceptional times of aggressive state intervention, it was only natural that the everyday lives of the ethnic German farmers in Romania would be dominated by conflict with the communist authorities, which ordered their evacuation and the housing of settlers in houses that had be expropriated or were on the verge of being expropriated. There were also many conflicts between the former, expropriated owners and the settlers; the former desperately trying to retain the right to live in their houses and the latter exercising their right to take possession of property "offered" to them by the state.

Two of the articles in this issue touch on the issue of free time under communism and the use of media sources and technology in an attempt to become detached from the official reality dominated by the cult of personality surrounding the Ceaușescu family. These are the texts by Adriana Speteanu and Annemarie Sorescu-Marinkovic.

Adriana Speteanu looks at the reorganisation of free time in Romania during the 1980s, starting with the well known case of the 23rd August Works. Between working time and free time we can speak of an intermediary, "statisised" time, monopolised by the state, this reorganisation of time being the consequence of a continual process of ideologisation. In focusing on the testimonies of people who had worked at the 23rd August Works, the author is able to provide some real-world evidence in support of K. Verdery's observation that time in Romania during the 1980s was slowed down, flattened, immobilised and rendered non-linear (Verdery, 2003: 63). And yet, apart from the time monopolised by the state in the form of the never-ending marches, commuting between the village and the city, "patriotic work" and the extended working week, there also existed a free time that the regime failed to control. Admittedly limited in most cases to holidays spent with friends and family, in the mountains or by the sea, or to participation in games of football, "all together", both workers and engineers, temporarily oblivious to all forms of hierarchy, this type of free time was nonetheless like escaping from the monotone daily existence, an entirely exceptional time.

The article by Annemarie Sorescu-Marinkovic is a very successful example of the narrative interpretation of a "mini archive" of oral testimonies relating to everyday life in the 1980s in the Banat, on Romania's western border. The central theme is the watching of Yugoslavian television by inhabitants of this region during the darkest and most difficult years of Nicolae Ceușescu's dictatorship. In a context in which the cult of personality of the dictator tended to monopolise the everyday lives of Romanians, including through unprecedented control of the media (public television broadcasts were limited to two hours a day and even this was dedicated to propaganda and the cult of the Ceaușescu family), the "connection" of the inhabitants of the border region to the television broadcasts of their neighbours provided the most convenient means of escaping the Romanian everyday reality and adhering to the values of the "free world". Media consumption is only one of many elements that constitute the much broader picture of contact and exchange with their neighbours, despite the impossibility of crossing the border freely. This dynamic and intense form of contact would lead to an expression of local identity based on an extremely positive perception of the Serbian neighbours and, later, an increasingly powerful sense of "Yugonostalgie" (the author's own term).

The second part of the magazine contains testimonies and recollections of everyday life during communism. Everyday life is reconstructed through a concentrated effort of memory or a "spontaneous", retrospective examination of long-gone but still vivid, deeply internalised, time. This section begins with the testimony of extraordinary beauty and sincerity by Professor Sanda Golopenția. The Bucharest of the years 1949-1950 is the

Bucharest of the narrator's childhood, her years spent (amid the scent of lime trees) at no. 7, Doctor Lister Street, in the Cotroceni district.

Through the innocent eyes of a child of yesteryear, we find ourselves transported to an extraordinary quotidian world, seeing for ourselves the rose garden tended by an anonymous gardener, the street of lime trees, "which smelled like a huge tea-pot every spring", the garden behind Elefterie Church, where lambs were sold around Easter, the florists beside Meinl and the grocery store where they sold fresh butter. These are the defining features of a past world which for this innocent child continues to retain its secret, wonderful charm, despite the rationed dark bread, bought from a former university professor, or the days when polenta was the only staple food. This old world, despite the prospect of the changes imposed by the new regime, nonetheless seems to have survived, to have retained its air of times past. However, the account, while positive at the outset, gradually darkens, acquiring notes of sadness. The inexplicable disappearance of her father, of whose arrest and death the child only learns later, and the books and documents hidden in the cellar of the house demonstrate the gravity of the changes and the gentle suffering, exhibited with restraint out of a sense of modesty, but which the reader can easily imagine.

Through an exercise in self-reflection, professor Zoltán Rostás describes the specific conditions in which oral history was practiced during the dark years of the 1980s, as well as the intimate relationship, based on trust, between the researcher and his subjects. We are presented with a few fragments of oral history that serve to exemplify the intrinsic relationship between researcher and narrator and allow us to move back and forth between the narrated past, selectively and partially retained in the memory, and the present of the 1980s.

As to the recollections of Mirel Bănică, they provide an opportunity for the author to reflect on the exercise of memory (or, rather, the lack thereof) in post-communist Romania. It is no accident that Mirel Bănică recounts an important moment from his life as a school pupil during communism: "agricultural training". An obligatory activity, agricultural training forms part of the still vivid memory of his generation. Consigned to paper, his recollections describe the experience of pupils living under communism, which differs from that of children and adolescents living in developed, capitalist societies today. The introduction to the article provided by the author aims to explain to the reader the context of this account and the role of the witness in post-communist Romania.

Mirela Florian provides us with the story of a hero, a life story, told as such. This story is relevant both in terms of the manner in which the protagonist reconstructs his self (by creating his own life story) and the evocative power of the troubled times in which he is living, both he and the communities he passes through. Inspired by one of the books compiled by Smaranda Vultur (Vultur, 2000), alongside the story Mirela Florian includes a description of the preliminary phase of the research, including a portrait of the narrator. The author captures details of the story teller's communication style, particular moods, gestures and hesitations, which the audio recording and even less so its transcription are able to capture.

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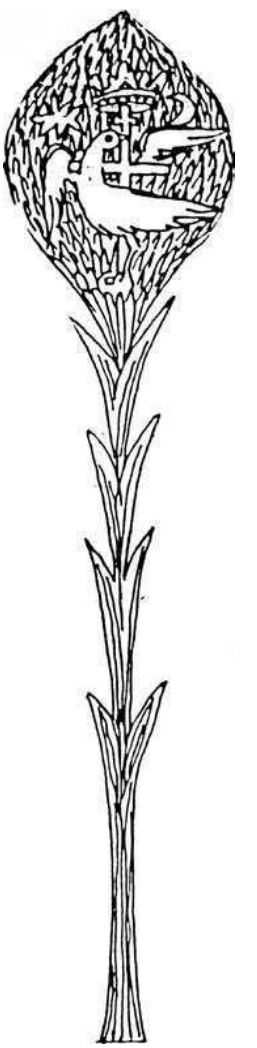

MARTOR

Title: "Surviving communism. Escape from underground"

Author: Mihai Gheorghiu

How to cite this article: Gheorghiu, Mihai. 2012. "Surviving communism. Escape from underground". *Martor* 17: 19-38.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

Surviving communism. Escape from underground

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ABSTRACT

This essay seeks to provide a phenomenological description of the conscience's particular quest to free itself from servitude. Trapped in the mechanism of a world that dictates and imposes totalitarian mechanisms of control and "production" of social and personal conscience, man begins his search for the paths of freedom and liberation from this prison-like mechanism. This quest of the conscience is also possible in this society of total human alienation, and even here it is an event of everyday life, of the practice of survival, and not an event of great histories and great confrontations. The human conscience is most definitely the conscience of freedom, of transcendence towards the centre of a freedom that remains an integral part of the human being, at least as a trace or a secret propensity of the socially and politically annihilated being. Communism can therefore be interpreted as an immense challenge to the individual, the human person, as well as the community: the ultimate challenge of seeking and finding freedom. Designated for total annihilation, the human conscience rediscovers through this quest for the centre, for self-definition, its true ontological status. The escape from communism should also be defined as the conscience's quest for freedom, and not only as a political and economic act of dismantling the command structures of the old regime. Liberation from servitude is first and foremost an inner liberation from the condition of servitude, the transition beyond, towards a new human condition, even where this condition is one of fragility and transience.

KEYWORDS

Communism, revolution, freedom, humanism, transcendence.

" *Gentlemen, God is dead.*
– Jean Paul Sartre

Incipit

Communism was a colossal force of human self-destruction, of total annihilation. The barbarism of communism is Europe's hidden barbarism, its latent potential for destruction, which is called into play throughout history. Communism is the manifestation of a kind of impulse of death – a phenomenon of darkness.

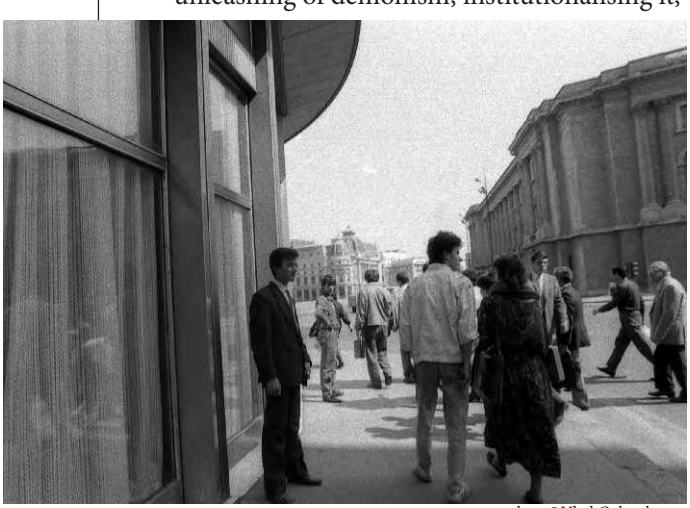
No one in Romania was prepared to face up to contemporary history, neither the political parties nor the utopian dispensers of justice. Our Levantine democracy, unrepentant phanariotism, was unable to rescue the Romanian country from disaster, to endow it with the political, economic and cultural strength necessary to withstand the maelstrom of events. Romania's decline placed in the hands of the enemy a country that was ridden with contempt for any kind of utopia and in the grip of a frenzy of institutionalised crime and plunder. The oriental tameness of Little Paris should not deceive the eye set on uncovering the roots of a country's decline. It is true that communism not only represents our own defeat; it also represents the defeat of the whole of Europe as well as being a disastrous phenomenon of human civilisation. Berdyaev was entirely right: communism is a metaphysical phenomenon, not economic or purely political. Dostoyevsky was the first to grasp the substance of the communist revolutionary project, providing a memorable description of

it in The Devils.

The failure of Europe in this tenebrous Russian endeavour is first and foremost the failure of the history of European Christianity in the face of nihilism as a historical force of civilisation. Communism's penetration of man's deepest tissues represents the failure of the Church as well as all other forms of dogma or metaphysics. This leaves man himself defeated, crawling in the mud. And it renders the blindness of much of the western intelligentsia, starting with J. P. Satre, all the more repugnant.

Returning to Romania's quest, there is no way to explain the teratological experience of so many Romanian communists and the forced resignations of the intellectual elite at a time when thousands of other Romanians were taking to the mountains in a desperate attempt at resistance and a recourse to basic human dignity. This serves only to demonstrate the weakness of any noble gesture by the Romanian intellectual.

What was astonishing about Romanian communism was the incredible level of organisation, of bureaucratisation, of cynicism and crime. Local tradition had only reached the stage of blood-soaked buffoonery characterised by frequent interruption and a certain, typically-oriental detachment. Even Carol II had a touch of the Robin Hood in his congenital vileness. Bolshevism triggers an immense unleashing of demonism, institutionalising it, rendering it effective and consistent. The oriental charm of terror and crime gives way to a different form of aberration, a mechanism, a machine of organised crime. Wallachia was transforming...



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The defining feature of communism is the biological exercise of survival and the social function of labour. Nowhere else does labour fulfil such a "metaphysical" role as it does in communism. The party's first call is the call to labour. Labour engenders a feeling of life and humanity as well as solidarity. The working nation is a sovereign nation, a historically redeemed nation. This represents the creation of supreme slavery. The west associates labour with profit, and therefore with power. Stalin views it as generalised form of slavery, an optimum form of submission, of defeat. In communism labour is a sustained experience of bankruptcy – but no less useful for it. Labour is constantly producing slaves to feed the enormous ideological lie. The irresponsible fiction of unlimited development and progress acts as a religion of salvation of the glorious transition to the new man. Labour is the instrument of this transformation, the asceticism required of a new, planned humanity.

Communism's main preoccupation was essentially the reduction of man to a thing, to the objectual existence of the instrument[1]. This reduction is achieved by all available means, most commonly the use of unrestrained violence. Confronted with the monolithic, cellular, power of the force that generates violence in a seemingly legitimate way, society dissolves into the crowd. And the crowd is the eternal malformation of man, the crowd is always an object. Being an object, the crowd can only occupy the weak position in the equation of power and will thus always be deceived. The categorical imperative of communism is falsification. Instating falsehood and maintaining it always implies the resort to violence. Political deceit and crime represent different intensities of violence. In order to perpetuate the lie you must always be able to exercise violence – ideological violence, political violence and, finally, also physical vio-

1) See André Scrima, Ortodoxia și încercarea comunismului, Simple reflectii despre comunism, pp. 153-198, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2008, coordinated by Vlad Alexandrescu.

lence.

The historical use of violence against one's own society, against the entire society, was something new to the Romanian historical experience at the end of the Second World War. Romania was therefore an easy target[2].

Caragiale and Ceaușescu are the two pillars of Romanianness of the 20th century. They are symbols of modern Romania, milestones of Romanian contemporary experience: the acid wit of the former and the dictatorship of the latter's delusions. Between Caragiale and Ceaușescu there exists an entire nation of good-for-nothing "Miticăs" and proletarians continually hailing the achievement of nothingness. Under communism Caragiale was all but useless. You cannot satirise crime; it remains in itself an absolute. Caragiale's acid wit could not burn through the iron logic of terror. Yet Caragiale showed us the beginning of our modest history as a modern state and, in particular, he reproduced the genome of the Wallachian species. Because of him we know how we really are, we no longer harbour any illusions about ourselves. The end of communism brought Caragiale back to the fore; having come in from the cold, our old face is once again recognisable.

The dictator, in this case Ceaușescu, is a creator of fictions. The fiction of a world run according to the algebraic calculation of orders. Orders create the fiction of order. But order cannot exist in reality, for man is a disorderly being, a being who, even in the obedience imposed through terror, retains a minimum freedom of rebellion, of life. That said, dictatorship is paradoxical in that it is a realised fiction.

Ceaușescu the revolutionary knew one thing very well: the battle must go on, hour after hour, and be strong. Politics in its element, that is war, means nothing more than the defeat of one side by the other. The people are split into two camps: my people and their people. He also realised that the public speech is an excellent political weapon, being used to win over and, at the end of the day, to hoodwink the masses, selling them the illusion, the belief, in the political action of the revolutionary. He later understood that individual power is the natural consequence of all bellicose forms of politics. In 1968 he presented himself

2) On Romanian com munism, see in particular: Victor Frunză (1990) Istoria stalinismului în România, Humanitas, Bucharest, Vladimir Tismăneanu (2005) Stalinism pentru eternitate. O istorie politică a comunismului românesc, Polirom; Vlad Georgescu (1991) Politică și istorie. Cazul comuniștilor români, 1944-1977, Humanitas, Bucharest; Denis Deletant (1999) Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, New York, St. Martin's Press; Stelian Tănase (1998) Elite și societate. Guvernarea Gheorghiu-Dej, Humanitas, Bucharest.

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as the father of the nation, declaring what he wanted to be the start of a "national revolution", after the "social revolution" had come to an end. The great crimes accompanying the installation of communism were committed by the old guard, to whom he lent his unconditional support until he became Secretary General and changed tack; he switched Stalinism for Ceaușescuism, that is, a fusion of "national revolutionary energies" under his personal leadership. At heart he was convinced it was his calling to provide the much-needed peace and that the country should become an autarchic power; he probably dreamt of a Romania that defied its own history, a Romania in harmony with universal destiny. Interestingly, during his "trial" he attacked the phanariotism inherent to Romanian political history at the beginning of the modern era and stemming from the original historical phanariotism of the 18th century. Communist ideology contains the elements of "heroic fury" typical of any revolution. Ceau?escu undoubtedly also relied on the dynamic, heroic "new man", the initiator of new historical paths. Ideology is nothing more than a circle ruthlessly closing in on the others, those who must present the gift of delegated will; ideology is a form of submission and, at the same time, a filter for those whose energy or whose good will is too great. A tool for battle as well as defence, ideology is fundamental to any political system. However, every leader is above ideology, for his actions must be free and sovereign. The fanatic, a kind of extremist idealist who ends up believing ideology to the letter, is sidelined, whether violently or not. This is a principle also adhered to by Hitler.

Having consolidated his political power (probably after 1968), Ceaușescu turned enthusiastically to the great work of national building projects: industrialisation, militarisation and education. Industrialisation under Ceaușescu was the result of a deficient forma mentis; Ceaușescu was never able to understand, despite using it to the point of saturation, the term and phenomenon of "scientific revolution", that leap forwards of western science and technology – and by the time he appeared to have grasped its significance, it was too late, the ruin was total. A thick layer of communist mafia ensured everything came to

nothing. What is also interesting is Ceaușescu's relationship with his own "class". Originating from among their ranks, but with an authentic revolutionary energy, he despised them, using them in every way as simple executors.

In fact, "Ceaușescu" meant the clique, probably small but very powerful, who held all the important posts in the Securitate, the party and the army. The others carried out the orders they received and thus ensured their survival. In this silent struggle between the leader and the nomenclature, it was the latter that emerged victorious. Ceaușescu couldn't possibly condemn his own instruments (he was no longer able nor had the time to replace them), and the latter paralysed the entire external machine, leaving only the internal Romanian Communist Party, which was a mafia and nothing more. In a strange sense, therefore, Ceaușescu was a misunderstood figure, the visionary who is ignored and betrayed. His trial clearly showed how he believed he had been betrayed and, at the same time, the country had been betrayed. His country.

Ceaușescuism was meant to be a form of Romanian communism, the national version of an imported revolution imposed by force. Our tragedy stems from the fact that Ceaușescuism existed, lived, was successful; a great number of people set to work with the thought in their minds that one day everything would come true. Some began making lathes, others wrote history and literature, etc. Certain patriots believed that the idea of Romanianism could also be served under and even by Ceaușescu himself. The placing of Ceaușescu among the ranks of the voivodes was their work, their excuse being that it was only in this way that the other names could be mentioned, too. Worse still is the fact that they never considered any resistance or opposition to the barbarism and crimes. Did thousands of Romanians die in camps and prisons only that Romanianism could be expressed by Ceaușescu and through Ceaușescuism?!

Ceaușescu led the "national wing" of the communists and finally won the argument for good in 1968. He eliminated the Comminternists, the KGB agents and the Stalinists; he cleaned things up, he gave a "green light" to self-criticism and even criticism; he tried to become popular and even succeeded in a world that was reconciled to the mantra of "moving forwards" and the whirlwind of history – and among people whose memories had been annihilated and who were free to examine the mass graves (something they could have done but didn't). An entire generation held an unflinching belief in communism and tried to live entirely normal lives.

Yet history played a terrible trick on him; he was to be killed by the very people he created and led. He was convinced, right until the end, that the workers were on his side, the side of he who had provided them with food, work, drink, every day and every night; he who had turned Romania into a major player on the international stage. He entered, through a gate of his own making, the absolute paradox of absolute power, which has always had missionary pretentions: he began building a strong (industrialised) Romania, while at the same time also digging its grave. A demented figure, at one point he passed as an element of positive, national energy, but he couldn't have been any less national and any more anti-national. Without a doubt Ceaușescu played a determining role for us; his madness was no accident and is also not something that should be forgotten or hidden. Romanians should assume responsibility for Ceaușescu. Without being a matter of fate, he served as a lesson, a dead-end we paid for so dearly that we must understand it and learn from it. We must learn how far we can go with patience, suffering, with the apathy of the soul and the mind, with fear, with submission and with violence.

So many people staked their entire lives on the system without looking ahead in their lives or beyond the unflinching will of a tyrant. These are people for whom compromise and duality became their substance, people no longer able to defend themselves, people no longer able to defend anything.

The absence of memory is itself a form of

betrayal and suicide. The intellectuals should have retained the memory of the sacrifices, the crimes, the instated absurdity; but they remembered nothing but the crude farce of the "obsessive decade", the bait of false compensation, of the comedy of errors and of self-criticism. In the end they had given up almost everything, memory, truth, future... There was no way to live a normal life except through guilt, but then guilt is also a form of destiny. If the truth is to be told, and if the task of speaking the truth falls to the intellectuals, then truth has never been told in Romania[3].

What is occurring today is astonishing. The entire experience of the communist ordeal has simply been forgotten, is never mentioned, our memory no longer wishing to be filled with the things that happened in the past, as if forgetting could save us retroactively. Not to remember is tantamount to not existing. The teratological experience of communism must be taken into account if we are to have a clear picture of the man of our agonised modernity. For this man, who emerged from underground, is a different man, a corrupted, malaised man who carries a double conscience and is shadowed by a tenebrous double of his own self. His existence is divided, incapable of rebirth. This abused and tortured being is a ruin of its own survival[4].

3) On the different types of intellectuals during communism, see the classic work by Czeslaw Milosz (1996) Gândirea captivă, Eseu despre logocratiile populare, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1996.

4) On the entire procession of crimes committed by international communism, see: Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkwski, Karel Bartosek, Jean-Louis Margolin (1998) (eds.) Cartea neagră a comunismului. Crime, teroare, represiune (Humanitas, Fundatia Academia Civică: Bucharest).

5) See Etienne de La Boétie, *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude, or the Anti-Dictator* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942)

Reason, nihilism and voluntary servitude

Communism meant for each of us living a life underground, in servitude and falsity. The captive freedom of the underground may have given the impression of an existence, but this was only a pseudo-existence, a surrogate existence, the existence of the obedient slave[5].

We were able to live our lives; we were able to be the actors of minimal freedoms, of a daily existence under the control of the mechanism of habit and survival. The major paradox, and at the same time the condition for the existence of any society alienated by terror, is the creation of a simulacrum of what it is annihilating. The original, existence as such, succumbs to the simulacrum. Life subsists biologically and conventionally in the simulacrum of freedom, which is the essence of personal existence. The simulacrum is the impersonal, it is the faceless visage of an existence dominated by servitude and falsity, and deprived of freedom, that is, of purpose. For he who subsists in servitude is always the same, a vicious circle of his own human existence, the continuous impossibility of becoming. Voluntary and individual servitude is an act of impotence or deviation; the general servitude imposed by terror is a political act, a perverse imposition of power. This power crushes the human being, my own being, until it becomes the smallest of traces; man thus becomes his own trace, the feeble trace of a former presence, whether the presence of weakness, of deviation, or of rectitude, but a human presence nonetheless. Through the imposition of a perverse power – perverse because it is not human, that is, it is no longer responsible for humanity – man disappears, is suppressed and marked as an absence; he no longer responds, his self has dissolved. His name becomes the name of an absence. What empties him of his own self is not money, capital or the knout of primal or circumstantial violence, but "everything", that is, the tangible and abstract immensity of the total imposition of a mechanism for the reproduction of everything that exists, a continual and complete production of falsity and error. A machine of lies, a machine for the fabrication of simulacra, including the simulacrum itself, the double perfected as an object. In this context, anything is possible against his existence as a person, against his freedom. Assigned to the world of objects by the authority of power through terror, man is left with no choice other than that of simply being, while no longer existing, being with the power to be a thing and nothing more. This taking control of your being, of any being, is the much-more-than political way in which power acts. Communism leaves politics to one side and resorts to basic terror.

What you feel when you are faced with this unleashed and implacable mechanism is not fear, which you leave behind, but the feeling of terror before an all encompassing demonism, before immaculate destruction. An unleashing that also annihilates time, for time is human, it belongs to man and represents the subsistence of hope and possibility. Through its massive presence this unleashing first and foremost suppresses hope itself, leaving in its wake a terrified, petrified sense of astonishment at the presence and efficiency of evil, which becomes mechanised, becomes the mechanism and basis of social existence. What was most terrifying during communism was its efficiency and capacity to appropriate life. A machine that comes to life. Through communism we all experienced collective death. The terror of history, as an alienating destiny, manifested itself strongly through communism, with the ultimate proof of the extreme devouring power of uprooted man thrown into the abyss of self-devouring reason. If the hubris of reason is the transformation of the world into an object, the instrumentalisation of the world for the subject man who no longer deciphers anything, but only utilises and submits through a project increasingly beyond interrogation, then communism represents total reason, the exacerbation of all the presuppositions of the European metaphysics involved in the project of human liberation that forgets its subject in order to suppress it. In this case 1789 is the full expression of rationality, while the Bolshevik revolution is instated humanism. Robespierre and his equally sinister double, Lenin, thus represent both sides of the man who instates the era of absolute and, therefore, paradisiacal freedom, bringing an end to history as deviation or progress, for time and history only exist as deviation and war, and the free, fulfilled man is beyond history, is liberated from history. Only in this way can man discover himself, find fulfilment, abolishing history and his own unhappy conscience. If it is reason that discovers or produces truth, then reason must re-produce man, that is, his liberation from unhappiness and struggle, his liberation from original sin and the absolute master who pushed him into history as the substance of sin. The reason that re-produces man must also produce his purpose, while society must become the paradise on earth of history fulfilled. Only now does man become human as the exigent and ultimate product of reason. But man becomes human as master of the world, as the ultimate authority that abolishes mystery, impotence, unhappiness and finitude. Only in this way is man fully rational, fully free, with no past and no future, living in the pure present of the fulfilled and purifying exercise of reason which has become the reason of the world, the universal law, concept transformed into substance. Transcendence now fully reveals its uselessness; there is nothing beyond except the void of reason, the progression of evil as ignorance. Thus, reason ends with Christian "nihilism", according to which this world means nothing and the world beyond means everything. Man steps out of this nothingness created by empty transcendence towards the paradisiacal immanence of his presence fulfilled in and through reason. The world ceases to be the realm of the transcendental presence and becomes the letter of reason and fulfilled, accomplished discourse. The world is no longer presence and tremour, but the text of reason it never stops producing. If the empire of reason is the empire of truth, then man must fight for it, truth must be let be, must be unleashed through revolution. The revolution is the final threshold of history, the final ordeal of reason, purgatory on earth. The master, the slave, the bourgeois and the proletarian must each die in the revolution, while the citizen, the new man, the man emerging from the desert of deviation and struggle must be born. He is the master of the world, the undivided universal conscience who put an end to history, transcendence and mystery. But alas, instead of the human man his puppet emerges, and the world of the puppet becomes the machine of the world, a system that functions. And what best functions here? Reason itself and the man it produces.

Revolution, both that of 1789 and that of 1917[6], is conveyed through discourse, and therefore history, as the fulfilment and accomplishment of reason, as a projection of the human essence of man[7]. The revolution is the accomplished project of reason, a reason which styles itself as fulfilment and is as such the end, the abolition of time and history seen as an intrinsic possibility of deviation. Reason, which designs and calculates man, which allows him to exist only as a structured project of its own and nothing more, takes over history and abolishes it. Man who puts reason at stake ends up merely being put himself at stake by reason. Reason itself is the game. Man becomes his rational and machine-like double, for he decides that freedom has been discovered, rediscovered or created. His rational and logical double is nothing but his fantasy double, just as reason conceived of Christian man as nothing more than the fantasy double of man and therefore not free to display the force of his reason. A force of reason which turns out to be the force of the illusion of sending man back to paradise, as the privileged home of reason that finds what it searches for. But what is it that reason looks for and finds? Always itself, in fact. The eternal return of the one and the same. The essential purpose of reason is to humanise the world according to the measure of the human subject which abolishes its object. To humanise the world also means to suppress it, to suppress the world as otherness, as mystery, as ex nihilo creation. The world thus becomes thing and instrument. In this sense the political revolution and the technical revolution of the man dominated by reason are one and the same thing. Freedom is understood in this case as liberation from the tyranny of God, of the master and of nature. The rational subject, who frees himself from these historical and ontological bonds, receives in exchange the bondage of sufficient reason as the highest non-personal authority. But man still conquers himself as an object in the era of reason and not as an autonomous subject of freedom. The myth of reason ends in revolution, that is self-destroying itself as a myth of liberation, for the revolution turns out to mean abolition of every form of construction and terror a rigorous but self-destructive logical machine. Thus, reason again makes room for history and therefore deviation.

Communism is rational when it defines itself as revolution and revolutionary when it defines itself as reason[8]. Thus, within this totalising dialectics, which is supposed to be the very production of the world and of man, all meaning is exhausted, for freedom, as fulfilled reason, emerges as fundamental meaning and puts an end to individual discourses and meanings, which come to be defined as singular, self-serving and factual. Any other movement of thought, any other positioning of the human being is and must be understood as an error, a guilty deviation or, at best, ignorance. Under these circumstances, reason becomes the guardian of thought, of the spirit, of any other form of man's establishment of a different relationship with himself, a relationship which lays the foundations for a new project, a new form of human freedom and therefore a new truth. Reason cannot be weak or friable, cannot be one determination among many others; it can only be conceived of as temporal and temporary non-fulfilment; it remains the only path by which to achieve the perfection of foundation, it reaffirms itself as complete and unique foundation, as an encapsulation of the essence, an essence which offers itself to the human being in the form of a return of the same and the rediscovery of the identical. Thus human reason, as a probe sent into the abyss of existence, suppresses ontic difference and brings back the meaning of existence, unravelling the mystery of the explored abyss. Human reason rediscovers itself as the reason of the world, as the revealed logos of the being. The world becomes exclusively human. Paradoxically, it therefore falls to scientific knowledge to grasp the infiniteness, the otherness and the manifestation of the universe as unfathomable mystery, as an abyss of reason. Yet science continues in rational terms to place man in a self-sufficient position, eliminating any relationship between man and the infin-

6) Revolution is the eschatological myth par excellence of communism: everything is related to communism for revolution is the return of truth to itself, the rediscovery of the humanity of man in the truth of decisive historical action. Revolution is the re-conquering of humanity alienated by a history which itself must again become the history of man and therefore the history of liberation and de-alienation. Revolution is thus a political and metaphysical lesson in the sense in which metaphysics for Marx is precisely the history created by the proletariat for the entire human species. The communist revolution is the movement towards truth. See here also the seminal work by V. I. Lenin, Statul şi revolutia, Învătătura marxismului despre stat şi sarcinile proletariatului în revolutie, 4th edition, Editura Politică, Bucharest, 1960. Of particular interest for the deciphering of the "hidden text" of the French Revolution as a founding event of modernity is Cartea neagră a Revolutiei franceze, Grinta, Cluj-Napoca, 2010 (Les Éditions du Cerf, 2008); see also François Furet (1992), Reflecții asupra Revoluției franceze, Humanitas, Bucharest; Pierre Gaxotte (1928) La Revolution Française, Arthème Fayard, Paris; Alexis de Tocqueville (1988) L'ancien régime et la révolution, GF-Flammarion.

7) For a definition of rationalism and reason in politics, see Michael Oakeshott (1991) Rationalism in politics and other essays, Liberty Fund.

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ity of a manifestation of transcendence that reveals itself in the immensity of a presence, in the presence of "something" understood as an absence of nothing. "Calculating thought" (and communism is more than thought that calculates, even if its goal is the paradisiacal liberation of the human species from any form of metaphysical and political bondage) understood as reason is in its essence revealed, it is atheism, negation and abolition of transcendence; it not only desires things, the fragmentary existences of the world, but the being itself of existence, which it conceives of as the production of its own presence as logos, as the identity of its own manifestation, as reason itself. Reason does not wish to know that the "being" can neither be an object of calculation nor rediscovered identity but pure transcendence that reveals itself through presence, through the mystery of this presence that "makes" the world exist. The man that is the product of this form of thought is the man who fails in revolution, progress and technology. For him, the freedom of reason becomes the freedom to explore the underground. Communism is precisely this captive freedom of the underground, the free, decentred exploration of the underground.

Faced with the revealed ideological text of Marxism, communism is nihilism, a decision in favour of tabula rasa. At this point, reason become nihilism, that is the reason of unfoundedness, the thought that projects everything and nothing. "What is nihilism? The fact that the highest values are devalued. There is no purpose. There is no answer to the question of 'Why?" Nietzsche thus declares the end of the Enlightenment and any subsequent theory (i.e. also communism) as well as Christianity and any form of theism, any foundation in transcendence. As for the man of modernity, Nietzsche is right, he does end up in nihilism, in a state of fatigue vis-à-vis any form of foundation; it thus seems nothing can bring him back to the centre. Man and world become decentred, lose all foundation and become a hall of mirrors that endlessly reflect each other, a string of meaningless images without a story. The world becomes lost in the reflection of these multiple and diverging images[9].

While in theory communism was for-

8) One of Marx's definitions of communism was: "Communism as the positive transcendence of private property, or human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i .e., human) being – a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully-developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully-developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution." K. Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, in The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition, W. W. Norton & Company, p.84

9) A highly interesting "introduction" to the intellectual adventure of the 19th century is Heinrich Heine's Contribuţii la istoria religiei şi a filozofiei în Germania (1834), Humanitas, Bucharest, 1996.

mally opposed to every kind of nihilism, in practice, it fulfils the nihilistic "destiny" of contemporary man. The communist underground represents the full exploration of the nihilistic vicious circle. The lack of fundament creates the lack of purpose and meaning of human existence, which, for its part, points to the lack of fundament of existence itself. Man is thus trapped, becomes a prisoner of the logical machine set into motion by reason. In this case, man no longer even has access to despair and anxiety, understood as suffering caused by the presentiment that meaning and foundation do exist but cannot be regained. This resignation to slavery and the mechanical extension of its duration is the consequence of the palpable historical existence of communism. Besides his resignation to internally accepted servitude, it remains for the man of the communist underground to accept the challenge in terms of defying the death threat, which is in fact the essence of the threat of all terror organised as a political regime. It is in this presentiment of death and the welcoming thereof that the meaning of survival is to be found. To survive non-sense, the humiliation of the bondage of the predestined victim, to survive in order to save yourself and not simply to prolong a prison-like experience[10]. This extreme threat can give rise to the task of rediscovering the meaning and dignity of human existence. Death is not only the threat of the absolute ending, but also the total lack of meaning, the impossibility of finding an answer to a question about the grounds and purpose of a life.

The threat inherent to communism, as in all forms of nihilism, is not only the threat to private individual existence; it is also the threat to human existence as humanity, as the history of the discovery of the human fundament itself. Communism sets in motion the prison-like circularity of the lack of fundament, of the human exercise as a mere decentred existence within the circular production of domination with the help of the technology of political power. Communism annihilates man in that it abolishes any form of interrogation and any form of answer, for in producing itself as an answer and absolute knowledge it eliminates the possibility of an answer. The fundament in this case is the will of power as a totalitarian practice.

As a form of political organisation, communism represents the exacerbation of this technological reasoning; it seeks to built a world with no residue, without the "insubstantiality" of the freedom of the irreconcilable, of the weakness of reason and confusion. What's most frightening about communism is its success, the fact that the utopia has been built, the experiment has been successful, and that its history is now part of the history of man. Communism is a phenomenon of the absurd, and as such it is ferocious in its movement, in the fact that it acts with an immense material force within an immense territory of denial and destruction. What modernity brings to the decentring of the human being is the immense force of negativity – self-destruction as a historical process that transcends the mere deviation of thought and brings about the radical process of the possibility of generalised and total destruction of man and humanity. The emergence of this possibility is not simply the consequence of the technological process, the propagation of an error, but the ontological fulfilment of man's power of denial and self-denial. This possibility is a metaphysical event in the sense in which the original sin is also a metaphysical event – of course, not in the sense in that it is the event of any given metaphysics. This event originates neither in communism nor in capitalism, but in the technological reason that sets both in motion. Man himself finds self-fulfilment in the process of this self-destruction. It's true that he fulfils himself as negation, as a spirit of denial, as the reason of domination in the perfect circularity of captivity. In essence, this man says the world is an apparition and an appearance of nothingness. Entertaining no theist illusions, abhorring Christianity as a cancer of thought and being, he frees himself in the simulacrum of his own abstraction. Man, we are taught, finally becomes "human". The paradox is that he

10) The most powerful account in Romanian culture and literature of the path to salvation from terror and servitude is Jurnalul fericirii by Nicolae Steinhardt, published by Dacia, Cluj, 1991. In another register but equally powerful in terms of the existential dimension: Ion D. Sârbu, Jurnalul unui jurnalist fără jurnal, 2 vol., Craiova, Scrisul românesc, 1996.

becomes "human" at the very moment his entire power of negation and self-negation becomes an act, the reality of his own power. He is the apocalyptic technocrat who in the end becomes "human", strong and alone, liberated from the alienation of transcendence, exploitation and nature; however, he remains master in an abstract and empty universe that might well be tantamount to the inferno. Thus, the adventure of the self-awareness of the western man becomes trapped in the circular repetition of "God is dead", the archetype of Enlightenment thinking, the philosophy of German idealism and the French Revolution. The 20th century appears to be nothing other than an experiment of this "founding" thought, its fulfilment as history, its production as the "revealed" meaning of the world. 20th-century communism is nothing but a stage in this reproduction of the world and in this respect communism should not be a surprise but the fulfilment of an expectation.

Having lived through communism, I already know that it is neither freedom, nor meaning, but the experience of imprisonment and the omnipotence of the absence of meaning. It is the underground of existence. Returning to the surface of existence, to the power and dignity of free existence is no easy task – on the contrary. There is no such thing as the fatality of freedom, just as there is no such thing as being doomed to servitude; our substance is our internal freedom, the ability to become aware of our enslavement or ignorance and to make a choice. The indestructible simplicity of our own presence already leads us down the path of making a judgment and a choice. Regardless of where we are deposited in time, in history, regardless of how and where we become shipwrecked, we can follow Robinson Crusoe's example by rebuilding – not the world – but ourselves or the world in ourselves. There is no external force that can enslave us and turn freedom into opposition, the struggle with the other, but we ourselves represent our own threat to ourselves through confusion and ignorance. We are as free as we ourselves can be if we can truly abandon the underground and not carry it with us as an already assimilated poison.

Freedom and transcendence

What remains not entrapped in this circular mechanism, this apocalyptic scenario? What is left beyond the abyss of the underground? Transcendence in the sense of an indestructible fundament of man, his essential freedom that is permanently offered, given to him as the fundament of the essence of existence[11]. This freedom comes in the form of time, not chronological time, but a time of choice, rediscovery and foundation. This is why human freedom is not only the act of liberation, labour or struggle, but also the simple rediscovery of transcendence, the openness towards the eternity of a presence[12]. The "weak" presence of God, his immensity which transpires as silence, as absence and as "nothing", God that does not exist nor is, must be found again. The reason why God exists is not because everything else exists, for in this case the world becomes the absence of God, the absence of all fundament, a cold coagulation of objects and objective presences. Man thus discovers the world as an object and not as creation. The world wraps itself in the simulacra of its own presence, becoming what human reason allows it to be, whether instrument or image, labour, struggle or an empty gaze. It is no longer a sign and a presence of transcendence, but a hieroglyph of reason. This world becomes absurdity and man the absurd product of this absurdity. Human freedom becomes the prison of this absurdity, the decentred drifting of the being into nothingness. In this captivity man proclaims himself master of the world, a world which becomes his possession, otherness suppressed as "something" of his own. Possession thus becomes the sign of any relationship, including that between people. For the man of the absurd this is the only way in which the world ceases to be absurd, suppressed as otherness, as unknown,

11) "We have lived, since the coming of Christ, in a fissured world", Gabriel Marcel, Omul problematic, Biblioteca Apostrof, Cluj, 1998, p. 97.

12) "God is nowhere for those who see with bodily eyes, for He is invisible. But for those who think spiritually He is everywhere; for He is present, being in everthing and yet outside everthing. He is in everything and close to those who fear Him (Ps. LXXXIV, 10), but salvation is far from those that sin (Ps. CXVIII, 155)." Saint Symeon the New Theologian, Cele 225 capete teologice şi practice, in Filocalia, vol. 6, translation, introduction and notes by Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1997.

as a threat. Possessed as an object, it is subdued and made rational. The world becomes mundus and not lumen. This possession of the world has to do with technology, and the relationship of possession becomes a technological relationship. Communism forms part of this relationship, which explains the adoption and the hypostasising of the technological optimism of the industrial revolution. For communism, the world and the human presence are tantamount to industry. Human existence becomes an equation that needs to be solved through production and distribution, while production offers freedom by means of the technological process, itself a form of practical reason, the reason of industry. The materiality of the world becomes an object through industry and, at the same time, materiality is reduced to matter and non-human limitation by practical reason, which humanises the world in the empire of absolute knowledge and absolute possession defined as the true empire of freedom. This is the Marxist meaning of human development as acquired freedom – which is again to say that man, through his historical actions in keeping with the essence of his (practical) rationality, abolishes the old world of alienation and generalised slavery, as a source of human non-freedom, as the limit of human destiny. Naturally, neither Marxism nor communism is a historical option today; however, as a historical experience, they remain the signs of a technological rationality that still represents the foundation of western thought.

What is there in the underground to prepare me for freedom? Suffering, which becomes the only proof of my freedom, because not to suffer is already to become a slave. All that happens there, including fear, threat, submission, perversion and death, is suffering, becomes suffering. Even when complicity with the power behind this underground is complete in the sense of submission, when I accept freedom only as biology, when I want to forget that I suffer, I still suffer. I know the world has been turned upside down, I know that I am someone else, that the society in which I live is dominated by submission and the banality of the routine of silence, but I at least try to rescue the intimate, an intimate, however, which is not the personal. But then here I also know

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I am trapped, that the intimate has been expelled from intimacy, that what I wish to retain falls apart because the lie penetrates even this corner, the lie as fear and the social "pedagogy" of perversion; and then I know that I cannot in fact save anything. I know that what I see as social mechanics imposing the regularity of submission as the only convention that allows me to survive, to exist in some way, no matter how, are no longer the mechanics of society, of the others, but my intimate self, my internal make-up which has turned into a mechanism of submission, convention and survival. And then I become another, I become the possession of this mechanism, a part thereof, and I am no longer the radical otherness of opposition, of the victim who does not wish to confess, to allow himself to be seduced by his own tormentors, but their accomplice, their task being thus accomplished, the accomplished existence of their power to dominate. And this awareness implies suffering and at the same time a fear of suffering. It is the suffering of defeat and submission, as well as the accumulated fear of exploding this relationship of subjugation, which would require opposition and thus defiance, and later struggle. However, the fear of the suffering of this form of liberation is paralysing. I am afraid of being free, I am afraid of extracting myself from this comforting form of captivity which I share with everybody else, waiting together with the others for the mechanism to be blunted through contact with the stone of deadly indifference and time which, through its passing, abolishes not only freedom but also the frightened submission in a blur of agony and dissolution. Whether master or slave, we all face the same deadly risks of destructive time. In the master, time kills the terror of domination itself, while in the slave it eliminates the measured slowness of submission. We die together, I, the slave, and he, the master, each dying his own separate death but all the same dying for each other. In me, the slave disappears for him, while he disappears as a master to me, and therefore our common history disappears itself, abolished by time. But this is only a way for me to avoid my human responsibility and delegate it to an authority that flattens everything in the blur of continuous ending. The fear of personal choice makes me choose the impersonal process of temporal dissolution. The time meant to destroy everything, first of all the history of this shameful and disastrous submission, is not the time of man, the substance of his freedom, but pure destruction and the action of nothingness. In waiting for the end, for the irrevocable that is due both to me and to him, I do nothing but betray my faith in nothingness; "I can't do anything, I wait for an end to all" is the underlying principle of this transfer. I try to dissolve my freedom into this principle and thus resist the temptation of trying to become free. I try to induce history as a terrible fatality that leaves me with no chance. I try, in fact, to escape from the possibility of suffering born of opposition in forgetting and complicity. But even this fear of suffering is nothing but suffering, awareness of the precarious situation maintained as a form of survival, the essential precariousness of the man afraid of his own image, who suffers the grotesque terror of servitude. Although I seem prepared to accept, and I do in fact accept the more or less blind subjugation, there is something in me, far more profound than the cynical acceptance proclaimed by my cowardice, that rebels and suffers a perversion. My intrinsic freedom does not roll with me towards the edge of acceptance and "wisdom". This something, which is my intimate essence and makes my being really be, remains stable in suffering and rebellion; this "I" knows that their lie cannot possibility become my life and that this lie will be thrown into the platitude of a history, haunted by the inability to defeat the human despite the fact that the appearance of this force is frightening. With communism, as with Nazism, the issue is not the loss of freedom (political in this case), but the loss of humanity pure and simple. My suffering in this captivity is not related to my not being able to vote or be voted for, but to the reality of the will of quasi-total annihilation, the generic fiction of

the simulacrum being all that is to be left of me: a labour force and agent of reproduction. However, as a human being, I reject this transformation, despite all the social and personal bondages that make me accept it. More intimately than my reason and will, I am determined by my intrinsic freedom, which represents my given, offered essence, the necessity of my constitution as a human being. I am already in my freedom, conforming myself to the necessity which is my "good", my fulfilled and yet secret being. I can destroy this constitution through forgetting, but it will always represent the fundament of my being, albeit a forgotten, invisible fundament. I am this freedom; freedom is not a state, it is not something I possess; I myself am freedom. What others annihilate is not my freedom but myself. Man is the only free being in the universe and he is created as pure freedom. My being, understood as something completely different than the world, different from things and different from animality, is freedom, the freedom to be something else. My humanity is freedom and my freedom is humanity. Freedom is the fundamental structure of man and reason a function of this fundamental structure. Freedom is not a creation of reason, of thought in general, of historical praxis, but a fundamental given. "Given" means offering. God alone can give man his humanity. Man is the creation of God, the expression and the gift of his power. Man could not have created himself, he cannot create his own fundamental humanity, man is pre-given from the very beginning, from the origin to the end. Man does not become human at the end of history, but is human from primordial times, he is human, fully human, from the beginning of history. This humanity which is given to me suffers during my temporal enslavement, my self-forgetfulness and the aggression of others towards me[13].

How can it be possible to forget freedom, to hide one's fundamental structure? Because I am man, I am permanently subject to this risk, this defiance of my nature, I am permanently subject to my own internal dissolution, the sin of forgetting and forgetting myself, insisting instead on the univocal existence of the quotidian which itself "forgets me" and through the violence of the other against me, which is the will to annihilate, the pure expression of the will to dominate. And so I fall, revealing my divided human condition and the extreme "friability" of my own existence. Faced with this inability, it is not the truth that escapes me, the rational awareness of this truth, but the existential exercising thereof, the ability to propose it as an experience and not as a defeated theoretical conscience. Man's moral conscience, which is the conscience of truth, the adoption of the truth of actions and relations, the relationship with the other, is always the conscience of paradox because it is aware that it is a conscience of freedom, for example, but accepts being defeated, the conscience of defeat and submission. He who is able to transform this duality into tension, into the consciousness of agony, can retrace the path to his own humanity, his own freedom, can free himself.

Thanks to the demonic genius of communism, rebellion – the result of this division and an act of responsibility for oneself and one's peers, a sign of liberation, the adoption of one's own humanity and the humanity of the other – is annihilated by means of a rigorous mechanism, by means of threat and repression. Rebellion thus becomes a feeling in lieu of action and solidarity, openness in the fight for meaning and not entrapment in terror and the mechanics of fear. The multitude of frightened approvals/acceptances around you, their promotion as humanity, as history, simply as existence, frighten you and reduce you to the dimension of an unusual gestuality and on these grounds is predicable as guilty or futile. The paradox of a terrorised world is that it subsists, biology and the economy allow it to continue to exist in the form of a society, albeit society itself has been abolished. And this paradox, human or inhuman, is a living paradox, a quotidian paradox, an event that allows existence to consume itself and, through this, even allows of the possibility of exploitation at

13) St. Augustine (2006) Confesiuni, Book X, pp. 204-247, Nemira, Bucharest, translated by Eugen Munteanu.

some point in terms of rebellion or victory.

Rebellion is transformed into hope.

The humanity "produced" by communism is a frightened humanity, a disastrous mass that secretes the sage cowardice of survival. A nation is mutilated by this experience, even if this features resistance or opposition, the force of this machine being far too strong and devouring. All the same, the moral order of individuals slips through the net and manages in places to become ethos. In these amorphous dialectics of the living, the faces of the people, although gloomy, manage to see and respond to each other. It is neither a solution nor a victory, but simply what happens. Man subsists miraculously even in disaster, and communism is disaster and decomposition.

The rebellion, the consequence of agony, is an inner act that seeks a gesture, the gesture being my message for the other, the visible acknowledgment of his presence in the realm of my freedom. Rebellion is the desire to co-opt the other in the openness of solidarity in order to reclaim freedom together, that is to return together to the existence of good, my recognition and that of the other as the tension of the return to the fundament of existence. In this establishment of an essential relationship, in this relating of one to the other in order together to return from the deviation from good, the ethical relationship also reappears through the ability to rediscover the face of the other, not as another form of threat and captivity, but as joy and the certainty of a presence that certifies good. Living in fear and under pressure I forget the other, as in the annihilating abundance of mere materiality. The other becomes an abstraction, a self devoid of humanity, a non-self and non-presence. This makes it possible to instate and maintain terror, the loss of my humanity being at the same time also the stripping of meaning and presence of the other. The world becomes a vacuum, a space in which objects are manipulated and nothing more, a space of realised fictions, of objectualised fictions. In the vacuum of my fear, impotence, lack of solidarity and dissolution of the other's presence appears the absurd and the implacable mechanics of my reduction to a thing by the political powers that be, which thus become the arbiters of an imminent destiny. Politics and the state are no longer instruments but irreconcilable absurd and ruinous forces of fate which crush me and countless lives besides. And this phenomenon is terrifying both in the form of manifest and instantaneously destructive violence and the social mechanisation and uniformisation, for having crushed all resistance it holds a monopoly over social control. Irrespective of the victim's response – opposition, resistance, neutrality, acceptance – the phenomenon is frightening and pushes man to the limits of his condition as a being.

In the very realisation of this absurd outburst of evil as a nothingness that congeals time, space and consciences or non-consciences, the pain of an essential question appears and is maintained as tension: "How can I remain human until the end?" Here there appears the fear of the end of my own humanity, which is different from the fear for my own life. But what is this humanity which I realise I may risk losing, ending? This fear itself is my undefeatable humanity, this ability to fear and to question my moral limits, how I relate to myself in terms of the fear of the end, of agony, of the absence of God, represents my humanity, my human character. Therefore fear, in terms of relating to myself, to my own humanity and the humanity of others, is the transcendence of the self, my transcendence to fundaments and purposes. But to what am I able to transcend, if this transcendence exists? Only to my origin, which is also my fundament, to what is eternally the origin of the world and being. My thinking always remains behind this transcendence, despite conceiving of it and recognising it.

Thought itself form parts of this surpassing, this transcendence. Paradoxically, what founds man is the non-human, God himself, and the paradox of this transcendence is that it "ends" in mystery, in the abyss. "How can I remain human until the end?" receives the only possible answer: by a founding in faith, in

transcendence, in the indemonstrable, in the unthinkable of the abyss that brings the being back to the light, turning it into light. There is no other "sufficient reason" for not turning existence into calculation or possession[14].

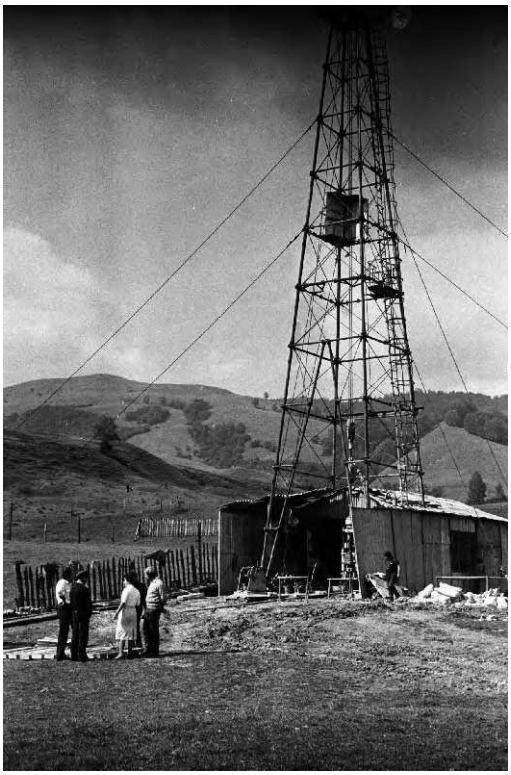
What is freedom? To go beyond. But beyond where? Beyond what? Beyond the lie, beyond the "image of the world", beyond the mathematical proof of the absurd, the captivity of existence trapped in the system, in the despair of the mechanisms that function, the civilisation that civilises and the reason that rationalises. To be beyond suffering through suffering, beyond beauty through beauty. Man himself is a beyond, he is the only one who through his being is beyond the world, nature, fate, and only in this way is his freedom the permanent realisation of his own essence of being beyond. But beyond is not protection, illusion and fiction, but correspondence, seeking and finding of the fundament. Beyond is not creation or self-creation, it is not the fulfilled history of victorious humanity. Man is that transition beyond, for this beyond is and gives humanity and also gives itself to humanity. The transition beyond by the human encounters transcendence at the origins because man is creation. This encounter is not a figure of speech, but a mystery of the origin, of creation. A mystery of creation and a mystery of freedom because man is beyond evil, but also beyond good. Man is able to choose to be beyond, in the nothingness of total absence, in the nothingness of self-annihilation, and as such he is beyond himself and beyond God, God in this case being "nothingness".

Suffering as fear and dread is the vehicle of liberation, of return to oneself. The suffering is the experience of the absence of beyond, the experience of captivity and the pain of not being able to overcome it. The malaise of the underground is the absence of suffering from captivity, is reconciliation with the enslavement caused by the departure from oneself, the forgetting of oneself. With the malaise of the underground existence becomes the plenitude of falsity of forgetting. Inexplicable to reason, the Gospel refers to man, to myself as a man of the underground. From out of the underground I am called to pass beyond, and this is why the Gospel is suffering, the plenitude of the suffering of man and the world, but also liberation, transition beyond, acceptance of the gift, the unveiling of the face, contemplation of presence. This beyond is therefore not a space or a place, but simply the fulfilment of plenitude, the presence of light that irradiates the being, for creation is nothing but "condensed light". In the mystery of his own presence, man is able to recognise the plenitude of what it means to be beyond, for here nothing can make him a being, here he is futile, a scandal to the world, a permanent defiance and a permanent threat.

14) See Marx's text on atheism and socialism in Manuscripts: "Atheism, as a denial of this inessentiality, has no longer any meaningfor atheism is a negation of God, and postulates the existence of man through this negation; but socialism as socialism no longer standes in any nees of such a mediation. It proceeds from the practically and theoretically sensous consciousness of man and of nature as the essence. Socialism is man's positive self-consciousness no longer mediated through the annulment of religion, just as real life is man's positive reality,, no longer mediated through the annulment of the private property, through communism.", op.cit. pp. 92-93.

Solidarity, identity and difference

The world and the other are beyond me. Beyond, in my relative proximity. The presence of the other is pure otherness in the first instance, a sign of reality and opposition. The other is my opposite but also my peer, a being existing beyond me but together with me here, enduring the ordeal of self-becoming, of presence as history. I and the other as another; the time separating us implies the creation and perpetuation of history. My relationship with myself inexorably passes through the other, his presence becomes substantial, irrevocable, my humanity is discovery together with the other, a shared being in opposition and struggle. The other is able to become my solitude, my annihilation or my freedom. I, the individual, the unique, am divided, my humanity is directly reflected in the face of the other. I am, but I am with him, be it as part of a historical co-presence or in a relationship of historical becoming. Naturally, there exists something irreducible in me, my own personal face, but the irreducible in me is at the same time communion, vision of the other, the initiation of the relationship. Through myself, my inner self, I see and conceive of the other; he exists through me and I exist through him, and the



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place of our reflection is the place of our freedom.

What we share is not only the being of humanity, but also the becoming in time, the terror of history. In the underground of our freedom we are one and the same, confined not to the irreducible but to repetition, to the similarity of eradication and absence. We are both the same simulacrum of the agonised man, the fake currency of history, the mortar for the bricks of fiction. In this communion of slavery and the underground we are, however, responsible for truth and freedom, not for victory or changing the world or man, but for maintaining the possibility of being human. My ultimate response is my ultimate word before God, but until that moment I live ultimatively, and in being aware of transcendence my daily response is an exercise of this brief burst of light. On a daily basis my relationship to the other can be described in terms of tension, indifference, aggression or reflection, but this relationship does exist and is essential – it says something about both of us and something to both us. The experience of the underground is that this relationship subsists, but only as a degradation, for freedom itself disappears, having been transformed into survival and the fear of freedom. If I am able to suffer for this relationship, if I laugh at my disfigured face and realise that it is my disfigured face in his face, and if the fear of the end is greater than the fear of freedom, then I can retrace my steps and the underground is left behind me as a trace left by me on earth. This is when the other becomes presence and the necessity of freedom, the beginning of the authenticity of the good. The other may at any time discover me, and I can see myself again in the other, just as I can hide or deny myself in the other. The other can be either my inferno or my freedom. This is why any society is essentially all about the relationship with the other, the establishment of this relationship and its practice. Communism, like any form of nihilism, builds this relationship in terms of the tension of possession and degradation, which is precisely the formula for an underground, that is the lack of foundation as the retention of the origin and revelation of transcendence. Communist humanism is precisely a humanism, and this is not a paradox. Humanism is the "place" where the identity of man finds itself as identity rediscovered. Communism is not human, but it is humanism in the sense that the human defines and reconstructs itself as the rationality of all possibility, as rejection of transcendence and tradition, as annihilation of the homeland and as the productivity of the material plenitude of the world and humanity. Man is thus no longer weakness and the delicateness of creation, but the key principle of the total construction of complete rationality. Communism is quite justified in defining and building itself as humanism, for it wishes to free man, in the tradition of the Enlightenment, from the strongest form of enslavement, that of transcendence, that is from the "slavery" of questions about himself, the world and divinity. The Marxist idea can also be found in the early writings of Lenin and Stalin, and the

Marxist meaning of history is precisely this, the emancipation of man (the true and only humanism), the emancipation from transcendence, the only way in which man can become human. Historical communism served only to emancipate man from all foundation, all roots. The man of communist humanism is uprooted par excellence. He is the man whose face is so new that it no longer resembles anything, it is the face of the absolute producer, of the slave who rises through production to the privilege of domination[15].

15) See Nikolai Berdyaev, Originile şi sensul comunismului rus, Dacia, Cluj, 1994.

16) See Martin Heidegger (1988) Scrisoare despre "umanism", in Repere pe drumul gândirii, Editura Politică, translation and introductory notes by Thomas Kleininger and Gabriel Liiceanu, pp.297-343.

Freedom, authenticity and existence in the tension of salvation

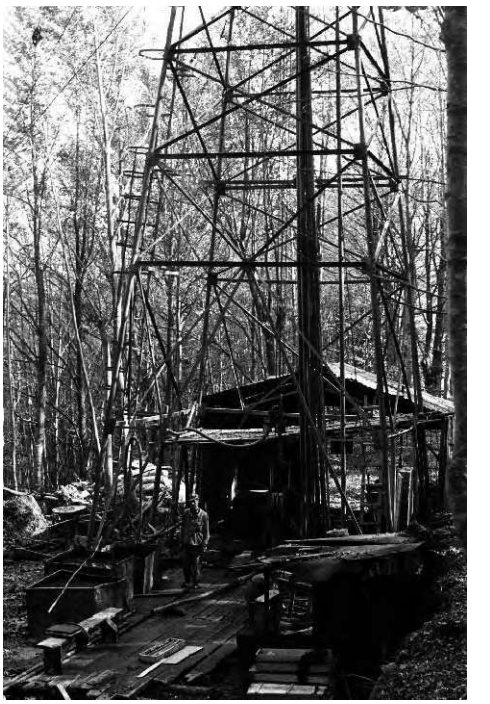
The metaphysical error of modern man did not end with the fall of communism. This in no way implies that the fall of communism does not create an opening in our destinies and does not afford us the opportunity, not only historical, of moving towards ourselves. The political and economic violence of communism is unbearable, and the uprootedness of man is everywhere present and therefore also where political and economic freedom exists. But can you really be free in a world that turns all people into the utensils of a giant universal reproduction and replaces the world with a mechanical and fictional double? Here, humanism is in the last instance the same desire for power and desire for denial, the same immense desire for solitude of the emancipated man[16]. Only an understanding of the world as an epiphany can shield man from his complete transformation into an instance of universal reproduction, an instance of instrumentalisation. When the world becomes an object, its essence is defined as manoeuvrability, experience of instrumentalisation and manipulation of objects in the space and time of a productivity accomplished as freedom. What founds this productivity is the understanding of the world itself as the objectual materiality of an infinite reproduction, in the sense in which the world is the infinite appearance and disappearance of matter, infinite production and reproduction of matter. What modern science posits is precisely the capacity of man, through experiment and knowledge, through technology, to co-participate in this infinite continuum of production and reproduction. Man becomes increasingly human through his technicality, which becomes co-participation in the naturalness of the nature of the world, co-production and reproduction of nature. In this world, human par excellence, man can no longer free himself as we, but only as I, as an individual, as indissoluble uniqueness. This is a world in which we no longer transpires as meaning and existence, for there is no longer any foundation and therefore also no communion, but only organisation.

In the experience of the underground created by communism as ultimate and eternal humanism, as a true end of history and a genuine experience of the limit, I can still return to myself, for this suffering triggers searching and questioning. In this suffering I also seek the other and I can find him or we can find ourselves together as part of an experience that rebuilds communication. When I come to realise that what is suffering within me is not only my self, but also the person within me that "contains" my own irreducible self, my humanity, then I can turn to God and to the other; I am ready. My suffering, my agony, is also my openness, my breaking, as if of a vicious circle, of my definite identity; as of this moment, my identity is no longer strict and monadic, but processual and interrogative, I am no longer trapped in a definition of the others or of society, but seek my own face and an existential experience of freedom.

The political terror of communism dehumanises both the victim and the executioner, and may also be the paradoxical consequence of rediscovering freedom, as the experience of incarceration of so many people confirms. At the epicentre of terror you can perfect yourself as humanity, as a living presence of the plenitude of existence. And then freedom is not the freedom to vote, but the freedom to be human until the end, not to jump ship, to be irre-

ducible. Terror, which is absurdity, lack of meaning, is therefore rejected and annihilated through freedom and foundation in transcendence as being that which gives being, essence and meaning. In this freedom that rebels against terror and the underground man ceases to be the failed actor of history and a stranger to the being of this world, just as he ceases to be only the absolute master of a perpetually manoeuvrable existence with the aim of establishing a world limited to the object of a ceaseless action of making. Contemporary man, the absolute subject of modern history, is a subject of historical action, a subject who acts with no other foundation than the action that simply produces effects meant to solve an impossible equation of transformation, effects which fuse together to form a faceless world, a world of actions and effects, of production of any kind which establishes the absence of any meaning other than that of utility and vitality.

He who leaves the underground, making his way out, whether by his own action or as the mere "accident' of history, must be aware that utility or emancipation is not fulfilment and rediscovery of the human, but the auxiliary of an existence. This is not a matter of conceiving of a freedom outside of the historical world, that is, an illusion opposed to another illusion, but of simply showing (indicating) an experience and not a doctrine, and any experience is also a thought that knows, an existential exercise of the tension of interrogation. It is not a matter of turning one's back on the firm universe of survival, of needs that must be met, of the bread that must be put on the table or shared, but rather, it is a matter of all that must be fulfilled as being human and the possibility to fulfil them as a man exercising his irreducible humanity. Communism itself began as a myth of the bread and capitalism is nothing but a technique to produce and save in order to invest with a view to acquiring comfort, profit and knowledge. Man must pass through the "systems" of the world or the world turned into a system so that he can live as much as possible in freedom and in the envisioned truth of the individual in order to defy constantly the terror of his being possessed as a thing by different powers. This implies permanently recasting the experience of tension between truth and falsehood, between freedom and slavery, between me and the other, between the world and transcendence, between here and beyond, between the world and Revelation.



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MARTOR

Title: "The Repression and Resistance. Women Remembering their Daily Life in Romanian Communist Prisons"

Author: Claudia-Florentina Dobre

How to cite this article: Dobre, Claudia-Florentina. 2012. "The Repression and Resistance. Women Remembering their Daily Life in Romanian Communist Prisons". *Martor* 17: 39-50.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

Repression and Resistance. Women Remembering their Daily Life in Romanian Communist Prisons

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ABSTRACT

The everyday life in a communist prison was characterized by terror, repression, harsh living conditions. Nevertheless, women, former political detainees, struggled to overcome all the difficulties in order to survive and to tell their story. This is the story of their faith in their victory over unfortunate and unpredictable historical events.

KEYWORDS

Communist repression, women's agency, everyday life, prison, post-communist discourse

You were not with us in the cells
to know what life in darkness is
in the claws of beasts with gaping maws
You don't know how a human being screams
when crushed by iron chains
– Radu Gyr, *You Were Not With Us in the Cells*

Introduction

Scholars interested in the history of daily life are still searching for answers to a question essential to the understanding of Western modernity and postmodernity: "is the everyday a realm of submission to relations of power or the space in which those relations are contested or at least negotiated in relatively interesting ways?"(Highmore, 2002: 5) There are two major theoretical approaches to this problematic: the first privileges agency, while the second emphasizes structures.

The first approach is masterfully exemplified by Michel de Certeau. His studies of daily life investigate individuals' emotions, experiences, reactions, and, most of all, resistance to the system of domination. The second approach is inspired by Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault. Both philosophers emphasize the permanence of structures, of institutions, and of dominant representations in the daily life of individuals from specific societies and particular historical moments (Highmore, 2002: 5).

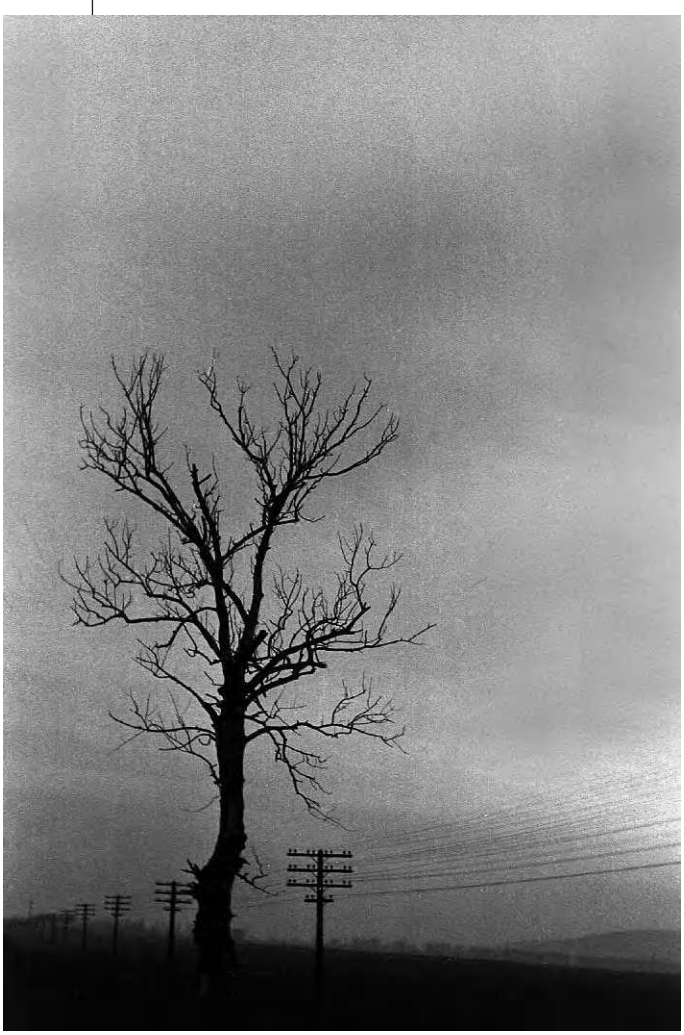
This article does not discount the influence of structures, dominant representations, and institutions in individuals' daily lives. However, it privileges individuals' capacity to resist power relations, to subvert dominant representations, and to assume risks; in other words their ability to exercise what Anglophone scholars define as agency. 'Agency' stands for "the freedom of the contingently acting subject over and against the constraints that are thought to derive from enduring social structures. To the extent that human beings have agency, they may act independently of and in opposition to structural constraints, and/or may (re)constitute social structures through their freely chosen actions." (Loyal, Barnes, 2001: 507) Judith Butler defines agency not only in terms of resistance to power relations, but also the risks assumed by this resistance (Butler, 1997: 29).

The starting point of this study is a particular microcosm, namely communist prisons. The analysis focuses on the memories of a distinct category, that of Romanian women detainees during the 1950s. The study of prison daily life raises a number of questions regarding the definition of daily life in a universe that is not normal, usual, or stable - a universe out-

This paper was supported by the strategic grant POSDRU/89/1.5/S/62259, Project "Applied social, human and political sciences. Postdoctoral training and postdoctoral fellowships in social, human and political sciences" co-financed by the European Social Fund within the Sectoral Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013"

side of the private and of the family spheres. If we define daily life as the space in which human beings exercise a direct influence through their behavior on the real and immediate circumstances of their lives (Wierling, 1995 : 151), is it possible to detect the human capacity to resist power relations (assuming even mortal risks) in an incarcerated space such as communist prisons? Can we apply to the world of prisons the definition according to which daily life is both an arena in which dominant social relations are reproduced and a locus of resistance, of revolt, of transformation?

To find answers to my questions, I will analyze a few interviews I have conducted with former political detainees. Between 2003 and 2006, following the theory and method of oral history (récits de vie) (Bertaux, 1997), I have questioned eight women and seven men imprisoned in the 1950s by the communist authorities. The women informants were incarcerated for various periods in the Jilava and Mislea prisons. Most of these ladies received amnesty in 1955. This was due to changing East-West relations, to Romania's accession to the United Nation organization, and to the country's adoption of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights".



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Their narratives may be regarded as "life reviews" (Thomson, 2000: 137), since the interviewees were over 70 years old (except for one woman who was 68 at that time). All women and men were retired and involved in various activities related to the memory of communism. They were informants for research projects, consultants for movies, documentaries, and involved in trials pertaining to the communist repression. The criteria for choosing my informants were related to their education, to their confidence in me as a researcher, and to the reasons for their imprisonment (i.e., their anti-communist endeavors).

The research followed the snowball interview sampling technique, one informant introducing me to another. This technique is the most appropriate in dealing with sensitive issues, such as political persecution, because of the need for trust between informant and researcher.

The main informant was a woman who had known me for years. She introduced me to some of her women friends and former cellmates as a young Romanian historian conducting a research on the memory of political persecutions in Romania. Furthermore, she explained to her friends/ colleagues that I would defend my PhD thesis in front of intellectuals from Europe and Canada. My informants were keen to make their life-stories known to the Western world. They wanted to prove that Romanians opposed communism, which was a destructive system. They all firmly stated that they were very pleased to

collaborate in a research project leading to a PhD thesis that would be defended in the West.

Thus, my focus group consisted of friends, family, and former cellmates imprisoned by the communist authorities for various reasons - some invented by the Securitate officers with no proof - such as espionage, disturbing the public order, conspiracy, and other similar charges.

All my informants belonged to the interwar middle-class, the so-called "bourgeoisie", and they all eventually built intellectual careers during communism. They were researchers, teachers, translators, engineers, etc. The interviews were conducted in Romanian, in their homes. No family or friends ever attended these interview sessions, which lasted from 30 minutes to a few hours; the length depended completely on the interviewees themselves.

The "non-directive" technique of interviewing presupposes a broadly framed opening question. I asked my informants to tell me their lives from the earliest time they remembered until the time of the interview. In order not to disturb their logic and chronology, I restrained myself from asking questions. I interrupted them only if there was something I did not understand, or needed an explanation concerning prison jargon. The interviews were recorded on tape. During each session, I wrote down the gestures and/or body language of my informants. Afterwards, I transcribed their life-stories for the purpose of narrative analysis.

This article will focus only on women's experience of repression and everyday life in Jilava and Mislea prisons. Without adopting an explicit gender perspective, my article will explore what daily life in the communist prison meant for women. What were the women's daily living conditions? How did they experience the reconstruction of their subjectivity after undergoing the methods of identity destruction practiced by the communist regime? How did these middle-class prisoners from the interwar period face the burden of their own femininity?

Jilava: A Romanian Bastille

Jilava was one of the harshest prisons, where the communists terrorized thousands of people for more than two decades. Its former inmates called it the "Romanian Bastille". People who waited to be interrogated, to go (or go again) on trial, or were brought back for "an additional interrogation" - as it was said at the time - were detained at Jilava. Because it was a transit penitentiary, Jilava was a mixed prison, housing in different buildings both women and men.

One of the women I interviewed describes her arrival to the penitentiary in the following manner:

After the trial, with black glasses on, we were transported in vans to Jilava. Here they took our glasses off […] Jilava was a fortress built in the era of Carol I. Around Bucharest there were several fortresses, the one at Jilava bore the number 13. It used to be a prison even during the time of Carol I […] Once at Jilava, our trial "lot" was divided into the four cells for women.

Another woman remembers what such a cell looked like: "At Jilava they took us to a very damp room, water was running on the walls! In the room we had a bucket of water, but this water was green because we were not allowed to properly wash the bucket."

The four cells had three rows of bunk beds. Such a cell could house up to 80 prisoners, some of them belonging to the same trial contingent. The beds were equipped with straw mattresses and blankets. The pillow consisted of a bundle of clothes, but this only in the case of the "lucky" prisoners who came to jail "prepared." The other women slept with their heads directly on the mattress, which was often stained with the blood of those who had already suffered in communist jails.

The cell windows were nailed shut and in the middle of the room there was a stove in which the inmates lit fires during the winter in order to warm themselves. They were given green branches that were hard to light and

produced more smoke than heat. Also in the cell, there was the slop bucket where the women had to relieve themselves in sight of everybody. Once filled, the pail was taken outside and emptied. One of the participants in my research recalls with horror this experience, which traumatized her profoundly: "At Jilava, I got to know the slop bucket. I was prudish and not used to this community of women. For me, it was a shock to see women carrying on conversations while relieving themselves."

The daily hygiene routine took place in the room. Once every two weeks, the women were allowed to take a shower, the shower room being located in another section of the prison. The shower, however, was more akin to a method of torture rather than of sanitation. The water was either very cold or very hot, and it stopped suddenly. The women had to wash in a hurry - within five or ten minutes. In this short time, the women also washed their lingerie, which they then wore wet. If they did not hurry upon exiting the shower, the inmates were beaten. A woman described to me her experience in the washing room in the following way: "We had a wicked female guard who hit us every time we got out of the shower. One day, being pregnant, I stuck my belly out and she dared hit me no longer. Shortly thereafter, she was reassigned."

The food was terrible, sometimes downright inedible. Another lady who participated in this research tells the following story: "The buckets full of food were taken to the door by the male prisoners, after which we took them into the room. One time, the food smelled so bad that the female guard who watched us placed her handkerchief over her nose. Another time, we were served the famous worm-infested pork scraps".

The food regimen, together with the bromine in the food rations, caused the women's menstrual cycle to stop. In the delicate period before this happened, the inmates received an additional piece of wadding and a cup of water above the usual norm.

Life at Jilava was terrible. Nevertheless, for the persons incarcerated there, the winter of 1954 exceeded any limit. A woman recalls those days with horror: "In February 1954, there was a huge snowstorm. The snow reached to the height of houses. There was a story circulating then, that a prisoner who had just been released had to return to jail because of the storm. The irony of fate!"

In Jilava, the women prisoners were permitted to walk, daily, for half an hour around the interior courtyard. The walk took place in a circle with hands behind the back. Talking was forbidden. Any breach of the rules was punished with beatings and/or confinement to the lock-up room. Care packages or letters from home were prohibited. Nothing from outside the prison was supposed to enter the cells, sometimes not even a ray of sunlight.

The daily life of the prisoners was regimented and controlled by the holders of power. It was a life surrounded by secrecy. A lady recalls that "at Jilava everything was done in secret: if cell 4 was allowed out, the other [cells] were not supposed to see… well, big secret…" The daily life of the prison was designed as a method of torture. The object was the annihilation of individual will and of the prisoners' capacity to (re)act.

Mislea, the Women's Prison

All the ladies with whom I have collaborated in the course of my research were incarcerated between 1952 and 1960 at Mislea, one of the most famous women's prisons during the communist regime. Mislea was an old Orthodox nunnery already converted before the Second World War into a regular women's prison. After the communists took power, Mislea was transformed into a penitentiary for women political prisoners. Outside the enclosure of the former monastery, there were still barracks housing ordinary convicts (Grossu, 1976: 82). In 1954, Mislea counted 397 political prisoners. (Ciuceanu, 2001: 18)

My informants who left Mislea after the

amnesty of August 23, 1955 were compelled to sign a promise that they would never discuss what they saw there. The former prisoners respected their commitment and did not do so during the communist period. However, the collapse of the regime released them from any vow of silence. It offered them the chance to tell the story of what they have lived through and to describe what daily life in prison meant.

The arrival at Mislea was by its very nature a traumatizing experience: the transit to the Bucharest North Railway Station, the journey by cattle train, the march or transport by truck from the Câmpina train station to the prison, in the dead of night. One of the women remembers this sad journey, yet another occasion for the communist authorities to inflict humiliation and torture:

Last stop, Câmpina. From the bowels of the railway car, and after 18 months of detention, we were pushed into fresh air. Because it was June, the chestnut trees were in full bloom. We were about 50-60 women who journeyed without luggage. After we disembarked, we were immediately surrounded by soldiers with their weapons pointed at us. We were shoved into a partially uncovered truck and traversed the city. It was the first time when we were seeing regular people, greenery, flowers, shops…

Other women, however, lived through the long and exhausting march:

It was the winter of 1955. From Jilava, they took us, again by train, to Mislea. In the train, I had the opportunity to know Vida Nedici, who was accused of spying for Tito. I don't know if this name tells you anything; it is then that I found out who she was. She had ascended to a high rank in the Ministry of Interior; she conducted inquests and investigated all those who used to be paratroopers, spies sent to organize the resistance, and she tortured them […] Then, we were in the train at night, going from Bucharest to Mislea, [and] one could not discuss a great deal, but she told me how it was, how elegant [she used to be] and how high she had risen, and then what happened to her. When we arrived at Băicoi, they disembarked us from the train and we walked to Mislea. It was winter, but there was such a beautiful field, everything was frozen, everything seemed translucent. The stars above shone so beautifully that it seemed to me an amazing landscape. I was looking at how all of us were walking, each with her little bag and dressed how she could.

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'The lifers', as they were called, [namely] the women with long or life sentences wore leg irons and walked very slowly, dragging their chains. Under that light, under those clear and starry skies, the convoy had a sinister air about it. We looked like little bundles heading towards death or who knows what…

Mislea housed a 100-person dormitory reserved for women with sentences shorter than 10 years or those not yet tried. "The Big Secret" was organized in other cells for women condemned to more than 10 years or for the "lifers." Close to the "Big Secret" was a small cell called the "Little Secret," used for confining punished inmates. The monastery's church served as a storage space.

Daily life at Mislea started with the headcount, which took place in the yard. There followed washing, dressing, and the morning meal. Inmates who had the right to work then headed for the workshops. Lunch break took place in the monastery's former refectory. At the end of the 12-hour work shift, the prisoners headed to the dormitories. Lights-out was at 22.00 and no activity was allowed after that time.

There were three workshops at Mislea: the first for threading wool, the second for weaving carpets, and the third for manufacturing shirts. In communist jails, labor was conceived both as a method of oppression and as a means of rehabilitation.

The detainees who had the right to work, namely those with light sentences or those not yet tried, could choose one of the three workshops. The work quota was 12 hours per day. The women worked non-stop. The advantage of working was better food and purchase coupons that could be exchanged for sugar, marmalade, and cigarettes. Working conditions were harsh, especially in the winter.

A former prisoner recounts that, "in the winter, during the nightshift, we warmed ourselves with an old iron carpet beater, which we warmed over the only stove in the room. We tried to unfreeze our hands. There were work quotas that were sometimes exceeded by zealous prisoners, and this made the situation of those who were frailer more difficult."

Laboring in the workshop helped the inmates to cope better with their confinement. As one lady recalls, it even offered them opportunities for amusement:

What I tell you happened in the carpet-weaving workshop where one used looms, one of these looms [called in Romanian "razboi", the same word for war] being very large and used for weaving immense carpets. One time, this loom fell down and the girls started yelling "razboiul, razboiul [the war, the war...]" Everybody thought that the war between the USA and the USSR had started, and that the noise had been caused by an exploding bomb: We rapidly convinced ourselves that they weren't talking about the long-awaited war…

Sanitary conditions were better at Mislea compared to those at Jilava. In the morning, the prisoners washed themselves with cold water. Once a week, they took a shower. Since the inmates were tasked with housekeeping both in the washroom and in their own rooms, there was a high level of cleanliness. Even those detainees less used with personal hygiene, such as peasant women, were required to wash regularly and to take care of their clothes. A former prisoner relates the following:

The washer was a sort of trough fit for horses to drink water from. There were some faucets that one could turn on and wash. Warm water did not exist, there was only cold water. There was only one bar of soap, which passed around from one to another. There was plenty of time to freeze, to get a cold, to get sick. Due to this experience, I acquired a lifelong obsession with being cold.

The more diversified food continued to be a means of humiliating and even destroying the inmates. A woman remembers how, at Mislea, she became reacquainted with the "famous" pork scraps: "After some time they served us some scraps, but the scraps crawled with worms. They had made a kind a gruel to which they added these scraps, but the scraps had such a horrible smell that one could not even stay in the mess hall. We entered, took

our piece of bread, and ran outside… This story lasted about 3 days…"

In order to demonstrate their dominance by terrorizing the detainees, the prison authorities conducted regular dormitory and body searches. Most of the times, these took place in the middle of the night. The inmates were taken into the courtyard and stripped, while the guards searched every corner for a pencil, a scrap of paper, a pin, or a peel of soap. A lady characterized these searches as "the periodic amusement of the guards."

Challenging authority or showing dissatisfaction with living conditions was a good reason for confinement to the "hole." An eyewitness described the "hole" in the following terms: "a cement cell normally used for storing provisions, but now used for punishment." This lady had the misfortune to be punished because:

One spring, a prosecutor showed up. He inspected our dormitories and we stood aligned near our beds. We talked and he asked us if we had anything to report. He was accompanied by the prison commandant… And in that entire crowd who do you think had the bright idea to report?! "I say yes, I have something to report". Look, they took our soap away and I also told him that we had been given rotten food, so that for three days we could not eat. He says, "all right I will investigate and take measures." I don't think the prosecutor reached the gates that I was simply swept away to be punished… I stayed for 7 days in the "hole," and had only a canteen full of water and a piece of bread. My bed was brought into the cell in the evening and taken away at 5 in the morning. The bed was one of those "campaign beds" with no mattress or pillow, only the metal reticulation. Once in a while, the warden came by and told me to "wake up." I stayed for 7 days and was cold and hungry. After 7 days, they took me out of there and stuck me in "Secret."

The Construction of Subjectivity

Daily life in prison was dominated by repression, anxiety, violence, but also (re)adaptability, and the reinvention of self. Although subjected to the brutal oppression which characterized life in communist prisons, the ladies I interviewed succeeded by means of various "tactics" (Certeau, 1984: 37-38) and "rhetorical maneuvers" (Phillips, 2006: 312) to resist and (re)construct themselves despite the system's "strategies" (Certeau, 1984: 35-36) employed to destroy them. This was the mode of resistance typical of daily life, a type of resistance that undermines the force and the representations of the dominant power (Certeau, 1984: 151).

Daily prison life was a creative bricolage whereby the self repositioned itself in extreme conditions. Socialized in a bourgeois milieu, my informants incorporated norms and practices disavowed by the communist regime. During the interwar period, middle class women were reared in the values of liberty, individualism, patriotism, of respect for others, and idealism. In prison, these values were observed. Affirming them meant punishment by the prison authorities. Nevertheless, these women upheld these values both in prison and thereafter. In fact, as many of them stated, being in jail was regarded as normal, because they represented the bourgeois class enemy of the communists.

One of the women told me she even wanted to go to jail, because "all the quality people had been or were in jail. In my mind, prison was like an adventure […] I wanted to penetrate this mystery, to see for myself what occurred there…" Treated as "enemies of the people," these ladies proudly assumed this new identity by translating it into their own idiom. They regarded themselves as the "personal enemy of the communists." One of my informants states: "They tried to crush us... they tortured us… but we had the satisfaction of not letting ourselves be humiliated, that we fought them even in prison."

Agency and the Prison Practices of Disobedience

Despite the domination, which aimed to be total, as well the constant repression, the political detainees circumvented the system at every opportunity. Most of the times, they created these opportunities by deploying various "tactics."

In prison conditions, communicating with others became a means of resistance. In Jilava, a piece of newspaper, news transmitted via Morse code, questions addressed to new arrivals or inmates in transit, were ways of finding out about the outside world. Although strict, the control of the Mislea authorities could be more easily evaded. The women incarcerated here were freer. They could move around the prison courtyard and sometimes succeeded in communicating with the regular inmates. The latter worked outside the grounds of the monastery, had access to information, and, when it was possible, shared with the political prisoners what they knew about the outside world. It was the regular prisoners who brought them the news about the reprieves of 1955. In addition, the regular prisoners donated them vegetables when they could mislead the guards.

Another way of disobeying prison rules was to refuse food. Hunger strikes or the rejection of spoiled food were methods for gaining concessions, such as obtaining medical care for an ill prisoner. Most of the times, such an initiative resulted in the punishment of the "recalcitrant" persons.

Sometimes, in order to avenge themselves, the inmates forced to wash the shirts and personal lingerie of the soldiers and guards scrubbed them until they tore apart, especially when these items were very dirty. The risk to the prisoners was great. If caught, they could be beaten, tortured, or punished with confinement to the lock-up.

Human solidarity, too, was a means of circumventing oppression, domination, and the communist authorities' desire to destroy the women prisoners. One of the ladies remembers such a gesture:

My friend Mariana was with me in the cell… The girls insisted that Mariana, who had a terrible cough, be taken to the hospital. Finally, they decided to take Mariana to the Văcărești prison-hospital. They notified us one day in advance. It was shower day, but I decided to stay with her and help her, because she was extremely weakened, incapable of moving by herself. I remember that, and I regret it to this day, hearing the key in the door, I wanted to give her something and I climbed quickly into bed, I slept on the third level and, trying to descend, I fell on my back, it hurts even now, and thus I did not give her anything and neither did I manage to say goodbye to her. After two months, someone who came from Văcărești told us that Mariana had died…

The communist strategy was to destroy the individual, to deprive him/her of any capacity for action, reaction, and even reflection. Despite these circumstances, the women found resources to manage their daily lives. In a manner similar to what happened at Jilava, at Mislea the resistance was organized through study, storytelling, prayer, and play. Prisoners shared cooking recipes, described places they had visited, recounted books, recited poems, and even staged plays. In the inhuman conditions of detention, every gesture represented a condensation of memory and every remembrance played the role of bringing the past into the present. (Certeau, 1986:4)

Faith in God played an important role in the detainees' survival, in their adaptation to prison life, and in their salvation from the despair brought about by seclusion. The inmate population included a good number of Catholic and Greco-Catholic nuns, women belonging to the legionary movement (fond of Orthodox religion and traditions), and Jewish women. This enabled the practice of rituals specific to each religious denomination. Worship was held in each separate dormitory, and was conducted either by nuns or by persons versed in the specific practices of their religious denomination.

Because they were banned, all religious practices were observed in secret. Prisoners were punished for expressing their faith. Nonetheless, the inmates succeeded in celebrating Christmas and Easter. By means of skill and "tactics", they even managed to prepare the special Easter cake and sometimes knocked eggs smuggled in or made ad hoc.

Even desperate situations, such as confinement to "Secret", were turned to the prisoners' advantage by dint of will and ability. A lady recollects:

There were some entertaining moments at Mislea. There was a female guard there, who was naive and easy to fool. We started to keep this guard busy, we plucked her eyebrows [and] we refined them. But how to tweeze her when we didn't have tweezers?! I had with me a small button, and this is what I used. Of course, I didn't have any cream and so I requested a medical cream, a cream for hemorrhoids. I sat up in bed and, while she put her head in my arms, the other girls went to talk with the "lifers" and the other inmates with long sentences, because we were all on the same floor. When she entered our cell, this guard left the door open, and the girls swarmed everywhere, they went to see their [trial] mates, to find out one thing or another. Times were good as long as we had her as a guard. It was we who ended up guarding her, because she was so comfortable in my arms waiting to be tweezed and massaged, that we ended up standing sentry in order to prevent anyone surprising her in this position.

Repressed Femininity, Feminine Resistance

Daily life is the locus in which not only subjectivity, but also femininity is constructed. Feminist theory even discusses the concept of a gendered everyday life. Naomi Shor argues for the existence of a "feminine daily life" tied to the rituals of private life, unfolding in the domestic sphere. She further maintains the existence of a "masculine daily life" that takes place on the streets, markets, and other public places - regarded as the domain of men. (Shor, 1992: 188)

Middle class girls/ women of the interwar period internalized during their growing-up process a certain conception about the masculine and the feminine, as well as about the qualities characterizing both sexes. Femininity was regarded as comprising of grace and elegance, sensitivity, discretion, and esthetic refinement. The modern woman was inoculated to eschew vulgarity, spontaneity, and violence. She was encouraged to mind her personal appearance in accordance with the feminine ideal promoted by the cosmetic and fashion industries. (Duby, Perrot, 1992: 303)

Once in power, communist authorities did all they could to destroy the middle class. The emancipation of women at any price, promoted by the art and literature of the period, was one of the key points of their agenda. In prison, the communist program to eradicate middle class acquired a different meaning and new dimensions. Nevertheless, even in the seclusion, the femininity, although not necessarily destiny, (Butler, 1990: 8) but rather a component of the gender habitus (Bourdieu, 1980), represented a form of resistance to communist endeavors.

As the relationship of women with their own bodies, with others, with society at large, is mediated by the dominant culture by means of quotidian practices, of representations, as well as the clothing items associated to daily life (Bordo, 1993: 15), the everyday life in prison was meant to indulge a new mentality. Brutal measures were taken in order to destroy the "bourgeois" vision of femininity. The detainees' body, their interface with the outside world, was first and foremost targeted by the authorities.

The regimen of nutrition, of hygiene, of rest, as well as esthetics played an important role in the "ritual annihilation" (Le Breton, 1998: 97-99) of the prisoners' bodies. The body was subjected not only to torture, but also to a type of ritual rape in the form of gynecological exams. One of the women re-

counts that these regular controls seemed to her the most dreadful thing that happened to her in communist jails.

Despite these circumstances, the persecuted women tried to subvert the domination and control over their own bodies. In prison, the woman's body became a "site of resistance" (Frigon, 2002: 58-59) against the system. During the period of seclusion, they did everything possible to maintain a rigorous personal hygiene by washing daily. They also tried to eat the most varied foods possible, resorting to different tactics in order to do so. In Mislea prison, the inmates stole salad and cabbage leaves, as well as carrots when they were deposited in the courtyard. Moreover, despite the extreme conditions, some of these ladies even managed to preserve certain stylishness. One of the women remembers that, since she was not sentenced, but rather detained by "administrative decision," she used to arrange her hair "in curls" every day, thinking that she would be released any moment, and wishing to appear "proper" and feminine. Another woman used to mend her silk stockings for the day when she would leave prison.

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The violence, although present in the body to this day, is passed over in silence in the discourse of the women interviewed. A lady showed me her broken hand, while another told me about the method of torture inflicted on her. No one talked about rape, not even in regards to their fellow inmates. This is an attitude reflecting the habitus of the bourgeois woman - an outlook that presupposes the non-display of violence over the body and its absence from discourse. However, this silence may also be interpreted as an inability to talk about extreme experiences. (Pollak, 2000:182)

Another method of control over individuals and their bodies, which the detainees keenly felt as a stigma, was the requirement to wear the prison suit. This garment was fashioned from an awful material that scratched the skin. The prisoners wore it over their own clothes.

The clothes worn in daily life signify a person's position and status in society.(Joyce, 2005: 142) Depriving the inmates of this signifier of social identity was yet another communist strategy of annihilating the individual and the group to which s/he belonged. Without being a communist practice, the prison' habits being invented before communism, zeghea, the clothes worn by political detainees, were made of very scratchy material which destroyed the skin.

The experience of prison was a boundary-stretching experience for the women who participated in my research. The fight for survival, renewed daily, dictated first and foremost a struggle against one's own body. The force of character displayed by these women allowed them to push limits of personal endurance, to overcome hunger and thirst, to endure the cold, the absence of sleep, and the inhuman treatments inflicted on them.

"Hell is the Others"

Daily life is not only the site for the construction of the self and of gender identity, but also an arena where the individual performs various acts. During his/her interaction with others, s/he interprets different roles, thereby trying to influence them with the aim of obtaining something. (Goffman, 1959: 3-16) This performance carries within itself the vision of the world and the values of the group to which the individual belongs. (Lemert, Branaman, 1997: 97)

The prison was an arena where the detainees had to endlessly perform roles: in front of the guards, the prison authorities, their fellow sufferers. The permanent presence of others created an external discomfort. At other times, it produced miracles.

In addition to the roles imposed by the authorities, the inmates lived through the daily staging of self-performance in relation to their fellow sufferers. A former inmate recalls that the quotidian inferno was sometimes marked by quarrels:

We clashed among ourselves, sometimes over nothing. Even for a piece for bread. The room boss, all rooms had a boss, had to allocate bread that had already been cut, thus distributing all the slices, whether larger or smaller. Still, even the smaller pieces had to be dispensed. The tension in the cells was very high. There were days when we got along very well and days when we fought over inane reasons.

One ray of light warmed this inferno: the intense cultural activity that took place in the cells. This became both a form of resistance against the communist system and a method of survival for those who had been incarcerated. The detainees learned foreign languages, recited poems, and narrated novels and films. Conferences were held on various subjects, while the women who had not lost their faith prayed.

A lady evokes with pride the image of an environment where culture was the only means of tearing them away from the evil that had become a banality of their daily lives:

There were distinguished people in our cell at Jilava. Wives of former ministers, university professors, high school teachers, the Secretary of the American Embassy who taught us English… We spoke among ourselves mostly in French and German so that the guard could not understand us. Many women prayed and everybody told stories.

Conclusions

Daily life in communist jails questions the pertinence of analyzing daily life through the prism of the influence of power relations and of the existence of a subtle resistance to domination. In the world of the communist prison, everything was controlled, manipulated, and repressed. The system aspired to the total annihilation of individual will, capacity for action, and even reflection by means of an oppressive and inhuman lifestyle. Nonetheless, the life histories shared by the ladies who participated in my research, also confirmed by other prison memoirs (Constante, 1993; Orlea, 1991, Samuelli, 2001), prove the human capacity to resists terror and, most importantly, show that even in extreme conditions, the individual finds resources to oppose domination, thereby assuming the risks inherent in this stance.

The daily prison life of the political detainees I interviewed was marked by the efforts of the communist regime to maintain total control over the individual, to dehumanize him/her. Communist social engineering endeavored to create the "new man", a machine devoid of reflexive capacity and will to revolt against the system. Despite these efforts, the life stories of the participants in my research show that, even in the daily world of incarceration, the "total colonization of daily life by the system" (Certeau, 1997: 137-138) is practically impossible.

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Title: "Public and the Private in Communist Romania: The Retrospective of a Dynamic Dichotomy Twenty Years after the Demise of the Communist Regime"

Author: Maria Mateoniu

How to cite this article: Mateoniu, Maria. 2012. "Public and the Private in Communist Romania: The Retrospective of a Dynamic Dichotomy Twenty Years after the Demise of the Communist Regime". *Martor* 17: 51-68.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

Public and the Private in Communist Romania: The Retrospective of a Dynamic Dichotomy Twenty Years after the Demise of the Communist Regime

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the dynamic relationship between the public and the private in the Romanian rural world during the communist period. The analysis is based on oral interviews with persons comprising various age groups and diverse socio-professional categories. The data was gathered during an anthropological research project on communism undertaken between 2011-2012 by the Romanian National Peasant Museum

KEYWORDS

Public - private, adaptation, resistance, compromise, approachment - reapproachment.

Considering that Marxist-Leninist ideology aspired to shape an egalitarian society, the attempt to apply the notions of public and private to the societies of the former Communist bloc may seem paradoxical (Christian, Knott, 2009: 1). The program of the Bolshevik Revolution took an explicit stance against the distinction between the public and the private, since the relationship between the two was regarded as intrinsic to bourgeois society. Indeed, the very notions of public and private were considered "bourgeois" ideological categories. As such, they had to be eliminated al all cost.

From a juridical standpoint, the regime replaced "public" with the notion of "common," while the expression "private" was substituted with the term "personal" (Christian, Knott, op. cit.: 6). The concept of "common" designated the domain of production carried out by means of etatized means of production. On the other hand, the notion of "personal" indicated consumption, which is an individual matter often engaged in by possessing private property over goods.

Despite the massive nationalization of the economy, the communist systems - including the Romanian regime - did not entirely suppress individual private property, least of all personal consumer goods. The regimes not only tolerated consumption, but also encouraged the development of a socialist consumer society as an alternative to capitalist consumerism (Betts, 2008: 1-54). Consequently, the communist regimes continued to act upon certain public and/or private realities, although the very existence of these categories was officially denied.

Contrary to what George Orwell implied in his anti-utopia, the communist regimes did not succeed in completely absorbing the private sphere. A personal, private life continued to exist alongside and in opposition to a transparent, surveilled, and controlled public sphere. Despite the ideological discourse that propounded the elimination of the cleavages between the two realms, the relationship between the two spheres was dynamic and constantly negotiated by social actors. Their practices contributed to the shaping of a new society conceived differently than the previous, allegedly bourgeois and retrograde social order.

This article focuses on the dynamic relationship between the public and the private in Romanian society during the period of com-

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munist rule, as well as on the modalities whereby this relationship evolved in response to state policies. The reaction of social actors to these policies will likewise be analyzed, particularly their strategies of circumventing, accepting, transgressing, or adapting to the new circumstances. The public - private relationship is understood here primarily as the connection between common and personal property, between the peasant homestead and the collective farm, and between the place of residence and the place of work and public expression.

The empirical material utilized here comprises a significant number of interviews completed in the period from 2010-2011. The interviews were undertaken in the framework of a research project on the anthropology of daily life under communism, sponsored by the Romanian National Peasant Museum[1] . The interviewees were of various ages and from diverse social environments. In order to better delineate the subject, we focused on the Romanian rural world, selecting from the gathered material the recollections regarding this specific frame of life. These memoirs provide the necessary elements for understanding not only the mechanism whereby the communist system functioned as a whole, but also the typology of daily practices that contributed to its reproduction.

We do not posit a dichotomy between state and society; we highlight this opposition only to the extent that it clearly emerges in the stories told by the informants. As researchers, we interrogate the relationship between the public and the private starting from the premise that the state is an emanation of society. In this context, individuals contribute passively or actively to the reproduction of the system. The relationship between public and private in the Romanian rural world during the communist period reveals specific elements of the system, as well as a distinct subjectivity - marked by distrust and fear - pertaining to citizens' relationship with the state and with authority. To a great extent, the situation continues today.

Politics is a social practice, an ideological form of quotidian life (Deyanova 2003: 166). The employment of the secret police to monitor citizens, the imposition of restrictive and discriminatory laws over a portion of the pop-

1) We would like to express our gratitude to all specialists and collaborators who participated in this research project under the aegis of the Romanian National Peasant Museum: Mihai Gheorghiu, Ana Pascu, Mirela Florian, Vlad Columbeanu, George Turliu, Dan Turcu, Irina Ornea, Oana Mateescu.

ulation, the transformation of the citizenry into simple marionettes on the political scene, particularly in regards to the right to elect and be elected to office, as well as the persecution of the old elite and its replacement with a new one, are undeniable realities. Without ignoring these realities, on the contrary, by foregrounding them, our starting hypothesis is that, despite their harshness, the authorities' oppressive policies did not lead to the eradication of private life. Private life was an intimate and secret domain that survived all coercions, and which became more relevant in direct proportion to the regime's measures of surveillance and control.

By recording and analyzing certain conjunctures and life fragments preserved in the memory of those who lived and experienced them, we are inevitably reconstructing a subjective and undoubtedly partial history of quotidian life during the communist period - particularly the evolution of the public - private rapport. We will survey the changes in the property regime starting with the instauration of the regime in 1945. This moment was followed by the terror of the 1950s, the highpoint of the planned economy during the 1960s and 1970s, and the terminal phase of decline and penury during the 1980s. We will document the attitudes of the authorities and of ordinary people towards production, consumption, leisure time, personal and civic responsibilities, as well as towards the insinuation of the state into the private life of citizens. At the same time, we will analyze the appropriation of public institutions by private individuals and the emergence of parallel non-public networks that led to the collapse of the regime.

The Metamorphosis of the Villages: The Quotas Regime, the Decline of Private Property, and the Collectivization of the Land

In Romania, the communist regime came to power by force. Its political adversaries were swiftly annihilated, their families put under surveillance and excluded from the public sphere. The public sphere became the terrain for applying the norms and practices meant to effectively eradicate the old system. The fact that Romania possessed no significant communist tradition is well known. Before 1945, the membership of the Romanian Communist party did not exceed 800 people. Most of them were city dwellers, while 75% of Romania's population consisted of peasants, with 80% of the latter possessing up to 10 hectares of land (Roberts, 1951: 51). This reality determined the new leaders to devote special attention to the rural world. Accordingly, the regime established two main objectives. First, the collectivization of agriculture and its incorporation in the planned socialist economy. Second, the implantation of party organizations in the villages (Roger, 2002: 25). This dual preoccupation of the authorities resulted in the development of a new, complex, and evolutive agrarian structure.

Despite the absence of a strong Romanian communist tradition, it is nonetheless true that the regime would not have gained power, much less survived, without the acquiescence or complicity of those who opportunistically adhered to the movement out of the desire to acquire high official positions. Against the backdrop of pervasive delations and conformism, the system of surveillance and control was rapidly instituted. The public space was invaded by imposed measures, by the elimination of so-called class enemies, and by the eradication of any opposition to the policies of the sole Party. Disavowing the principle of political pluralism, schools became the privileged terrain for the implementation of the new, singular course, for the radical transformation of society, and the creation of the "new man." Teachers were replaced by unqualified personnel; schools were joined together, while specializations and educational programs were hastily transformed. Controversial passages from textbooks were eliminated by the censorship mechanism, and books and magazines with a bourgeois sensibility were

banned. The nationalization and collectivization laws radically modified the relationship between public and private. The two spheres were reconfigured in relation with these new property laws. All these changes marked the beginning of the transformation of the rural space, which underwent radical changes under the impulse of the top-down measures enacted by the authorities. The constitution of "collective" property rendered the land, its products, and the labor force more easily legible and manipulable by the centralized authority (Scott, 2007: 18). Faced with these ultramodernist abusive policies, ordinary people lived with the hope of an outside intervention (the coming of the Americans), the desire to return to an earlier period, or a change for the better. They also lived with the feeling that their success was ephemeral or with the fear that they will become future victims of the terror instituted by the regime. Most often, they were motivated by the yearning to survive on the stage of history, quickly adapting to the new socio-political context.

Peasants were first subject to the quota system, which forced them to cede the greatest share of their crops harvested on their property to the state. This measure was implemented precisely in order to convince them to renounce their right to property and to accept joining the collective homesteads established on the model of the Soviet kolkhoz farms. Peasants that owned larger properties were rapidly framed as exploiters (chiaburi) of the poor peasantry. They were put under surveillance and imprisoned, sometimes for the most far-fetched reasons.

The constitution of "collective" property occurred in a gradual and difficult manner, following a long chain of abuses and intrusions into the private sphere. Peasants were subjected to unprecedented pressures in order to give up their right to individual property. This was the case of the peasants living in Bărăști, Haţeg district.

They didn't have reasons to tell why they imprisoned [my father-in-law]. That's how it was around here. We didn't have a boiler to make plum brandy, we didn't have… because one had to have a thresher machine, something [for which they could put one in jail]. But they assessed our property at over 10 hectares and then we were all classified as chiaburi. There were seven of us in this village. There were also some old people who lived here, across the road, and who died [and], they didn't come anymore. They were not taken to Alba Iulia, to Bicaz, to the Canal, because they were all old. 'Cause they measured the placement [of the properties] according to the old people's properties. And then they took old people, not children. They only took one [young] man instead of his father, who was very old, and [the young man] took his place in jail. [For my father-in-law] the motive was that he did not turn the stubble [when they wanted him to]. But one could not stubble-turn. We had oxen like lions and we went with my poor mother-in-law to try to do it. Those from the Popular Assembly told us to try, that if we did not want to try we were against the Party. There was no way, the earth was like concrete. We had iron ploughs, with Hungarian wheels. But it wasn't possible. We took the pigs for the quota and we arrived… [they said] that one also had to provide meat and milk. In two years, we were left dirt poor. We could only bring home straws, because one also had to give them hay. [In order to sustain ourselves] my husband discharged himself [from the army] and took a job [in the factory] at Călan. And during the winter he used to go to Călan, staying for six months at the coking plant. He used to come [home] the way he left the coke plant, he was black, only the teeth in his mouth were white. When his mother saw him, she cried. And this is in order to support ourselves. We had only the first child then, the second we had nine years later. He went [to the plant] both in the summer and in the winter, because [otherwise] we couldn't have made it. And then they went easier on the quotas. I don't remember for how long the quotas lasted, maybe two or three years. This great evil. It was so awful. For one cow, you had to deliver 700 liters of milk. [It was a lot]. Poor me! Because there was a drought. There was no hay to contribute, there was no grass in the

fields. If only these were better years to help us out! He went to Călan to buy butter for the quota, so that we would not end up in jail. If you didn't deliver the quota you ended up in prison, because you were considered [to be] against the regime. And then they went and bought 10 kilos of butter every trimester and delivered it to the quota. I don't know how many liters of milk was this butter worth. One could find bulk quantities of butter like this... [My folks] used to bring potatoes from Făgăraș; we brought them all to the reception area. We planted a hectare of potatoes, [but it was not enough]. When they brought us [potatoes] from Făgăraș, it was because they had a better harvest, for the seed was changed. Here we didn't really know about such matters. Neighbors used to exchange seeds, but not to go to Făgăraș, or to go to Brașov… The potato harvest was so large, that we needed three [people] to take them to the reception area. It was very, very hard, that I don't even want to remember. I was a 17 year-old child… (Ileana C., Bărăști, Hațeg district).

This story offers a specific image that is very telling of the way in which Romanian villages metamorphosized with the advent of communism. The measures imposed by the regime profoundly and dramatically affected the daily lives of ordinary people, who were compelled to rapidly adapt to the new context. The imprisonment of prosperous peasants, classified as chiaburi, the burdensome quotas required by the state, the shortages and wrongdoings caused by the regime, convinced especially young people to move to cities in order to find work in factories, mostly as unskilled workers in very tough environments. Effectively under assault, the family abdicated when confronted by the series of measures imposed from above. The family adapted to the demands of the regime in the hope that good will ultimately "overcome" evil, and that they will be able to "hold on" and survive.

Since opposition seemed destined to failure, the only solution remained the search for alternative forms of survival. Agricultural work became burdensome and meaningless, since it did not even ensure the fulfillment of the necessary quotas. Consequently, wage work compensated for the lack of returns. The cash salary offered the family not only the material conditions necessary for survival, but also the means to fulfill their obligations towards the state.

Despite these increasingly onerous obligations, the peasants were most reluctant to give up their properties. "Collective" property was established with difficulty, following a long trial period. In order to compel them to relinquish their lands, peasants were hunted down and harassed by the agents of power. The private space was systematically invaded by the representatives assigned to carry out "edification work" with the peasants, in order to determine them to sign the applications for membership in the Agricultural Production Cooperative (CAP). Asked whether she willingly joined the CAP, Ileana C. responded:

Willingly - no way! Oh, we all ran, men, women... They collectivized four villages… for our village was a wealthy one, with land and people who worked it; they were good husbandmen. And we said: "We won't apply!" 'Cause one had to state that one willingly joined [the CAP]. I don't know if you know the situation. [This] lasted for a week or two and [then] the Moldovan woman came around. The entire district was afraid of her. And I ran, I went in the first room, [then] I entered the other one. I hid under the bed and they came after me and they

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found me there. And [they said]: "Why are you hiding? Aren't you ashamed, you sow?" I got out and I stayed silent, with tears in my eyes. Afterwards, the entire village signed up… There was no other way, because they came around with all kinds of threats. There were seven or eight individuals that came by. But around here, that Moldovan woman, whom we talked about, did not take our cattle. While in Răchitova, in those mountain villages, they took them because they did not meet their quotas. They used to take the cow from the stable for meat. Troubles. And then we joined the Collective. They called the Assembly at the cultural house and they played music. Nobody showed up, everybody cried. A voluntary party, you know. But no one came to dance, to have a good time. And then we accommodated ourselves, what else could we do?" (Ileana C, Bărăști, Hațeg district).

The institutionalization of collective property was achieved through force, the household was besieged, and the family put under surveillance. The agreement to join the Agricultural Production Cooperative was insistently and systematically pursued, by means of full employment of force, as well as menacing and insulting words. Although they vehemently opposed joining the collective, the peasants gradually succumbed to pressures and later conformed, accommodating themselves to the new situation.

The intrusion into private space elicited responses of flight and retreat to secluded, hidden places:

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What I remember - Silvia S. recounts -, *being six or seven years old, is the fact that we used to hide. Thus they came after our parents, they came with those applications, to sign the papers for joining the CAP and... Here there was quite a great deal of resistance, that is, people resisted for a long time, because they were very attached to their lands. The land was their soul, so they could not conceive giving up their land and their animals. They did not realize what this cooperative meant; they could not imagine giving up their goods and assets, to be taken there… There were party activists from the Hațeg region… And they arrived in an organized fashion, and they came very late in the evening, so that I remember that one night I fell asleep in the attic; another time we were away [working] in the field and in the end the wave overtook everybody and… my folks also joined up. Daddy had a very hard time detaching himself from his tools, from his plough… they took the wagon, they took the plough, they took… the animals… No! I don't… Look, I don't remember about the animals… But I remember those tools, which I know were very important to my father, 'cause he built them all by himself and he was very attached to them. And after tens of years he recognized the wagon, and the harrow, and the plough; he knew where they were… He managed to recover his plough; he went after 1989 and brought it home* (Silvia S, Bărăști, Hațeg district).

The rural space was metamorphosized by the emergence of Agricultural Production Cooperatives and by the adjustment of the former landowners to the new socio-economic context. The elements of autonomous public life were marginalized. The Party organization became the "cell" that oversaw both the CAPs' activity and the cultural activities undertaken within the schools with pupils and teachers. The old markets, fairs, mills, and the village pubs were eliminated. Although tolerated, religious life found itself in strong competition with the mandatory activities organized by the authorities. These activities included participation in celebrations and festivals, visits and trips to model factories, supposedly "patriotic"

(voluntary) work for the "commonweal" in maintaining roads and houses, as well as harvesting of agricultural products.

It must, however, be emphasized that the CAP, although included in the planned economy, benefited from a certain degree of organizational freedom. State control over the CAP was less stringent than over the State Agricultural Enterprises. Cooperative peasants were remunerated in cash and in kind, according to the work days performed. In exchange for working for the CAP, they were allotted individual plots no larger than 150 square meters, and which gave them the opportunity to raise farm animals in their own homesteads. These lots could no longer be bought or sold, but were gradually appropriated by peasants and thus assimilated into the symbolic order of private property.

The time allocated to individual work was much longer than the work set aside for work at the collective farm cooperative. This caused the systematic intervention of the state in favor of collective work and property (Roger, 2002: 26). The results mirrored the degree of implication. The official statistics show the state's priorities very clearly. In 1962, at the national scale, the individual plots made up only 10.2% of the surface occupied by the Agricultural Production Cooperatives, but they yielded 14.8% of the total cereal production, 40% of vegetables production, and 45.3% of animal production (Montias, 1967: 103).

State control of production increasingly determined the emergence of a subterranean economy. The yield from individual plots was partially hidden, so that peasants could deliver only a portion of their crops to the state. A full-blown mechanism for eluding the prescribed rules appeared and developed. Ostensibly compliant peasants worked hand in hand with the elites of the production cooperatives. In their turn, these elites channeled part of the agricultural surplus towards illicit economic exchanges. The foodstuff surplus was destined primarily for the upkeep of family members who lived in cities. City workers exchanged part of their salaries for a portion of the food produced in the peasant households, with agricultural work typically being performed by parents. Yet another form of resistance to the official policies was to commute between city and countryside, which enabled rural workers to combine factory employment with work on their personal lots.

Houses and the Systematization Laws

The appropriation of land and the replacement of a large part of private (homestead) work with wage labor, decided village inhabitants to devote their entire energy to their house, which was the private domain of the family. Houses became the most valuable possessions, one of the few in which one could invest accumulated earnings. This private good was, in turn, threatened by laws pertaining to the systematization of territories. In parallel to the project of instituting collective agricultural property according to centralized planning criteria, the system of centralized national planning was also developed. In 1965, a commission was established with the purpose of "systematizing" villages. The commission was charged with accounting for and reducing the costs of distributing prime agricultural goods. Concurrently, a state institute for architecture, construction, and systematization was tasked with evaluating the outlook for agricultural development. As such, the institute was required to classify villages into those "suitable for systematization" and communes that lacked the "potential for development." The classification criteria consisted of the villages' "physical facilities," "demographic evolution," "their real and potential economic function and "positioning in relation to urban centers." Villages deemed lacking potential for development were not subject to any measures, because they were assumed to eventually disappear through modernization; the ones with prospective for development were included in a vast project of aligning them to the urban lifestyle (Roger, 2002: 39).

In order to prevent workers from combining industrial labor with subsistence agricultural work, the authorities proposed measures meant to standardize both village and city life. The area allotted for building was delimited by the area set aside for agriculture. Construction norms were very strict. Individual houses were required to have two levels. This was considered necessary for accommodating an extended family. No doubt, this provision was intended to persuade family members established in the city to return to their native villages.

The purpose of the systematization of villages and towns was to control the space of the private household and to standardize the different strategies of private life between villages and cities. The "Agro-Industrial Centers" planned in the beginning of the 1980s, equipped with specialized industrial enterprises, aimed to radically transform the rural world and render life uniform by erasing the difference between city and village.

In regions rich in natural resources, such as the Jiu Valley, people were repeatedly put at risk of losing their homes. The transformation of the region for the purpose of systematically exploiting resources on an industrial scale, profoundly affected the local way of life.

They drilled and discovered coal and they said the Valley must be sacrificed for coal, and then they destroyed people's houses... Yes, where they discovered coal, [they simply said] just take your things and go... but what [indemnification] did they give? 'Cause there is compensation here too, but what is 15 centimes, one of these small coins for who knows what [amount of property], and they weren't even interested if you could move your home or you couldn't. (They didn't give them land to relocate their home). Where could they give you from? They said that some had [something] somewhere else but they'd better find a way not to move them from there too. They did what they did, they sacrificed, they experimented [to show] that there was no coal there, but still some were moved from there too… You know what the Ceaușescu woman said when she once came to the Valley and she said that if one meter of coal, [for] one square meter of coal, everything must be destroyed, it was irrelevant how they moved or what they did… That's why they're all on hills and mountains; you should see that area, where they have their houses on mountaintops, they ran and oftentimes that's where they found [a place]… They were evicted from there… They said that they would give them a deadline; if by the deadline you haven't gathered your house, 'cause that's why these villagers build their houses out of wood, 'cause they were conscious; well there was no other material anyway, but they were conscious that if they came and tore it apart you [had to] quickly take it and you move… They were chased on the mountaintop.

The image of the locals, forced to retreat into the mountains, who built perishable wooden houses that were easy to assemble and disassemble, evokes the barbaric medieval period. The association of communist ultramodernism with the Middle Ages, when peasants took refuge in the mountains away from the path of barbarian invasions, is not accidental. Belying its program and ideological discourse, the communist regime employed harsh, barbaric methods of controlling private life, of subordinating it to the centralizing plans of national territorial administration, and of subordinating it to the exploitation natural resources

Practices of Negotiating the Public - Private Relationship

The agricultural management and territorial administration policies imposed from the central level did not manage to transform private property solely into consumer goods. In addition to wage work undertaken away from home, and/or tending the individual plot at the CAP, another means whereby the peasant household consolidated itself as a unit of production was the practice of skilled crafts such as carpentry, furriery, and cooperage.

Working at home proved salutary for the

Adventists from the village of Bărăști, Sântămăria Orlea commune - Hațeg district. Because they were religiously prohibited from working on Saturdays and consequently unable to accept employment in state enterprises, many members of this religious community specialized in trades that allowed them to perform individual work at home.

Ioan D. worked as a carpenter at home for a period of 40 years, paying a tax to the state in exchange for being allowed to practice his trade. In addition to this tax, there were other levies, which had nothing to do with the practiced craft. Like any other inhabitant of the rural world, Ion D. was obligated to perform nine days of community work (for the "commonweal"). He was likewise compelled to sign a contract with the state, by which he undertook to deliver one pig every year. Despite these restrictions, he managed to earn a profit from his work and acquire a car - the supreme luxury of the era and the mark of prosperity and social status. For this, he was called in by the Securitate and required to explain himself.

During communism, I, as a craftsman, as a carpenter, was renowned throughout the Hațeg Valley, because I work well and my word is good, but my prices were higher. This is what the clients said: "Go to that Adventist, he doesn't lie, but his work is expensive." And I earned money. And I made a deposit to buy a new Mosvic. I waited seven years to have the car delivered. I was called to the Securitate post to admit that I had a car. I did not want to admit the money that I had [on deposit] at the CEC (House of Economies and Consignations). "Say this, it's a state secret and the secret is kept." "You have money!" "No, I don't." And I was investigated on the basis of Law 18… I had to answer the questions as to how I made them. I stayed 18 months at the tribunal in Petroșani so that I tell [them] from where I had my wealth and how I made it… It was not a large sum, but I was dispatched there by the station chief. And they applied Law 18 to me. Those [Securitate agents] had quotas, just as the traffic militia had quotas for fines. And the station chief had a quota for our commune, [to gather] persons on the basis of Law 18 in order to show what they owned. 'Cause I had a painted house that drew attention. For 18 months, they called me there. And in the end, they passed a sentence of non-penal supervision… And during this time, an expert came to the place. And I found out that the actions of the station chief were not legal. But he had a quota to fulfill and he applied it on the community… [Ion D, Bărăști, Hațeg]

Private property entered under the incidence of state control. It had to be maintained within certain safe limitations so that it too, in turn, could become part of the planned state economy. Even the practice of exercising control was subordinated to the principles of the planned economy. What mattered for the station chief and his subordinates was not so much the efficiency of their measures, but the numbers of controlled persons.

On the other hand, there also existed a relationship whereby the representatives of state institutions and persons who aspired to develop autonomously in their own private domain sounded each other out, trying as much as possible to avoid institutional frameworks.

The representatives of these institutions did not seem the staunchest defenders of the law; even the headquarters of the Securitate, of the Militia were transformed from a place of inquest into one of negotiation.

Mihu C. from Nereju, Vrancea district, continued to practice cooperage from his domicile - a craft learned from his parents. In this land of wood, as Vrancea district is considered, the communal property traditionally used by peasants was abusively appropriated by the state and managed by the local Forrest Ranges. Thus, peasants were deprived of the forests and pastures necessary for their survival. Those who did not abandon the old crafts had to constantly negotiate with the authorities for access to raw materials. These negotiations were necessary even if they possessed an official authorization to practice their trade and they procured the wood on the basis of a sales order. Paying for the wood was not sufficient; the buyer had to perform a

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number of days of unpaid labor planting trees.

From 1950 onwards it stopped, the forest was no longer ours; it belonged to the state. They took the forests, they were no longer… Back then, if you could do something you talked to the forest ranger. You came to an agreement with him… It was hard to do (to keep doing it), 'cause I carried it only on my back, although I also had oxen. So that I don't leave tracks in the forest… And there was a forest ranger, P. He was a real bastard. He took them from your back. Yes, he took pails; he took trugs from my back… You should see what bargain I struck with a forest ranger. That was a deal! I went and I brought him a wagon of shingles, there, at Năruja. You know, at Năruja. He was from Năruja. I took them on the hills, with the ox-drawn cart to his house, so that he gave me a fir tree. He gave me the fir tree; I made about two big barrels. Me, I say, I'm friends with him, I did business with him [so] I brought the wagon of wood tiles to his home. Let me tell him how I'll do. I made six big vats and I broke the staves, the staves I numbered, 'cause the whole barrel took a lot of space. I stuffed the staves into two large bags, 'cause there were large bags back then, worth 5 centimes, made of hemp canvas. And I stuffed them, pay attention! I tied a bundle of hay and I put them inside the hay in the wagon. And I left with them to Focșani, telling this forest ranger about it. He said, "be careful, look what they do, [be sure to] tie the heap of hay…" Somewhere there was a guard, another forest ranger from Năruja. When I got there, I was stopped. "Stop! What do you have in the wagon?" "I'm going to Focșani to buy [something]." He had a stake and poked the hay with it. I had two heaps that were tied to each other, one in each bag. And he started poking and found the staves. He made me unpack the hay and took the staves. I was left with the circles; he didn't confiscate those. Lucky me, I still had about two centimes from home, don't know where I had those from, and I went and got one or two sacks of corn and came home. Working for the forest ranger, brining the shingles to his house, and still he was the one who informed on me… (Mihu C., Nereju, Vrancea district).

The laws of public property were formal, made to be broken and interpreted according to personal interests. The agents of the state abused the law in order to consolidate their position in the framework of a non-public network of relationships. In this manner, there appeared dependency relationships towards the agents of power. The latter came from the rural communities, local people who held functions in the system. The informants did not live with the feeling of guilt, with the awareness of conforming to a system they did not like and did not agree with, but to which they tried to adapt. What motivated them was the desire to "win" by adapting to the new conditions. Perhaps this is precisely because they did not belong to those privileged by the system, they were the victims of fraud and at the whim of a dominant class in the process of consolidating itself. Given the pervasive clientelary relationships that dominated everyday life, collective property was an ideal nobody believed in.

State property was systematically undermined from within by the very people supposed to defend it. "Collective" property became, in reality, a site of personal negotiation, a source of enrichment for some, and for others a means of survival. It was effectively reappropriated by the hidden clientelary networks that started to form and develop from the very beginning of the regime.

Alternative Non-Public Networks

Surrendering the land and entering into the CAP did not eliminate the intrusion of the state into the private sphere. Starting with the 1970s, every homestead was obligated to deliver, on the basis of contracts, agricultural products and animals to the state. This became the defining feature of the relationship between public and private in the Romanian rural milieu. The contracts requiring peasants to supply the state with products from their own household at prices well below what the free market would bear artificially tied individual households to the tutelary authority of the state, including them in the socialist planned economy.

In 1981, Romania was declared incapable of paying its debts, which amounted to 12 billion USD. The solution adopted by the leadership was to clear the public debt within four years. Imports were reduced to the minimum, while exports were encouraged, especially in sectors that did not necessitate the purchase of raw materials. These economic policies led to severe shortages on the internal market, especially food products. Because of their obligations towards the state and of the low prices they received, householders generally felt cheated. The state came to personify an enemy who had to be fought in order for them to survive. The representatives of power were seen as malefactors by the village communities.

What can I tell you about these quotas, recounts Victoria B. from Bărsești, Vrancea. I was very young, the town hall guard went around with a bugle and said everybody [should go] to the committee for contributions, contributions meant delivering quotas from all products in your household. I had my sister who could not pronounce "committee" and said "mocittee", but I easily remembered this, so everybody to the "mocittee" for contributions. So I don't know a lot about these things, I was too young, but now, nearer to our times, closer to '89 there were obligatory quotas. So I got married in '75; after '75 my husband worked for the mayoralty, we were required, especially those who worked for the mayoralty, to make a contract for a pig, for birds mostly, sheep we didn't have [...] There was a plan at the commune with whom should fulfill the plan first, with the people from the village, with the animal breeders […] The quotas were established according to the number of animals. If you had sheep when the animal census was taken [the quotas were established]. After I got married, my husband being in the mayoralty, the piglets were brought to the town hall to be distributed to those who had contracts. The price for buying [the piglets] from them was larger than the one we got when they acquisitioned [the grown pigs], so that we did not receive as much as we spent buying [it]… They took [the pig] through the town hall, they brought it from a farm somewhere, they fattened it by 15-20 kilos, we had to make it reach a certain weight and deliver it; and at the delivery I remember it was 10 Lei per kilo… along the lines of these contracts people regarded those from the mayoralty as crooks, you know, they had a plan and all those from the mayoralty formed teams and went to people's houses in order to edify them, this word "to edify them" to close a contract for a pig and of course, I don't know whether it's relevant, but I remembered it now. My husband died very young, [at] 43 years old; I was 41 years old and where his grave is, someone, a distant relative, owned a gravesite next to my husband's, and I built a wall there, surrounding the grave thinking I could plant a flower there, and the person in question took pieces from the plaster and placed them in jest on the wall of my husband's grave. I was silent for a year or two; then I met her, my anger had lessened somewhat, and I asked her "Why did you do that auntie Ileana?" "'Cause I had found out." "Well, they came to me and forced me to make a contract, to deliver chickens, to make a contract for pork," so look how far things went, people see you as an evildoer, they don't understand that you in turn are required to go there. My husband was not at the top of the mayoralty pyramid, he had a boss; it was the mayor who required him to go, and the mayor was obligated in his turn (Victoria L., Bârseşti, Vrancea).

As Victoria L. expressed it, the laws, plans, and the controls imposed by the "Center" or "the top of the pyramid" engendered opposition by means of diverse forms of solidarity and various methods of deceiving the system. Everyone managed how she or he could, most times by transgressing the rules and by adapting to immediate needs. Most frequently, it was persons who were part of the state and/or party structure who first broke the laws.

[…] we also had a cow, my parents raised animals and they stayed at the monument, until the snow melted, at Dumbravă, they stayed with the animals, mostly my mother, for my father had his job and moreover they used to keep part of the animals, calves, a pig. They were gone and I was the one who used to feed them, the pigs and the cows. I used to come back from school and the first thing I used to do was to feed the animals and only afterwards to take care of other tasks in the household. And they thought to reward me for this work and they gave us a two-year-old cow. And we raised her, she became a mature cow, she gave birth. My daughters and my niece came here during the summer and they liked the milk from our cow. We were not allowed to slaughter the calf, we had to deliver it according to the contract; and in order for it to be accepted, the calf had to weigh 300 kilos. But it was a young cow and at her first birth she didn't weigh herself 300 kilos, so how could the calf possibly reach 300 kilos? And so we decided to sell the cow. But what to do with the calf now - we were neither allowed to slaughter it, nor to sell it, 'cause it was in their register. We needed to have a contract to give it away and so we decided to surreptitiously slaughter it. And we hid it so well that they found out. How did they find out? I threw away the calf's nostrils… I put everything that needed to be thrown away in a bowl in the summer kitchen thinking that I would take them somewhere further away or bury them. A cat entered and it took exactly the piece with the nostrils, and it went to eat them at the neighbors', she crossed the street, the neighbor saw it with the calf nostrils and she went to the veterinary technician and said: "Look here, Mitică, my cat came home with these nostrils, where could they be from?" My husband was working at the town hall, as I told you, and we decided together with the mayor, 'cause my husband was his man, to write down a statement in which we explained that he sent the calf to pasture and it didn't come back, for it is usual around here that during the fall the cows would go alone to pasture and in the evening everyone goes to get their cow. And the statement that my husband filed with the veterinary technician went hand in hand with what the neighbor with the cat told him… There were people in the village who did this on a regular basis (slaughter calves). I mean certain people dealt with this; we needed some meat, I used to go to someone whom I knew was in contact with these people, "Ion, look, I need a package of meat." [And the mayoralty knew about this and kept silent]. From our case, I deduced that if they [the mayoralty] received it from us, it meant we were not the first ones (Victoria L., Bârseşti, Vrancea).

The husband of Mrs. Victoria L., who was responsible for "edifying" villagers to sign contracts with the state for the raising of animals, broke the rules that he himself publicly proclaimed to his fellow residents. The spirit of complicity against the regime, engendered by the excessive interdictions, caused everyone from the lowest to the highest-ranking citizen to break the rules. Public office was abused in order to acquire necessary or rare products for oneself or for one's clientelary network.

The shortage of absolutely necessary goods unobtainable through official socialist commerce gave rise to non-public networks dedicated to obtaining these products. Television sets, gas cylinders, or washing machines were perceived as high-status goods, which conferred social distinction due to their scarcity and difficulty in procuring them.

It was difficult to obtain a gas cylinder, with interventions at Petroșani. I had an acquaintance here, and had to wait one year in order to buy a gas oven and then finally to obtain a gas cylinder. And it was difficult to fill up the gas cylinder, they didn't give [gas]. And who owned two gas cylinders was privileged. And in order

to obtain the second gas cylinder one had to intervene. Someone brought me a second gas cylinder from Făget, left it two kilometers away in the corn, at night. He came by motorcycle, 'cause he would have been condemned if caught. And the gas cylinder was paid for, I paid for it. Back then, the price was half a cow… (Ion D., Bărăști, Hațeg).

The conditions of penury rendered items of strict necessity into luxury goods. They were acquired directly from the warehouse through private relationships.

And I bought furniture in installments for one person or another, and he gave me the money and I paid the furniture in installments. But it was insignificant, the last time, I got "Crișu" furniture, very beautiful furniture made out of fir tree, for a colleague who had to marry his daughter off… but it was quite scarce and the man kept looking to buy furniture and no… he had the money, but didn't have the furniture. I had connections, but no furniture either, but I needed his money. And then I discussed with him one night, at work. "Man, he says, c'mon I'll give you." "But you'll get it for me?" "Yes!" And I went with him to Hațeg, to the warehouse, and there was a guy. "Man, I say, this and that." "You know, he says, what the deal is? This doesn't get to the warehouse, this is distributed from the railcar." The furniture was wavy. And he said: "Look, man, be careful here, the railcar is supposed to arrive on Monday, and if you're here in Călan, call them up and tell those guys from the transport department to phone Simeria to check where the railcar is, and when the railcar gets here, you come and you take it, with no discussions, 'cause one never knows when I can get it again." Well, and indeed in about three days the railcar arrived and I got the furniture… (Peter L., Sântămăria Orlea, Hațeg district).

The excessive regulation of exchanges, the obvious obstruction of the transparent market frequently generated theft and fraud. State property was regularly subject to theft, becoming a common occurrence, tacitly accepted by everybody. The accommodation to the new situation, created through the institution of "collective" property meant the accommodation to certain rules, their transgression or their domestication in order for the family to survive and even prosper. The abusive accumulation of private property gave former owners the right to appropriate products from communal property.

To be honest, we stole potatoes sometime [from the CAP], we stole occasionally… Everybody did it… Then the corn, when we started harvesting it, 'cause it was good, we kept it cold in our bosoms until the evening… we filled it up 'til here (showing her abdomen). Poor me, I kept it cold close to my bones. It wasn't only me, it was everybody who went harvesting. There were times when the team leader used to search us, and we had to push him away 'cause he upset us... (Ileana C., Bărăști, Hațeg district).

They used to steal, yeah. I remember, I tell you!... And they mostly stole raw corn, when it was good for boiling. And when we harvested, my God! They picked and made "hives." And they used to put it in the "hive", hiding it… We called it "making the hive." So they used to cut the stems, the corn stalks, they cut them with the sickle, they picked them up, on the ground, crouching on the ground, 'cause we didn't pick then standing up, then you cut them. And they bundled several, about as much as one can hold in one's arm. They used to bind them with withes or with birch roods. And they used to make several. They put one standing and, after it, the other ones. And they made a "hive." And they tied that "hive". And there, in the "hive," they stuck the corn. And in the evening, the moment in which... the team leader or the guard, who were around them, they chose a moment when he wasn't there or they made a deal with him, 'cause they probably gave him some. And they stuck them in there. And they used to go at night and take them. They used to take out the corn from the "hives" and take them. So it was customary to steal from the CAP... [If they stole from the CAP], they considered that they were taking something for which they had worked. Theft wasn't practiced… one did not steal from another. But then, when… from the CAP they said: "Well, I work there too, I take 'cause it's in

common!" But from one's garden, meaning to steal from your garden wasn't done. So there were peaceful people here in this regard, but they used to take from the CAP (Viluca S., Vălioara, Hațeg district)

Stealing from the CAP simply meant taking something that was rightfully yours, and that right had been violated. The theft from collective property lost its meaning, becoming a legitimate act in the circumstances in which "collective" property emerged following forced expropriation. Stealing from the state amounted to taking what was one's due for badly paid work, and especially for the loss of property rights. Only the theft from private property was seen as reprehensible, taking someone else's goods - someone made of flesh and blood, not an abstract and impersonal entity such as the State. Stealing from the CAP became such a frequent practice that it ended up being part of daily rural life under communism.

And in the beginning of the '90s, in order to have the right to teach religion at the local school, I had to… I wanted to take a course at the Theological Seminary in Sibiu. And our classes were taught only by priests. And the discussion led to the issue of theft. And I said: "Father, I did steal in my life, I kept going to harvest potatoes and every time I stole three or four potatoes, 'cause I liked them and I didn't have any at home…" And the priest K.H. said: "What you stole was justified in the eyes of God, 'cause you only stole from the collective [farm] (they all laughed)." The collective belonged to all of us, it did not belong to any one person, thus "Your theft is justified in the eyes of God too!!" Well, I say, think about that! (Rosemarie M., Altâna, Sibiu district).

Forms and Means of Institutional Reappropriation

Over time, state organizations and institutions were reappropriated by the locals, who adopted a complicit attitude, practically undermining from within the imposed norms. The CAP leaders, initially nominated for political reasons and without necessarily possessing any agricultural training, were gradually replaced by specialists. The latter adhered to the line set out by the Romanian Communist Party either out of opportunism, or simply because of the need to keep their jobs and accede in the system.

The villagers appropriated not only the CAP, but also other local institutions and organizations. The local party organizations, the unions, women's organizations, and the village assemblies were appropriated by the community and included in the daily lives of the people.

Alongside these public organizations, the cultural house emerged as a niche space between public and private. The cultural house was the site for imposed celebrations, school festivities, cultural activities, and contests that engaged especially the youth, pupils, and schoolteachers. At the same time, the cultural house was the locus of traditional celebrations. It was, undoubtedly, a controlled and surveilled space, but it was far from being exclusively associated with party propaganda or with the idolatrous poems dedicated to the great leaders. In the village of Vălioara, Hațeg district, the harvest festival was celebrated at the cultural house with relatives, friends, and acquaintances in attendance.

We did evening sittings. So during the time of Ceaușescu there were evening sittings; dances took place in our village... traditional harvest festivals. For instance, nowadays we don't have harvest festivals anymore. And it is a rare occasion that a friend drops by [for an evening sitting]. But back then, under Ceaușescu, there were harvest festivals, you brought musicians. I remember that one year, after I got into the school, in the second or third year, I organized a harvest festival, 'cause I was also the director of the cultural house. We organized the harvest festival. Mihai used to sing for us at the Vălioara fest, he came and he sang. But now there are no more harvest festivals. So there's no longer any music. Back then, one loved it at the

cultural house, you went… you went there, relatives came too. And from there, one went away and took them to dinner. You came home with them and ate. And after dinner, the youth went back. And we would wait; we had rows of tables, people at the tables. I remember that, for a few years my husband worked in commerce, and he had many colleagues. And one year we had outside, about 25-30 people at one single table… At our house, in Vălioara, we took the tables in the yard and we… So people used to get together. Now, for instance, I went on Sunday for the Easter celebration. I swear, you couldn't find people, only here and there you could find a man playing cards or knocking eggs. But the women… I no longer saw women coming out of the house. There used to be women. They came out, they talked, they chatted. Now everybody is tired. Also because of work. There's too much work (Viluca S., Hațeg).

The public space was reappropriated by the community; it became a communal space despite the indications and obligations set forth by the party organizations. There was a certain fluidity between public and private, based on old community rules and local solidarity. Celebrations used to unite, to consolidate relationships already consecrated by ties of kinship, friendship, and collegiality. The cultural house reentered in the possession of the community. At the same time, the street was also a territory where one communicated and celebrated. During celebrations, the yard opened up; it became welcoming in ways that no longer exist today. Paradoxically, within a system that worshiped work as the supreme ideal, regular people managed to elude this propaganda in order to celebrate in a way that today they no longer can.

The second ball, I mean the next one was just before Christmas, for the Christmas fasting, around November 25 is Katarina. The name, in the calendar. And we used to organize Katarinen ball. So, and for these balls, which had a tradition, each time we used to stage a theater play. And I wanna tell you, that is during Ceaușescu's time, and I lived those times, when every evening there were electricity cuts and we

photo©Vlad Columbeanu

didn't have electricity. And we used to go with the oil lamp for rehearsals, to the teachers' room, and my friend Edith had five kids. So this is the only way I remember Edith - with a big belly, pregnant, and with the oil lamp in front of her, at the rehearsals! I swear, I don't recall any other image of her. And then we organized a ball, so we called them up there, that is… everybody was invited, there was an entrance fee, and we also had a vocal ensemble. I was their instructor too, and many times, we combined the theater play, the dance, and the vocal group, so a program like this... And afterwards, the ball. A band came, 'cause there were many - [from] Sibiu, Mediaș, Turnișor, and we had a ball. At midnight everybody went home, there used to be a break for about an hour, although, if outsiders came, we used to invite them for a sandwich, a bit of food, and we came back. And there was dancing at the cultural house until morning, without music… This Saturday I went to a wedding and I had to come home 'cause my head and my brains almost exploded. And everything back then was totally different (Rosemarie M., Alțâna, Sibiu).

With the imposition of the public sector on the agricultural economy, the peasants determinedly tried to adapt to the new conditions. They survived and even prospered by elaborating various strategies and succeeding at the same time to reappropriate the imposed framework, to domesticate it for their own needs.

Ordinary people from the country side demonstrated resistance towards the system, not only when adopting an oppositional stance towards the economic measures imposed by the Center, but also when they bent the purpose of the institutions set up by the established power. They did this using combinations and adaptations suitable to their own way of communal life. In order to resist the imposed norms, the peasantry did not rigidify into an immutable mode of organization, but continuously adapted to exterior pressures, maintaining a dynamic relationship with power.

Instead of Conclusions

The collectivization of agriculture and the constitution of "collective" agricultural property led to the achievement of the twin objectives that the traditional modern state aspired to from its very inception: political appropriation and control (Scott, op. cit.: 248). The Agricultural Production Cooperative proved to be an instrument for the appropriation of a social and economic fund extremely resistant to any form of appropriation and control. Collectivization radically changed the traditional ways of life, forcing the peasantry to adapt to a new ethos of wage labor. This represented a radically transformative vision of the peasantry into proletarians. Through the cultural revolution that followed the strictly economic measures, the "dark" civilization of the peasants needed to be replaced by the organizational culture of cooperative workers. The cooperatives were designed to function in a manner similar to the factories within the centralized economy. The laws governing territorial organization were likewise intended to homogenize the population by reducing the differences between the rural and urban milieus.

At the same time, the collectivization of agriculture, the excessive control of property and private life proved to be "a tribute less to the plan of the state than to the improvisations, gray markets, bartering, and ingenuity that partly compensated for failures (Scott, 1998: 203)

Treating the workers only as industrial labor, not as peasants, the collectivist system destroyed many of the skills that the peasantry possessed before the collectivization process (Ibid: 420). The collectivization and the excessive control measures that followed destroyed a certain institutional autonomy specific to the rural world. The forms of solidarity associated with public projects were replaced by subversive forms of solidarity and complicity against the official structures, the centralizing state, undermining individuals' ability to govern themselves (Idem).

Despite the means and the effects, the people found the power to survive and, in their turn, even to control the system. The emergence of parallel economic networks based on gift exchanges created the premises of a circular movement through which family clans appropriated the impoverished formal institutions of the state. Concurrently, these networks developed and prospered (See Deyanova, op. cit.: 166).

In the conception of the Hungarian sociologist János Kornai, family networks, based on mutual aid and gift exchange and opposed to the official contractual economy, constituted a fundamental structural feature of socialism (Kornai, 1980). We are in the position to reflect upon a society that systematically produced shortages, simply because any capitalist motivation was blocked from the start. The societies are typified by the existence of a duality of structures - on the one hand, a public sphere characterized by formal allegiance to the regime and idolatry towards its supreme leaders and, on the other hand, a private sphere of unofficial relationships, of transactions, and exchanges vital to survival. Far from being a characteristic specific only to the economic field, the private networks, even through opposition, sustained the official public sphere.

On the other hand, following James Scott, the systems of formal order created through

social engineering were but subsystems of a broader framework they depended on and even had a parasitic relationship to. The response to this parasitic relationship was the development of a non-public sphere of relations. The more rigid the framework of official life, the more significant and powerful these non-public networks became, leading to the demise and replacement of the regime.

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MARTOR

Title: "Studium post negotium. La première génération d'étudiants de Bessarabie (République de Moldavie) en Roumanie (1990-1991): redéfinitions identitaires, stratégies de survie, tentatives de profit"

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How to cite this article: Negură, Petru. 2012. "Studium post negotium. La première génération d'étudiants de Bessarabie (République de Moldavie) en Roumanie (1990-1991): redéfinitions identitaires, stratégies de survie, tentatives de profit". *Martor* 17: 69-80.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

Studium post negotium. La première génération d'étudiants de Bessarabie (République de Moldavie) en Roumanie (1990-1991): redéfinitions identitaires, stratégies de survie, tentatives de profit

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RÉSUMÉ

Une partie des étudiants provenant de la République Soviétique Socialiste Moldave (de l'URSS) de la première promotion (année académique 1990/1991) en Roumanie a tenté de tirer parti d'avantages «secondaires» de la libéralisation des frontières en transportant et vendant des biens de consommation divers. La réalisation d'une telle activité d'«économie secondaire» entrait en conflit avec les attentes communes liées au statut d'étudiant et avec l'éthique idéaliste d'austérité personnelle en faveur d'un supposé bien-être collectif, promue dans le discours officiel du régime communiste. Avec le changement des régimes politiques et la délégitimation des anciennes autorités et idéologie, cette activité informelle acquiert de nouvelles significations sociales, morales, symboliques, idéologiques et identitaires. À travers un comportement et un discours que l'on peut qualifier d'immoral à cette époque, cette «minorité active» d'étudiants a contribué à sa manière à la reformulation de modèles rigides de valeurs et de pratiques (considérés comme idéalistes et/ou idéologiquement manipulés), qui ont perdu leur efficacité, tandis que l'Etat réduisait son «monopole sur la violence légitime» et que les libertés individuelles éclataient au grand jour.

MOTS-CLEFS:

République de Moldavie, économie secondaire, frontières, style de vie, stratégies d'adaptation.

Une des victoires de la révolution « chantante » [Thompson, 1992][1] de la fin des années 1980 à Chișinău et de la révolution de décembre 1989 en Roumanie a été le fait d'accorder le droit à de nombreux jeunes moldaves[2] (de République de Moldavie, de Transnistrie et de Bucovine) de l'ancienne URSS (République socialiste soviétique de Moldavie et République socialiste soviétique d'Ukraine) de pouvoir poursuivre leurs études en Roumanie. Une partie des étudiants de Moldavie et de Bucovine en Roumanie de la première promotion (année universitaire 1990/1991) a essayé de profiter de bénéfices «secondaires» de la libéralisation du régime de passage de frontière et de la différence entre les marchés économiques de Roumanie et de République socialiste soviétique de Moldavie[3] pour transporter (plutôt dans le but d'exporter, de République socialiste soviétique de Moldavie vers la Roumanie) diverses marchandises, pour en extraire un certain profit. Ces activités «économiques secondaires», plus ou moins systématiques, entrent en contradiction avec les attentes habituelles par rapport au statut d'étudiant. En même temps, cette activité commerciale informelle (nommée en Roumanie «bișniță»[4]; «contrebande» en français) était à contre-courant d'une éthique idéaliste d'austérité personnelle en faveur d'un

1) Ainsi que les mouvements de la fin des années 1980 ont été appelés dans les Républiques Baltes. L'appellation est aussi valable pour les manifestations du même type dans la République moldave. Cf. Thomson, 1992.

2)Dans cet article nous utilisons le terme « moldave / moldaves » pour désigner les habitants de Moldavie, de Transnistrie (dans l'actuelle République de Moldavie) et de Bucovine du Nord (Ukraine).

3) Conformément au témoignage du Premier ministre de la République de Moldavie (République socialiste soviétique de Moldavie) d'alors, Mircea Druc, sur son ordre sont partis plus de 3000 jeunes moldaves pour faire leurs études dans les lycées et les universités de Roumanie. Consulter : http://www.druc.ro/content/blogsection/1/88/lang,/ (page web en roumain consultée en février 2011).

4) Dérivé (d'une manière diminutive et légèrement péjorative) de l'anglais «business».

23 décembre 1989. Pancarte accrochée sur la grille du parc "A. S. Pouchkine" à Chișinău, en solidarité avec les manifestations de Timișoara et Bucarest. Photographie de Lina Grâu

bien-être collectif, encouragée par le discours officiel du régime communiste[5].

Les activités sur le marché informel (dont la «contrebande») n'étaient pas neuves en 1989. Pendant la période socialiste, en URSS comme dans les pays du bloc socialiste, il existait une large gamme d'activités économiques secondaires [Cf. Sampson, 1987; Kornai, 1992 ; Verdery, 1996 ; Ledeneva, 1998 ; Mandel & Humphrey, 2002 ; Chelcea & Lățea, 2000 ; Osokina, 2001 ; Heintz, 2005 ; Țone, 2009]. La chute du régime communiste – qui stigmatisait ou même interdisait toute activité économique informelle – a fait apparaître au grand jour ces pratiques et leur a permis un développement effervescent [Cf. Humphrey, 1991 ; Verdery, 1996 ; Konstantinov, 1996, 1998 ; Mandel & Humphrey, 2002 ; Carey, 2004 ; Verdery & Humphrey, 2004 ; Heintz, 2007]. Dans les conditions de changement de régimes politiques et de délégitimation des puissances et des idéologies anciennes, ces activités informelles prenaient de nouvelles significations sociales, morales, symboliques, idéologiques, identitaires. Jusqu'à très récemment considérée comme une pratique malhonnête, ou même totalement illégale, la contrebande est acceptée immédiatement après 1990 comme une activité presque honorable et comme une source de revenu considérable, à laquelle recouraient toutes les catégories sociales, aussi bien à la vente qu'à l'achat, en fonction du potentiel d'investissement et du degré d'accès de chacun aux biens que l'on pouvait vendre par le biais de la «contrebande».

La contrebande, surtout celle pratiquée par les étudiants, et encore plus par les étudiants moldaves lors de leur première année d'études en Roumanie, acquiert des significations symboliques et identitaires. Les étudiants moldaves intègrent le commerce transfrontalier à leur vie quotidienne, à leur système de normes et de valeurs, dans un processus de transformation continuel, sous la pression des changements sociopolitiques et économiques de cette époque, mais aussi des activités commerciales qu'ils entreprenaient. Pour ceux qui la pratiquaient avec assiduité, la «contrebande» a exercé un effet destructeur sur leurs relations de solidarité et sur leur rapport à certaines «lois non écrites» et certaines valeurs (considérées comme «idéalistes) que beaucoup d'entre eux ont hérité de leur milieu familial et social d'origine.

L'âge d'or de la «contrebande» pour les étudiants moldaves a été pendant les années 1990-1991. Selon plusieurs témoignages et données auxquels j'ai eu accès, à partir de 1991 les prix des biens de consommation de masse des marchés de Roumanie et de République de Moldavie ont eu tendance à s'équilibrer et en Roumanie les importations de ces produits de pays tiers ont augmenté[6], alors qu'en République de Moldavie la production des biens de consommation de masse baissait drastiquement. Ces tendances économiques ont mené à la diminution de la rentabilité puis à la disparition du trafic commercial transfrontalier chez les étudiants originaires de République de Moldavie en Roumanie, au profit de relations économiques légales et de plus en plus intenses entre les deux pays, tout au long des années 1990 [Bîzgu, 2006].

Pour cet article, en janvier et février 2011 j'ai réalisé une série d'entretiens semi dirigés avec huit personnes, dont six sont d'anciens étudiants moldaves à l'université roumaine (la plupart à l'université de Iași) de la première promotion (1990/91) ; une autre personne in-

5) Et, dans une certaine mesure, au sein de certain cercles intellectuels (éduqués dans la tradition de l'intelligentsia russe du 19ème siècle) opposés à « l'esprit capitaliste » : « L'idéologie bourgeoise n'a jamais été au pouvoir chez nous, elle n'a jamais exercé d'attraction sur les cœurs russes. Nous n'avons jamais connu de base idéaliste pour les droits des classes bourgeoises et pour le régime bourgeois. Au fond, presque tout le monde considérait la bourgeoisie comme un crime, pas seulement les révolutionnaires et les socialistes, mais aussi les slavophiles et les croyants, et tous les écrivains russes ; même la bourgeoisie russe elle-même se sentait humiliée de son état ». Nikolai Berdiaev, Un Nouveau Moyen Age, Paris, 1927, p. 210, cité par Besançon, 1967: 523.

6) A partir de 1991, en Roumanie les importations ont augmenté (elles dépassent l'importance relative des exportations, soutenues par voie administrative pendant les années 1980) surtout en provenance des pays développés (de 15,4% en 1989 à 44,7% en 1991), alors que les importations provenant des autres pays de l'Europe orientale a baissé (de 43,5% en 1989 à 26,2% en 1991). Cf. Chițu et Bălăsescu, 2004.

terviewée était pendant cette période l'épouse d'un étudiant de cette promotion (interviewé lui aussi); enfin, une personne a fait partie en 1990-1992 de la commission de l'enseignement du Soviet suprême (puis du Parlement) de la République socialiste soviétique de Moldavie, impliquée dans la sélection des étudiants moldaves (de Moldavie) pour leurs études en Roumanie. De plus, en tant qu'ancien élève moldave en Roumanie de la deuxième promotion (1991/92), j'ai moi-même connu directement l'atmosphère et la majorité des personnes dont je parle dans cet article, surtout à partir d'octobre 1991[7].

Les premiers étudiants moldaves en Roumanie: la révélation de la différence

Pour la majorité des jeunes de Moldavie et de Bucovine qui devaient faire leurs études en Roumanie à partir d'octobre 1990, leur relation avec le pays d'accueil s'inscrivait dans un horizon d'attente romantique et nationaliste, créé par les prises de parole enflammées prononcées à la tribune du cénacle «Alexei Mateevici» et aux meetings du centre de la capitale, les «ponts de fleurs» entre la Roumanie et la République socialiste soviétique de Moldavie[8] et les autres manifestations des «mouvements de libération nationale» de 1989-1990. «Les enfants, allez au Pays[9] [en Roumanie, NDT] et étudiez, étudiez bien, puis revenez pour réformer la République de Moldavie!» – clamait le Premier ministre Mircea Druc devant des milliers de jeunes moldaves rassemblés un jour de fin septembre 1990 sur la place de la grande réunion nationale[10]. Les représentants des nouvelles élites politiques étaient entrés au Parlement de la République socialiste soviétique de Moldavie en profitant de la vague des« mouvements nationaux» (et, sur le plan politique, étaient aidés par le Front populaire de Moldavie), ils focalisaient leurs attentes patriotiques (et, au moins en partie, unionistes) sur ces nouvelles générations de jeunes qui devaient faire leurs études en Roumanie, possibilité à laquelle ils n'avaient pas même rêvé au

23 décembre 1989. Réunion spontanée devant le monument d'Etienne le Grand à Chișinău pour soutenir les protestations à Bucarest du 22 décembre 1989. Photographie de Lina Grâu

7) Pour des raisons de confidentialité, je ne donne pas les noms et les statuts sociaux des personnes en question. Les informations que je décris et que j'analyse dans ce qui suit, je les dois à l'ouverture et à la compréhension que les personnes interviewées ont eues par rapport à ma recherche, raison pour laquelle je leur suis profondément reconnaissant.

8) Il est question de deux événements réalisés avec l'accord des gouvernements de l'URSS et de Roumanie pendant lesquels la frontière entre la Roumanie et la République socialiste soviétique de Moldavie a été ouverte pendant une journée : le 6 mai 1990, de Roumanie vers la République socialiste soviétique de Moldavie et le 16 juin 1991, de République socialiste soviétique de Moldavie vers la Roumanie.

9) Dans le discours nationaliste roumain (véhiculé surtout dans les anciennes provinces) le Pays (Țara) désigne la « grande patrie », à savoir la Roumanie.

10) Paraphrasé par un témoin oculaire que j'ai interviewé, lui-même à cette époque membre de la commission de l'enseignement du Soviet suprême / du Parlement de la République socialiste soviétique de Moldavie et responsable de l'organisation du départ des jeunes moldaves en Roumanie.

temps de leur jeunesse, pendant la période soviétique (même si, évidemment, ils l'auraient désiré).

Animés par ces attentes et ces désirs patriotiques, les enfants des Moldaves d'URSS remplissaient continuellement les trains et les autobus à destination des villes universitaires de Roumanie. Certains jeunes portaient le drapeau tricolore roumain, ramené directement des «barricades» des luttes pour «la langue et l'alphabet». L'attente impatiente de la grande rencontre flottait dans l'air, intensifiée par la lenteur du véhicule et le changement rituel des roues de train[11]. Une fois passées la gare Ungheni et la rivière Prut, s'élèvent les maisons d'un village modeste, humble, familier, semblable aux villages parsemés dans toute la Moldavie. Ensuite, au bout d'un moment, une zone industrielle grise, l'enchevètrement des rails de la voie ferrée annonce l'arrivée à la première destination: la ville de Iași, la gare Nicolina. La foule, des fleurs plein les bras pour l'accueil. Emotions, animation, certains ne cachent pas leurs larmes de bonheur. «Mes frères, nous nous sommes retrouvés!» – on entend ces mots dans le murmure de la foule.

Au moment de la répartition dans les résidences universitaires, les jeunes moldaves reconstituent leurs groupes d'origine ou s'associent en fonction de leur provenance, selon leurs propres choix, mais aussi pour faciliter la tâche des organisateurs. Après l'installation, les jeunes étudiants vont aux premiers cours, où, suite à l'accueil chaleureux et un peu écrasant, ils découvrent leurs handicaps par rapport aux collègues «du pays». Le roumain parlé par la majorité des étudiants moldaves avait en général un lexique pauvre, il était parsemé de mots et d'emprunts au russe et était de plus marqué par un accent régional et/ou russe qui suscitait le sourire des locaux. Les connaissances des élèves moldaves, formées en famille et pendant les dix années d'enseignement moyen (par rapport aux douze années d'enseignement général et de lycée en Roumanie), étaient criblés de lacunes importantes dans les matières de culture générale (et surtout en culture roumaine) et dans les enseignements de spécialité. Enfin, mais ce n'était pas le moins important, les étudiants de Moldavie et de Bucovine étaient en moyenne plus jeunes de quelques années que leurs collègues roumains (à cause des âges différents de fin d'études secondaires), une différence d'âge décisive pour la maturation de la personnalité. Toutes ces différences et carences entretenaient un complexe d'infériorité chez les étudiants moldaves dans les universités de Roumanie, amplifié au fur et à mesure que l'excitation du rapprochement entre les deux rives du Prut laissait la place aux rituels d'hospitalité, à la routine officielle et aux attentes déçues. Les déceptions se sont succédées, et les stratégies d'adaptation et de compensation ne se sont pas faites attendre non plus. Les complexes d'infériorité étaient souvent compensés par la revendication, par les étudiants moldaves, de prétendues supériorités, dues à leur provenance du plus grand pays du globe et de la connaissance affichée de la langue de Tolstoï et Dostoïevski.

Après une courte mais intense période de fraternité, au moins au niveau des discours de bienvenue, les nouveaux venus et les locaux n'ont pas mis longtemps à remarquer leurs différences. La perception de ces différences était d'autant plus frappante que l'identité des «frères» des deux rives s'annonçait être parfaite. La découverte des différences – perçues dans le langage, le comportement, l'apparence et la vie quotidienne des autres «nous-même» – approfondissait l'identification avec le groupe d'origine. Pour compenser leur déficit d'image, les jeunes de Moldavie et de Bucovine (parfois qualifiés par les locaux entre eux de «russes», une étiquette encore attribuée à l'époque à certains étrangers proches, redoutés et haïs) mettaient en place des stratégies d'affirmation de soi qui oscillaient entre la ségrégation bruyante (en parlant et en chantant en russe) et l'assimilation silencieuse [Cf. Goffman, 1963][12]. Ces deux choix extrêmes laissaient la place à une gamme de relations de négociation et de compromis, par lesquelles les étudiants moldaves cherchaient et affirmaient leur identité, en communiquant et en jouant avec les attentes des locaux.

11) Dû aux systèmes des rails différents entre l'URSS et les autres pays européens, le passage des trains à la fontière de l'URSS était réalisé par le changement du méchanisme des roues des trains.

12) Ces stratégies d'adaptation aux normes du groupe majoritaire sont analogues à celles analysées par Erving Goffman pour l'exemple des personnes et des groupes discrédités.

La contrebande: le phantasme de l'opulence dans un monde pauvre

Sortie récemment de l'ère Ceaușescu et de la tourmente de la révolution de décembre 1989, la Roumanie est apparue aux yeux des premiers étudiants moldaves comme un pays appauvri, humilié, courbé sous le fardeau d'une pénurie et d'une oppression totalitaire persistante. Les étagères des magasins d'Etat brillaient encore par le manque de produits de première nécessité. Par contre, tout le monde vendait et achetait quelque chose. Tout le pays était devenu un immense marché aux puces. On vendait et on achetait pratiquement tout, avec passion et frénésie, partout: dans les gares, dans les stations de transport public, sur les comptoirs et en pleine rue. Les résidences universitaires sont devenues de vrais centres commerciaux[13] de cette époque de tribulations. Dans une chambre de résidence universitaire on pouvait acheter des cigarettes et de la bière, dans l'autre du café, dans une troisième des jeans, dans la suivante des articles électroménagers et ainsi de suite. Les étudiants moldaves ont découvert en Roumanie post-révolutionnaire un monde dans lequel l'ubiquité des objets de consommation cachait mal l'incapacité de la majorité à se satisfaire vraiment de ceux-ci [Cf. Chelcea & Lățea, 2004: 152-174].

Pour la majorité des étudiants de Moldavie et de Bucovine, la «contrebande» est apparue comme un moyen normal et pratique de compléter leur budget d'étudiant et de satisfaire un surplus de besoins. Lors de leur premier voyage en Roumanie, certains étudiants ont été encouragés par leurs parents et par leurs proches à ramener avec eux certaines choses (du café ou de petits articles électroménagers), dans l'idée de les commercialiser une fois arrivés à destination, pour se procurer de la monnaie locale (à Chișinău le rouble soviétique circulait encore), en attendant le versement de la bourse. La majorité des étudiants moldaves apprenaient à la gare, lors du premier contact avec les locaux, la liste des objets

Un groupe de jeunes Moldaves, à Iași (Jassy), à l'occasion du pont de fleurs du 16 juin 1991. Photographie de Lina Grâu

produits en URSS qui bénéficiaient d'une demande forte de la part des locaux.

Au début, presque n'importe quoi pouvait être considéré comme une marchandise dans ce «petit trafic transfrontalier», car la Roumanie à cette époque était un marché insatiable qui ingurgitait presque tout en matière de biens de consommation: ampoules électriques, ballons à gonfler, savons parfumés, dentifrices «de marque», etc. [Cf. Chelcea & Lățea, 2004 : 155-166 ; Chelcea & Lățea, 2000; Țone, 2009]. Certains jeunes étudiants, plus familiers de la «haute» culture, trafiquaient avec un certain succès des biens «symboliques»: des livres (les maîtres de l'existentialisme et de l'absurde Camus et Kafka se vendaient comme des petits pains) et des disques vinyles (à cette époque la maison de disques russe «Melodia» sortait les albums des monstres sacrés du rock occidental: Beatles, Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, etc. – considérés avec vénération par les rockers roumains de tous âges).

Au fur et à mesure que la demande de la part des acheteurs roumains pour les objets de qualité croissait, les besoins des commerçants pour des formules de trafic plus rentables augmentaient aussi. Une partie des étudiants moldaves a découvert rapidement que, par un effort bien administré accompagné d'une once d'imagination et de sens pratique, la «contre-

13) Je reprends cette image d'un entretien avec une des personnes interviewées, ancien étudiant moldave en Roumanie de la première promotion.

bande» pouvait augmenter leurs revenus de manière substantielle. Comme, selon certains témoignages, le contrôle douanier était plus relâché dans les premiers mois après le départ des étudiants moldaves en Roumanie, le commerce informel tendait à devenir une occupation systématique. Suite à l'accumulation de sommes d'argent provenant de petits profits ou avec l'aide d'emprunts contractés auprès de la famille et d'amis, certains étudiants réussissaient à transporter des objets plus grands (téléviseurs, réfrigérateurs, magnétophones) et ainsi plus profitables. La demande pour les téléviseurs soviétiques était si importante en Roumanie que certains étudiants n'avaient même plus besoin d'aller au marché aux puces ou aux dépôts-ventes (les principaux lieux de vente / d'achat des produits provenant de l'URSS), ils les vendaient directement à la gare ou, sans taxe ni commission, aux chauffeurs de taxi.

Alors que le commerce informel transfrontalier réalisé avec de petits objets était une occupation surtout féminine, la «grande contrebande» – avec des objets de grande taille (électroménager, tronçonneuses, motos...) – était l'apanage des hommes [Cf. Chelcea & Lăţea, 2004: 160; Konstantinov, 1996: 769; Konstantinov, 1998: 737]. C'est une séparation sexuelle des tâches, motivée en général par la distribution inégale de la force physique (la force nécessaire au moins pour le transport des objets en question), mais qui n'est pas sans conséquence sur le plan matériel et social pour chaque sexe. Dans l'idée de certains étudiants moldaves de 1990/91, la «grande contrebande», qui impliquait des risques divers et parfois un certain niveau de violence, était associée à un idéal de masculinité (souvent inspiré du folklore interlope), et basée sur le culte de la force brute et le dédain vis-à-vis des valeurs «féminines» (sensibilité, non agression). Les étudiantes moldaves de la première promotion ont aussi essayé de faire un peu de «contrebande» – puisque tout le monde le faisait –, pour subvenir aux éventuels trous dans le budget. Les marchandises transportées par les étudiantes dans le trafic qu'elles faisaient à l'occasion des voyages réguliers à la maison étaient légères et facilement accessibles: ampoules, dentifrice, livres, bijouteries pas chères. Cela était d'habitude vendu directement à la résidence universitaire ou placé dans les dépôts-ventes, pour lesquels le coût de la commission était préféré à l'inconfort de la vente au marché aux puces. Leur implication réduite

Juillet 1992, Bucarest, devant l'ambassade de Russie. Manifestation organisée par la ligue des étudiants moldaves contre l'agression russe en Transnistrie. Photographie de Lina Grâu

dans le trafic transfrontalier a accordé aux étudiantes un avantage temporel, qu'elles pouvaient consacrer, entre autres, aux études ou à des relations plus harmonieuses avec les autres collègues. Plus rarement, certaines étudiantes cassaient cette représentation commune des femmes comme étant le « sexe faible » et s'engageaient, auprès de leurs partenaires masculins, dans des pratiques commerciales qui sollicitaient de manière égale un effort physique et un caractère trempé. Dans ces cas-là, certaines d'entre elles se sentaient obligées d'interrompre leurs études pour effectuer de la «contrebande», qui devenait pendant un an ou deux une activité à plein temps.

Au départ une stratégie de survie [Cf. Konstantinov, 1996: 762; Chelcea & Lățea, 2000: 191-207], la «contrebande» a rapidement été considérée comme une opportunité de s'enrichir et un signe de prestige. A contre-courant de l'image de l'étudiant pauvre (et qui correspondait à la réalité de nombreux étudiants de cette époque en Roumanie et en République de Moldavie), les étudiants moldaves qui pratiquaient la «contrebande» étaient remarqués de par leur consommation de produits et services «de luxe». Ils ne cachaient pas leur préférence pour les cigarettes chères, pour les vêtements de «bonne» marque, et ils sortaient le soir en groupe – en taxi, de ci, de là – pour dîner dans un restaurant «select». Pour beaucoup de ces étudiants, l'élévation – significative pour eux et visible pour les autres – de leur niveau de vie équivalait à la conquête d'une «normalité» occidentale [Cf. Rausing, 2008: 8], interdite et désirée sous le régime communiste et justement à cause de cela profondément ancrée dans un imaginaire nourri intensément de films étrangers et consolidée par une lecture à rebours de la propagande officielle. Pour ces étudiants qui venaient d'un monde dans lequel les biens étaient contrôlés par voie administrative, la consommation (même peu ostentatrice) de produits et de services «de marque» était un moyen d'exprimer une liberté (et une marque de pouvoir), perçue par la majorité de leur famille et de leurs congénères comme un phantasme ou un vice.

1990-1991: l'époque des successeurs d'Ostap Bender

L'opulence visible qu'affichaient (parfois sans le vouloir) les étudiants moldaves qui pratiquaient la «contrebande» inspirait de l'admiration et de l'envie à leurs collègues moins affirmés sur ce plan. Le fait que cet idéal de bien-être était atteint par certains «d'entre eux» rapidement (en seulement quelques mois après le début de l'année universitaire 1990/91) leur créait une image de personnes inventives, débrouillardes, puissantes. Les étudiants qui avaient réussi à se forger une telle image incarnaient au sein de la communauté des étudiants moldaves de nombreuses histoires à succès qui alimentaient les mythes d'enrichissement «en une nuit» de cette période post-révolutionnaire, pendant laquelle on croyait que tout était possible. Aussi bien au sein des étudiants «contrebandiers» (de toutes catégories) qu'au sein du «public» des étudiants «normaux», circulaient des légendes, souvent sans substrat réel, dans lesquelles certains émules locaux d'Ostap Bender réussissaient[14] à se créer une richesse en transportant et en vendant certains objets manquant apparemment de tout intérêt commercial, comme par exemple le mercure ou les mines à encre pour les stylos, découverts grâce à un flair commercial spécial. De nombreux étudiants ne pouvaient s'empêcher d'espérer qu'un beau jour la chance leur sourirait, qu'ils pourraient acquérir ce «million» chimérique, dont certains, n'est-ce pas?, ont pu s'emparer. Pendant cette période d'ambiguïté juridique et morale, certains imaginaient des scénarii qui frisaient le domaine pénal, si cela pouvait les rapprocher, selon eux, du «Graal» tant désiré. Certains étudiants ont essayé de produire à la maison (ou à la résidence universitaire) de la vodka contrefaite, mais ils ont déclaré forfait car la qualité de la boisson n'était pas suffisante. D'autres se sont montrés tentés par des «plans» encore moins honorables, avec comme excuse le fait qu'une fois riches, ils reviendraient à un mode de vie honnête.

Les limites que leur imposaient les agents

14) Ostap Bender est un « anti-héros » des romans de I. Ilf et de E. Petrov (Les 12 chaises et Le Veau d'or), représentant la débrouillardise et l'esprit aventurier des Russes (Soviétiques) dans les temps troubles de la NEP (les années 1920 en URSS),

de l'Etat au niveau du transport des produits commercialisés en Roumanie étaient souvent considérées par les étudiants moldaves qui pratiquaient la «contrebande» comme autant de barrières à dépasser, par des moyens pas nécessairement honnêtes. La réglementation douanière de l'URSS/RSSM en vigueur à cette époque imposait à chaque étudiant moldave la limite de ne transporter en Roumanie qu'un seul appareil électronique, noté dans le passeport avec un tampon, objet réservé exclusivement à l'utilisation personnelle, et par conséquent soumis à l'obligation de le rapporter dans le pays d'origine. Cette contrainte a forcé les étudiants commerçants à inventer une série de subterfuges et de stratégies pour pouvoir continuer à transporter des appareils techniques (en particulier des téléviseurs) de RSSM/URSS en Roumanie. L'une de celles-ci était de faire appel à un autre étudiant moldave, d'accord pour transporter un appareil électronique, utilisant son droit unique de passer la frontière avec un objet de ce type. Le fait de soudoyer les douaniers, un autre moyen de contourner l'interdiction, était aussi une des pratiques – répandues à cette époque – qui instituait un genre de complicité entre l'étudiant commerçant et l'agent de l'Etat en violant certaines normes juridiques instaurées par les autorités de l'Etat en question.

La pratique du commerce transfrontalier (et d'autres activités économiques informelles) par les étudiants moldaves était en lien direct avec la représentation que ceux-ci avaient et partageaient du pays duquel ils provenaient (et de l'autorité que cet Etat incarnait à leurs yeux). Dans la perception des étudiants moldaves de l'année académique 1990/1991, le gouvernement de l'URSS était sur le point de voir son autorité faiblir et de perdre sa légitimité [Cf. Verdery, 1996: 205; Humphrey, 1991]. Cette année-là a été perçue, par la suite, comme un intervalle de temps pendant lequel les anciennes lois et coutumes étaient provisoirement suspendues, et les nouvelles n'étaient pas encore apparues. Les convictions nationalistes (pro roumaines et anti russes) que partageaient beaucoup d'étudiants moldaves, venus au gré des vagues des «mouvements nationaux», empruntaient à ces sentiments «anti soviétiques» une légitimité idéologique. Les repères juridiques étaient d'autant plus fluctuants pour eux que le cadre juridique imposé par le pays d'accueil (dans lequel de nombreux étudiants étaient confrontés à des difficultés d'adaptation) était lui aussi emprunté. La naissance de l'Etat de la République Moldave le 27 août 1991 n'a pas été non plus de nature à offrir immédiatement aux jeunes moldaves un ancrage solide dans un système de normes clairement définies, vu le caractère récent et, dans l'idée de beaucoup, provisoire, de cet Etat.

Pendant cette période d'ambiguïté juridique, le contournement de certaines normes légales n'était plus vu nécessairement, par les jeunes partis à l'automne 1990 faire leurs études en Roumanie, comme un fait condamnable, tant que ces normes ne respectaient pas, à leurs yeux, les intérêts particuliers des citoyens. Le comportement (et les possibles actes de «déviance») des jeunes étaient coordonnés et vérifiés surtout selon le prisme d'un système de valeurs – individuelles et collectives –, héritées de la famille et de la communauté d'origine. Cependant, pendant cette période «révolutionnaire», quand les positions éthiques des générations âgées étaient associées aux anciens systèmes de normes et de valeurs, des contradictions apparaissaient assurément entre les visions des parents et celles des fils et des filles [Cf. Spitzer, 1973; Burguire, 1994]. Avec leur ambition d'émancipation par rapport aux anciens cadres normatifs qui contredisaient leurs nouveaux principes et aspirations – de liberté, de puissance et de confort matériel –, les jeunes exprimaient de plus en plus ouvertement leur désaccord face à un mode de vie – marqué par les manques et les sacrifices au nom d'un code normatif, symbole d'un bien-être commun supposé – qu'ils considéraient injuste et désuet. Une des conséquences de ce processus socio-mental, par lequel les anciens codes normatifs sont partiellement abolis, partiellement substitués, était l'instauration d'une sorte de nihilisme ax-

iologique; processus que le sociologue français Emile Durkheim nommait «anomie» [Cf. Durkheim, 1897: 113; Merton, 1938: 672–682; Orrù, 1998][15] et que Dostoïevski a analysé par le biais des réflexions de son personnage Ivan Karamazov, selon lequel «si Dieu [alias l'Etat éternel et tout puissant, dans lequel tous ont cru comme en Dieu] n'existe pas, tout est permis». Certains étudiants qui pratiquaient des activités économiques informelles définissaient pour eux-mêmes et pour leurs amis un nouvel horizon moral qui assurait à leurs activités une base éthique et une rationalité pratique [Cf. Konstantinov, 1996: 764-766]. Comme cet horizon était variable et extensible d'un cas à l'autre, à ses marges ils pouvaient facilement se créer un espace pour des intentions et des actes qualifiés de «déviants» du point de vue des «anciennes» lois et coutumes.

Un groupe d'étudiants moldaves qui vendent du papier A4 à la feuille, sur les marches de l'Université de Bucarest. 1992. Photographie de Lina Grâu

«Le commerce n'a pas d'amis»

Une fois arrivés dans les centres universitaires roumains, les étudiants moldaves se regroupaient en général selon leurs relations d'amitié, établies et consolidées dans le tourbillon des événements romantiques et révolutionnaires de la fin des années 1980. Au fur et à mesure des premiers mois après le début de l'année universitaire, les pratiques commerciales informelles devenaient plus efficaces et amélioraient leur degré d'organisation par l'implication de ces relations de solidarité et de collaboration au sein des groupes d'amis et de collègues de faculté.

Certains groupes d'étudiants commerçants, liés entre eux par des relations d'amitié, de camaraderie ou de famille, prenaient rapidement une structure de clan, avec une organisation hiérarchique des rapports de collaboration et de subordination à l'intérieur du groupe, coordonnée par un leader auto établi, mais reconnu comme tel par les membres du groupe [Cf. Humphrey, 1991]. D'autres étudiants moldaves formaient des «équipes» de quelques membres, dans lesquelles il n'existait pas de statut clair de leader, mais plutôt une sorte de «conseil» qui administrait les affaires communes en vertu d'un «règlement» non écrit selon lequel les tâches étaient attribuées, les entrées et les sorties étaient contrôlées (d'une manière stricte), les règles de relation à l'intérieur du groupe et avec les membres d'autres groupes étaient établies. Les tâches étaient diversifiées et interchangeables: un (ou deux) «membres» allaient? à Chişinău (ou dans une autre ville de RSSM/URSS) pour acheter de la marchandise, puis la transportait en Roumanie via la douane, l'autre (ou les deux autres) devaient trouver des acheteurs ou vendre la marchandise au marché aux puces (ou aux dépôts-ventes); d'autres co-équipiers (qui changeaient souvent) avaient un rôle d'intermédiaire, si nécessaire, pour les relations de partenariat avec les personnes clés ou les réseaux locaux de commerçants.

Au début de la mise en place d'une de ces équipes, les relations entre les membres du noyau fondateur étaient basées sur la solidarité et la confiance réciproque, et les tâches et

15) L'anomie est l'état d'un individu ou d'un groupe caractérisé par la désintégration des normes qui règlent le comportement des gens et les relations entre ceux-ci. Robert K. Merton considère que l'anomie est générée par la contradiction entre les buts culturels et les normes sociales (moyens légitimes de les atteindre). Dans cette perspective, l'anomie peut générer des déviances (des actes qui violent les normes sociales existantes). D'autre part, Jean-Marie Guyau, le père du concept d'anomie (Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction (1885)), considère que l'anomie peut créer de nouvelles formes de relations humaines, d'autonomie créatrices (en rupture avec les normes constituées).

même les revenus étaient répartis équitablement. Au bout de quelques mois cependant, une éthique individualiste (basée sur l'intérêt personnel) s'imposait au détriment de l'éthique communautaire (définie par la prééminence des intérêts du groupe et des relations d'affectivité), diminuant ainsi le degré de confiance et de solidarité entre les «membres». De cette manière, les relations d'amitié ont progressivement été remplacées par des rapports rationalisés de partenariat.

Habituellement, ces groupes d'étudiants agissaient séparément (car le marché était suffisamment vaste pour tous), d'autre fois ils s'engageaient dans certaines activités pour lesquelles ils sollicitaient une collaboration. Pour augmenter l'investissement dans les objets soumis au trafic transfrontalier et ainsi le profit de ces opérations, les étudiants commerçants – ou les équipes dont ceux-ci faisaient partie – avaient besoin de plus d'argent. Une des formes les plus fréquentes de collaboration entre les groupes – ou entre les membres de groupes différents – était l'emprunt de certaines sommes d'argent. La majorité des étudiants impliqués dans des activités commerciales ont été plusieurs fois de suite endettés et ils ont emprunté. Certaines affaires pouvaient cependant se solder par un échec, par exemple dans le cas où la marchandise était confisquée à la douane. Dans de telles situations, un autre emprunt était fait, dans le but de diminuer les pertes de l'affaire qui n'avait pas fonctionné. Dans le cas ou celle-ci non plus ne réussissait pas, les dettes s'accumulaient, et la possibilité de rembourser à temps devenait plus faible. C'était l'intérêt de l'endetté de retarder le plus possible le remboursement, alors que les créditeurs multipliaient les stratégies pour récupérer leur argent. Ces relations devenaient parfois encore plus compliquées dans le cas où certains débiteurs ne reconnaissaient pas, pour certaines raisons, la dette que les créditeurs leur réclamaient. Les relations entre partenaires – souvent des collègues et de vieux amis – se dégradaient progressivement sur fond de dettes non remboursées à temps et de tentatives des créditeurs de les récupérer, en recourrant parfois à des intimidations et à des menaces. Ainsi, une partie des étudiants qui étaient, au début de l'année universitaire, de bons amis et des collègues devenaient, au bout d'un an de relations gangrenées par l'animosité et le manque de confiance, des adversaires redoutables et détestés. Ces tensions pouvaient prendre l'apparence de luttes de pouvoir, dans lesquelles le principal enjeu n'était pas tant la répartition des zones d'activité (parce qu'il n'existait pas de motif réel de concurrence) que la manifestation symbolique de la suprématie.

Les étudiants «contrebandiers»: entre déviance et non-conformisme

Les étudiants moldaves qui ont pratiqué régulièrement la «contrebande» au début des années 1990 ont eu à sacrifier beaucoup de choses qu'ils ont regrettées par la suite: des amis, des valeurs «idéalistes», du temps – qu'ils auraient pu autrement accorder aux études. En même temps ces étudiants commerçants ont bien sûr gagné une expérience qui a formé et consolidé certaines aptitudes relationnelles, d'influence et de négociation (en rapport avec les membres de leur propre groupe, avec les autres partenaires, mais aussi avec les agents de l'Etat), d'adaptation à des conditions difficiles de vie à la marge de certaines frontières sociales et morales, sous la pression d'exigences multiples et diverses (dictées par les activités fluctuantes d'une économie informelle et, en parallèle, par les études à l'université). Cette expérience de vie, qui pour la plupart des étudiants moldaves s'est terminée au bout de deux ou au maximum trois ans d'études, a conféré à certains d'eux des qualités de leader et d'homme d'influence, qui n'ont pas tardé à se manifester en seulement quelques années après la fin de leurs études.

La traversée des frontières (quelles qu'elles soient), jusqu'alors récemment interdites, était à la base de la naissance d'un nouvel ethos qui a cherché dans les années qui suivirent la chute de l'URSS une régularisation juridique et une

légitimation morale. Les étudiants «contrebandiers» de 1990/1991 sont devenus, sans s'en réclamer (et aux côtés d'autres catégories sociales), les promoteurs de certaines activités commerciales qui allaient s'imposer rapidement comme normales (le commerce international d'import/ export, le trafic transfrontalier) et les porteurs de certains modèles de mentalité et de comportement presque révolutionnaires pour ce contexte de rupture, par rapport à un régime communiste caduque: individualisme, consumérisme, prééminence des valeurs matérielles, etc. à travers un comportement et un discours que l'on peut qualifier d'immoral à cette époque, cette «minorité active» et impatiente d'étudiants a contribué à sa manière à la reformulation de certains modèles rigides de pratiques et de valeurs (considérés comme idéalistes et/ou idéologiquement manipulés), qui ont perdu leur efficacité, tandis que l'Etat réduisait brusquement son «monopole sur la violence légitime», et que les libertés individuelle éclataient au grand jour.

Lors d'une fête, dans une chambre de résidence universitaire avec des étudiants moldaves à Bucarest. 1992.
Photographie de Lina Grâu

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MARTOR

Title: "Les relations interethniques pendant la période 1945 – 1990 à Alțâna (département de Sibiu). Etude de cas"

Author: Ana Pascu

How to cite this article: Pascu, Ana. 2012. "Les relations interethniques pendant la période 1945 – 1990 à Alțâna (département de Sibiu). Etude de cas". *Martor* 17: 81-100.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

Les relations interethniques pendant la période 1945 – 1990 à Alțâna (département de Sibiu). Etude de cas

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude de cas étudie minutieusement l'évolution des relations interethniques et intercommunautaires entre les Roumains et les Saxons dans le village d'Alțâna (département de Sibiu), à partir de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale et jusqu'aux années suivant la Révolution [de décembre 1989, NDT]. Une puissante communauté de Saxons a existé dans le village jusqu'à la Révolution, et elle reste encore aujourd'hui, suite aux départs en Allemagne, la plus nombreuse de la vallée de la rivière Hârtibaciu. J'ai mis en évidence, dans l'analyse, la modification des mentalités des Roumains et des Saxons causée par les changements historiques provoqués par le communisme (déportation des Saxons après la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, expropriation des Saxons, collectivisation), ainsi que ses suites après la Révolution. Ont ensuite été étudiées les conséquences du point de vue identitaire, en prenant l'exemple d'un jeune Roumain élevé au sein de la communauté saxonne, en contexte de changement de mentalité locale.

MOTS-CLEFS:

Identité; interethnique; déportation; expropriation; collectivisation; Saxons

Dernièrement, les études consacrées à l'histoire et à la culture des Saxons, cette minorité ethnique de Roumanie qui a joué un rôle important pendant huit siècles dans la vie économique, sociale et politique de Transylvanie, se sont considérablement multipliées. Ont été mis en évidence la culture et la civilisation saxonne, le rôle économique et l'impact des événements historiques du vingtième siècle sur leur mode de vie. La perception que les Roumains ont eu de la communauté saxonne a été bien étudiée, mais beaucoup moins la façon dont les deux ethnies se sont perçues l'une l'autre, se sont acceptées et se sont influencées réciproquement. Cette réticence est compréhensible, car les générations de Saxons qui ont vécu des moments douloureux et incriminant les Roumains n'ont pas oublié ces souvenirs et ont transmis en bonne partie la mémoire de leurs souffrances aux jeunes générations, ce qui peut générer aujourd'hui des insatisfactions et des relations interethniques tendues.

Cependant, ce type d'étude est nécessaire, car les générations changent et, au fur et à mesure que passent les années, disparaissent les témoins qui ont vu et vécu les moments historiques qui ont conduit à la modification des relations entre les Roumains et les Saxons, aux modifications de la structure des communautés ethniques et, implicitement, de leur culture.

Dans les communautés multiethniques, l'analyse des relations interethniques crée un tableau plus complet de la vie quotidienne des Roumains et des Saxons, qui se sont partagés un même espace, qui ont travaillé ensemble, se sont rencontrés et se sont influencés réciproquement, au niveau de leur mode de vie et implicitement, de leur propre culture. L'étude des relations interethniques est d'autant plus importante qu'elle joue un rôle significatif dans la délimitation des identités régionales spécifiques (dans le cas qui nous intéresse, la vallée du Hârtibaciu) et des identités locales. Inversement, c'est l'analyse de la vie quotidienne, dans le contexte historique plus large et dans le contexte culturel concret de la commu-

nauté, qui permet une meilleure compréhension des relations complexes entre Roumains et Saxons, dans une perspective diachronique. De plus, la période communiste s'est révélée être une période de rupture et de changements profonds pour les communautés multiethniques.

Cette étude a pour thème le problème des relations interethniques dans le village d'Alțâna pendant la période 1945 – 1990; dans ce village une communauté saxonne nombreuse a existé jusqu'à après la Révolution, qui existe encore, et qui est aujourd'hui la plus nombreuse de la vallée du Hârtibaciu, dans laquelle il n'y a plus qu'au maximum dix Saxons dans chaque village.

Précisions méthodologiques

Les relations interethniques reflètent les constructions identitaires et la manière dont chaque communauté ethnique voit l'autre communauté. Elles reflètent la façon dont les choses sont dites et surtout la façon dont elles ne sont pas dites. Obligées de vivre à côté l'une de l'autre ou même ensemble, les communautés développent, par une négociation permanente, des stratégies de coexistence ; le déroulement pacifique de la vie est une preuve que les stratégies qu'elles utilisent sont viables, adaptées aux mentalités et qu'elles ont été appliquées avec succès.

Chaque ethnie possède son propre mode de perception du passé d'un même endroit et construit son propre ensemble d'histoires particulières, fondées sur les mythes identitaires, en les insérant dans une géographie propre. On considère que ces histoires, considérées comme représentatives et vécues par chaque ethnie séparément, se jouxtent plus qu'elles ne se superposent, et dans la plupart des cas s'excluent et ne se complètent pas réciproquement (E. R. Colta, 2010). Cependant, dans certains moments d'équilibre historique, les histoires des différentes communautés se rencontrent, décrivant les événements locaux selon des angles différents, en accusant ou en justifiant, en complétant et en négociant.

Simultanément, les relations interethniques affectent la vie des membres d'une communauté multiethnique à des niveaux différents (politique, social, culturel, de mentalité, religieux), leur action oscillant entre différents pôles: superficiel et profond, typique et atypique, temporaire et permanent.

Pour la collecte des données, j'ai réalisé une enquête de terrain dans le village d'Alțâna, sur la période 2011 – 2012, ayant pour but de mettre en évidence la manière dont les événements de l'histoire collective, l'Histoire (avec un grand «h») du vingtième siècle, ont influencé l'histoire locale et les histoires familiales des deux communautés, ont modifié les mentalités, le mode de vie, «l'ordre» [ce terme désigne le système de traditions et de coutumes, ainsi que l'organisation spatiale du terroir, qui existaient avant les bouleversements relatés dans cet article, NDT] dont parlent aussi bien les Saxons que les Roumains. La mémoire familiale reflète l'histoire d'une manière subjective. Les événements qui sont extérieurs pour les autres, sont réels, vivaces et douloureux pour les membres des familles affectées, et se transmettent aux jeunes générations par les personnes âgées, sous la forme d'expériences personnelles vécues. Cela confère à la mémoire familiale des dimensions aussi bien collectives, publiques que personnelles et intimes, en posant la question intercommunautaire du passé, avec ses erreurs et ses succès sur le plan moral et sur le plan actantiel, avec des conséquences jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Simultanément, j'ai analysé un cas dans lequel l'évolution des éléments de mentalité individuelle a joué un rôle dans le changement des mentalités collectives.

J'ai fait appel, en ce qui concerne la méthode de recherche, d'abord à l'entretien semi dirigé utilisé dans les recherches sur l'histoire orale, en me focalisant sur les problèmes qui m'intéressent. J'ai enregistré seize témoignages oraux d'informateurs représentatifs, fins connaisseurs de l'histoire locale, de la culture roumaine, et, respectivement, de la culture

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saxonne et des relations entre les habitants de la commune. De ces seize informateurs, quatre sont saxons (de familles saxonnes ou mixtes); Maria B. a été déportée, et les autres saxonnes ont eu un ou deux parents déportés. Les autres informateurs sont roumains. Trois informateurs, même s'ils habitent depuis qu'ils sont jeunes à Alțâna, ont grandi dans des villages uniquement roumains, ce qui leur a offert la possibilité de comparer deux réalités différentes du point de vue ethnique. Même si le nombre d'informateurs paraît faible, leurs récits se réfèrent à la vie d'un nombre assez important de villageois, complétant le tableau des deux communautés. Cela a été possible car les deux communautés remplissent les conditions pour être considérées comme des collectivités-mémoires, selon la définition de Sanda Golopenția (S. Golopenția, 2001: 36 – 37), pour lequel une collectivité-mémoire est une collectivité pour laquelle:

- les membres se connaissent tous (y compris les surnoms individuels et familiaux, les ascendants et descendants familiaux, le lieu d'habitation ; chacun sait que les autres savent tout de lui (société transparente)).

- tous les membres communiquent oralement;

- tous les membres sont en contact rituel.

Au sein des communautés ethniques il n'existe pas seulement une communauté rituelle, mais aussi une communauté de connaissances non verbalisées, de silences informés, de dialogues observés indéfiniment. En même temps, au niveau du village, les Roumains et les Saxons se connaissent et communiquent oralement.

La formule de l'étude de cas permet aussi la mise en évidence de cas spéciaux, la présentation d'individualités de la scène du village. Du chœur des personnes des deux communautés vont se détacher des solistes avec des personnes significatives, du point de vue des problèmes des relations interethniques. La recherche se focalisera enfin sur une famille comptant trois générations. Pour analyser ces cas, j'ai utilisé l'entretien du type « récit de vie », car cela explique aussi la manière dont les

individus comprennent les événements socio-historiques et leurs causes politiques, le mode dont les membres d'un groupe ou d'une génération perçoivent certains événements et actions et la manière dont la perception, l'expérience ou l'interprétation d'événements sociaux par des individus est liée à leur développement individuel. Les récits de vie sont en effet une interprétation d'une vérité historique, et non pas la vérité historique (R. Atkinson, 2006 : 28).

Les récits de vie ont mis en évidence le fait que, lors d'une interaction difficile, les gens vont adopter des stratégies de négociation, vont prendre une position défensive et vont avoir un discours de justification. Cependant, une fois que ce discours de justification se retrouve chez plusieurs informateurs de la même communauté, cela signifie que c'est un discours de toute la communauté à propos d'autres personnes ou d'une autre communauté. Cela se voit aussi dans notre étude de cas, la communauté roumaine ayant un discours de justification, alors que la communauté saxonne essaie de dépasser le stade critique d'un discours d'accusation.

Sans aucun doute, à la perspective subjective des informateurs s'ajoutent aussi les limites inhérentes à la mémoire, autant celles de la mémoire individuelle, que celles de la mémoire collective. Des données importantes se perdent, la trame de causalité des faits s'interrompt, les événements se modifient à cause de la distance temporelle et du changement de la perspective interprétative de ceux qui se souviennent. La mémoire reconstruit et redéfinit le passé et ainsi, à la fin de la recherche, nous allons obtenir pas tant un tableau du passé, qu'un tableau du présent revisitant le passé, l'un des tableaux possibles.

Quand les données fournies par l'enquête de terrain ont été disponibles, l'horizon de la mémoire collective (S. Golopenția, 2001 : 63) des communautés d'Alțâna s'arrête un peu avant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale. J'ai suivi la manière dont laquelle ont évolué les relations interethniques entres les Roumains et les Saxons au cours de trois générations, la manière dont laquelle les deux communautés ont défini leur identité l'une par rapport à l'autre, et les discours de justification par lesquels elles essaient de compenser les culpabilisations provoquées par les événements passés, en grande partie causées par la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, qui a eu comme conséquence directe l'instauration du régime communiste dans le pays et, pour la minorité saxonne, leur déportation en URSS, leur expropriation et l'appropriation des biens par les Roumains et les Roms, au détriment des Saxons. Les conséquences de ces événements se ressentent jusqu'à aujourd'hui, avec une intensité maximum immédiatement après la Révolution, lors de la dissolution des Coopératives Agricoles de Production (CAP) et de la rétrocession des terrains aux anciens propriétaires. Pour cette raison, nous ne limiterons pas l'étude des relations interethniques à la période communiste, mais nous verrons, autant que possible, les conséquences de ces relations jusqu'à aujourd'hui.

Même s'il existe dans la commune des communautés de Roms, j'ai décidé de ne pas étudier les relations des Roms avec les Roumains et les Saxons, et de ce fait les témoignages des informateurs roms manquent. Je présente les perceptions des Roumains et des Saxons concernant les Roms, dans la mesure où elles mettent en évidence des différences entre les relations des Saxons et des Roms et celles des Roumains et des Roms.

L'époque de l'« ordre »: avant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale

La commune d'Alțâna compte aujourd'hui environ 1600 habitants, Roumains, Saxons et Roms, répartis dans trois villages: Alțâna, Ghijasa de Sus et Benești. Sur le territoire de la commune a de plus existé un village, autrefois nommé Androchel[1], dont on dit qu'il a été complètement détruit par les Turcs en 1493, mais qu'il a été habité de nouveau par la suite, car les derniers habitants des dix maisons qui

1) Nous suivons l'usage des locaux qui prononcent ce nom « Androhiel ».

composaient le hameau se sont dispersés seulement après la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, à la suite d'une attaque de voleurs.

Nous avons concentré nos recherches sur le village d'Alțâna, le centre administratif de la commune, qui a été une implantation médiévale saxonne précoce (attestée dans un contrat de vente de 1291) comme le montre son nom, d'origine allemande[2]. Le 1er janvier 1990 il y avait à Alțâna 560 Saxons, aujourd'hui ils sont 68. En 1998, le village comptait environ 1200 habitants. Dans les maisons aux façades fermées et aux portails massifs, nommées « cours », habitent à présent au moins deux générations. L'ancien « ordre » du village est encore vivace dans la mémoire collective des trois communautés : tous savent que les Saxons, les Roumains et les Roms ont habité séparément, malgré le fait que, aujourd'hui, dans le quartier saxon habitent aussi des Roumains et des Roms. Au centre du village, qui coïncide avec le centre de la communauté saxonne, on trouve une église luthérienne, datant du treizième siècle, avec une enceinte fortifiée du quinzième siècle et une tour-clocher.

Sur la géographie réelle du village se sont superposés des éléments de géographie symbolique : les Saxons habitent sur le terrain plat, le meilleur, ils possèdent les maisons et les cours les plus grandes, les terres de « première catégorie », situées près du village, alors que les Roumains habitent sur les collines, dans des maisons et des cours plus petites, et les Roms plus loin, au-delà de la rivière Hârtibaciu, dans de modestes maisons en pisé. Jusqu'à l'appropriation, les Roms étaient briquetiers et ils aidaient les Saxons aux travaux des champs. Avec les terres obtenues des Saxons, ils sont entrés à la Coopérative Agricole de Production. Les Roumains et les Saxons qui travaillaient avec eux en équipes les considéraient comme travailleurs et honnêtes et les nommaient, d'une manière laudative, « tziganes de soie ».

Indifférents aux explications historiques ou économiques (peu de villageois se préoccupent de l'histoire du village ou de celle des Saxons), les villageois ont expliqué la supériorité évidente des Saxons du point de vue de l'habitation selon le principe du premier venu: les Saxon détiennent les meilleurs endroits, les meilleures maisons et terres parce qu'ils sont les premiers arrivés dans le village. A cette première reconnaissance de la supériorité des Saxons par rapport aux Roumains vont s'ajouter des appréciations positives concernant leur caractère travailleur, la supériorité de leurs métiers, leur mode de vie, leur organisation sociale en quartiers et même les fêtes saxonnes.

En plus de l'église luthérienne, il existe aussi une église orthodoxe roumaine et une église gréco- catholique, à présent sans fidèles. Le bâtiment de l'école allemande a été construit par la communauté saxonne, comme le centre culturel, dans lequel avaient lieu les bals et les rencontres de quartier. Chaque communauté avait de plus un hangar à l'air libre, où l'on dansait l'été. Dans la cour de l'école roumaine il y a l'ancien centre communal, actuellement la salle de sport. Les communautés ont chacun leur cimetière, les Roms ayant eu aussi le leur.

« L'ordre » s'étendait aussi aux terres : les Saxons, selon les « vecinătăți », c'est-à-dire l'organisation en quartiers, devaient entretenir les routes, les ponts et les sources aménagées au bout des parcelles. Encore aujourd'hui il existe une partie « des jardins saxons », des endroits avec des arbres fruitiers situés sur leurs terres, avec des hangars, où avaient souvent lieu de petites fêtes : « [Avant la guerre], l'ordre était partout, chacun maintenait l'ordre sur sa parcelle, où y'avait aussi un puit. […] Pis après l'jeune [saxon, NDA] allait là-bas le dimanche, il nettoyait et c'était tellement beau… comme dans un parc. C'était organisé par groupes [par quartiers, NDA] et lui il devait y aller, faire les puits, réparer les ponts, les petits ponts où ils passaient avec les charrettes, et garder les puits de la parcelle propres » (Auguste D., Saxonne, 74 ans).

Les Saxons d'Alțâna étaient de bons ouvriers ; il y a des documents sur l'existence d'une corporation de cordonniers à partir de 1590 (E. Crișan, I. Moise, 1997 – 1998 : 9).

2) E. Crișan et I. Moise (1997 – 1998 : 8) donnent plusieurs origines possibles pour ce nom, mais toutes allemandes: Allzehn, „Les Dix", c'est-à-dire les dix fondateurs du village ; Alczen, le nom d'une localité du Rhin inférieur, d'où auraient pu venir les colons ; Alzenan, „Vallée des Aulnes", explication proposée par Thomas Nägler, etc.

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Les Saxons étaient forgerons, cordonniers, tanneurs, maçons, meuniers, ils ont construit des maisons et ont travaillé la terre, alors que les Roumains étaient plutôt agriculteurs et bergers.

Vie communautaire et relations interethniques avant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale

Avant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, la communauté saxonne d'Alțâna était très nombreuse. Les Saxons et les Roumains les plus âgés se souviennent qu'il y avait beaucoup de jeunes : « Tu sais, il y avait vraiment beaucoup de Saxons. La jeunesse était nombreuse. Et des Roumains aussi. Maintenant il n'y a plus de jeunesse au village, plus du tout ! » (Eufimia F., Roumaine, 84 ans).

En ce qui concerne les relations entre les Saxons et les Roumains avant la guerre, tous les informateurs ont affirmé que les relations étaient bonnes: « Les relations entre les trois nationalités qui étaient depuis presque toujours ici, au village, donc les relations Saxon – Roumain, Saxon – Tzigane et ensuite Roumain – Tzigane, étaient bonnes en général. Avant que la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale ne commence, par exemple les Saxons avaient encore leurs terres, ils étaient agriculteurs, ça c'était le métier de base, la préoccupation de base des villageois d'ici ; ils étaient agriculteurs, ils travaillaient au champ et ils élevaient des animaux. Nous avions aussi de nombreux artisans, nous avions tous les artisans qui existaient dans les villages, donc si tu avais besoin d'un maçon, tu l'avais, et pas un seul, tu avais un charpentier, un menuisier, un peintre, un cordonnier, on avait de tout. On n'avait pas besoin d'aller dans les villages voisins, nous avions tout ce qui nous fallait au village et de bons artisans qui faisaient des articles de qualité, comme tu ne peux plus vraiment trouver aujourd'hui » (Rosemarie M., 56 ans).

Cela n'a pas impliqué de mélange des communautés, qui vivaient séparément, chaque communauté avec ses fêtes et ses occupations ; même les routes pour aller au champ ne coïncidaient pas, parce que les Saxons et les Roumains avaient leurs terres dans des zones différentes, et les Roms n'avaient pas de terres. La séparation est allée jusqu'à l'évitement des parties du village habitées par les autres communautés. Ainsi, Rosemarie M. raconte comment son père, revenu de déportation, mis à la porte de la maison de ses parents, a dû aller dans un nouveau logement, « quelque part sur la colline, à côté de l'église, où papa a dit qu'il ne savait pas s'il était allé de ce côté-là une fois ou deux avant l'âge de 17 ans[3]».

Les artisans saxons faisaient exception, ils étaient souvent appelés pour construire une maison pour les Roumains ; inversement, les Roumains connaissaient les rues des Saxons dans la mesure où ils faisaient appel aux services des artisans saxons. « La communauté saxonne était plus fermée que la roumaine, parce qu'ils possédaient tout ce dont il avaient besoin. Ils n'avaient pas besoin d'aller chez les Roumains » (Eugen V., Roumain, 30 ans).

Dans ces conditions, les relations entres les Saxons et les Roumains étaient bonnes, mais réduites aux relations de politesse : « Avant non, on n'avait rien à faire avec eux, tu vois ? Eux ils avaient leurs occupations et nous nos occupations. Ils avaient leur église, leur danse, les jeunes femmes et les jeunes hommes… Et on ne se mélangeait pas avec les autres. […]

Les Roumains ne parlaient pas trop avec les Saxons. Ni les Saxons avec les Roms… » (Eufimia F.).

Cependant, les jeunes roumains allaient de temps en temps assister à la danse des Saxons dans leur hangar ou bien, inversement, les jeunes saxons venaient assister à la danse des Roumains : « On allait le dimanche à la danse, parce qu'y'avait un hangar, c'est comme ça qu'ils l'appelaient. Pi après on allait à la danse des Saxons. Allez on y va, parce que hé, y'avait bien encore un gars non marié, tu t'amusais comme ça, avec lui, […] parce qu'on n'a pas eu d'problème avec les Saxons » (Eufimia F.). Mais les jeunes ne dansaient pas ensemble, parce que personne ne connaissait les danses spécifiques de l'autre ethnie, et qu'il n'y avait pas de mariages mixtes avant la guerre : « Les Saxons ne s'mariaient pas avec les Roumains ! Aucun d'eux ne se mariait chez nous ! » (Eufimia F.). L'identité ethnique, l'identité religieuse et les coutumes elles-mêmes des deux communautés empêchaient les mariages entre les Roumains et les Saxons.

La séparation entre les communautés est aussi visible au niveau linguistique : les Roumains n'ont pas appris la langue saxonne, alors que les Saxons apprenaient le roumain à l'école allemande. Même les enfants ne dépassaient pas la zone du village de leur propre communauté, ils apprenaient dans des écoles séparées, dans leur langue maternelle, et les Roumains ne jouaient pas avec les Saxons, ce qui, de nouveau, les empêchait de s'habituer à la langue de l'autre communauté pendant l'enfance. Les Saxons qui employaient des Roms ou des Roumains apprenaient à parler le roumain, petits, comme en témoigne Maria B., Saxonne. Ils parlaient en roumain avec les Roms.

Cela n'a pas exclu l'emprunt de mots saxons en roumain, mais une recherche linguistique est nécessaire pour comprendre la manière et l'époque à laquelle ils ont été empruntés.

En ce qui concerne les relations entre les Saxons et les Roumains : « Chaque famille de Saxons avait une famille de Tziganes qui venait tout le temps travailler chez eux […]. L'homme aidait l'homme saxon aux travaux des champs et la femme aidait la paysanne. Peut-être que le matin elles lavaient les vêtements, parce qu'à l'époque on lavait les vêtements à la batte en bois, peut-être qu'après elles travaillaient un peu au jardin, elles cuisinaient, puis elles allaient au champ. C'est ce que je veux dire : que jamais les Saxons ne les ont exploités. Jamais ces gens-là, qui étaient pauvres, jamais ils n'ont travaillé sans salaire, donc ils ont toujours été payés et si le printemps, l'été, l'automne passaient et que venait l'hiver, bien sûr les Saxons n'avaient plus de travaux à faire. […] Et que faisaient les familles de Tziganes, elles venaient ici chaque jour, au moins pour voir, peut-être que quand même elles sortaient les ordures de la grange et elles recevaient de la nourriture de la famille saxonne. Elles recevaient des pommes de terre, du choux saumuré de la barrique, du lard, c'est comme ça que chaque famille saxonne avait une famille de Tziganes dont elle prenait soin, et cette famille-là aidait les Saxons aux travaux, donc de ce point de vue les relations étaient très bonnes" (Rosemarie M.).

3) Entre la rue où habitaient Rosemarie M. et sa famille, au centre du village, et la rue Pârâul Napilor, où habitaient des Roumains et où ils ont dû déménager, il n'y a pas plus de 500 mètres, ce qui montre clairement qu'il est question d'une distance symbolique. Le dépassement de la distance symbolique entre les deux communautés et l'obligation de résider dans un espace étranger du point de vue ethnique, en plus des conséquences des déportations, ont été difficiles à accepter : « Cela a été si dur pour lui, inimaginable ! », relate sa fille.

L'époque de la destruction: la déportation des Saxons (1945)

Les gens ne parlent pas de la guerre au village, mais les deux communautés, roumaine et saxonne, gardent un souvenir vivace de la déportation des Saxons, bien que d'une perspective partiellement différente. Pendant la guerre, les Saxons ont lutté, comme les Roumains, aux côtés des Allemands, jusqu'au renversement de situation au détriment de l'Allemagne, mais, assumant leur identité allemande, ils ont combattu dans des postes privilégiés, dans les troupes SS, pas dans les bataillons roumains. Lors de l'occupation soviétique d'après-guerre, la situation change radicalement, on considère que les personnes d'origine allemande ont collaboré avec les

nazis et on prend des mesures punitives aux conséquences graves pour les Saxons. Il semble qu'environ 70000 personnes d'origine allemande de Roumanie ont été déportées en URSS en 1945 (C. Budeancă, 2011: 153).

Le moment du départ et le voyage dans des conditions inhumaines, les conditions de vie dans les camps, la faim, la saleté, les maladies et la mort, le travail forcé, tous ces événements sont gravés, jusqu'à aujourd'hui, dans la mémoire des Saxons d'Alțâna qui ont été déportés et de leurs familles. Les souvenirs des souffrances endurées ont été transmis à la mémoire collective de la génération suivante et assumés par leurs enfants. Ainsi, Rosemarie M., dont le père a été déporté à l'âge de 17 ans, raconte les détails de la déportation, qu'elle a appris de la bouche de son père, comme si elle l'avait vécue elle-même : « Donc ils sont partis le 13 janvier, par un froid [terrible], ils ont été réunis chez nous à l'école, ils ont amené les camions et les ont garés avec l'arrière directement à la porte de l'école, de telle manière que personne ne pouvait plus sortir… ».

La manière dont les Saxons ont été traités par les autorités roumaines a été très dure : même s'ils étaient envoyés pour travailler, sans être coupables d'autre chose que d'avoir une identité allemande, elles les ont traités cruellement, séparant les enfants des parents et laissant les enfants en bas âge sans aide ni abri : « Ils ont déportés les femmes et les hommes. Femmes, hommes, à partir de 17 ans, les femmes jusqu'à 35 ans, les hommes jusqu'à 40 ans. Et ils n'ont pas demandé s'il y avait des mères qui avaient 3 ou 4 enfants en bas âge, rien, ils n'en ont pas tenu compte, ils ont pris les mères et ne se sont pas intéressés au fait qu'elles laissaient leurs enfants dans la rue, qu'elles n'avaient pas à qui confier leurs enfants, donc le traitement a été inhumain » (Rosemarie M.).

Les souvenirs des conditions de vie dans les camps en U.R.S.S., du froid, du manque d'hygiène et de nourriture, qui ont conduit à la sous-nutrition et à la mort, sont encore très vivaces dans la mémoire des enfants des déportés : « Donc dans le camp où ils étaient, les lits superposés, fabriqués en bois vert, et ce bois là, de l'acacia ou je ne sais pas quoi, a commencé à germer. Et rien, donc seulement du bois, ils avaient la chance d'avoir emporté une couverture de chez eux. Les conditions d'hygiène, zéro. Au bout d'un moment ils étaient pleins de punaises, de poux. Et de temps en temps ils amenaient une étuve, ils mettaient les vêtements et les gens dedans pour les nettoyer d'un coup. Plus la faim. Donc pendant deux ans ils n'ont eu à manger que de la saumure de choux. De l'eau trouble et quelques feuilles de choux. Et seulement un tout petit peu de pain, et de tous ceux qui sont morts là-bas, mon père avait des exemples concrets, chacun est mort avec ces mots sur les lèvres : « Donne-moi, s'il te plaît, juste une tranche de pain ! ». Et personne ne pouvait leur donner cette tranche de pain, car il y en avait tellement peu que… Et mon père disait qu'à cause de ce régime au pain, sans rien d'autre, ils ne pouvaient pas retenir leur salive, la salive coulait de leur bouche et ils ne pouvaient rien faire. Les personnes âgées ne pouvaient pas retenir leur urine » (Rosemarie M.).

Maria B., 87 ans, déportée à l'âge de 20 ans, considère qu'elle a survécu parce qu'elle travaillait dans l'agriculture et qu'elle pouvait encore voler des tomates, des carottes ou des pommes de terre. Mais ils étaient punis s'ils se faisaient prendre : « C'était comme ça, un trou dans la terre avec un toit par dessus. Et celui qui faisait une erreur, ils le mettaient là-bas ! ».

Même s'ils ont été envoyés pour un travail de reconstruction, ils étaient gardés, enfermés, sans pouvoir envoyer de nouvelles chez eux (« Ils ne pouvaient pas avoir de correspondance, ils n'avaient pas le droit. Au bout de deux ans, ils avaient le droit d'envoyer une carte postale chez eux, mais avec un soldat qui les surveillait. « Je suis à Ienachieva, tout va bien ». C'est tout. Mais c'était quand même le signe qu'ils étaient vivants » – Rosemarie M.) et sans aucune forme de vie culturelle, sans possibilité de respecter les fêtes religieuses (« Ils ne savaient pas quand c'était Pâques, quand il y avait une date particulière… » – Rosemarie M.).

Malgré les terribles conditions, les Saxons ont conservé, pendant leur déportation, les qualités qui faisaient qu'ils avaient été appréciés de toutes les ethnies avec lesquelles ils étaient entrés en contact, étant travailleurs et sérieux : « A l'usine où a travaillé mon père, c'est comme ça qu'ils ont apprécié ces gens-là, donc ils ont été travailleurs, ponctuels, parce qu'il disait, quand l'ingénieur venait et qu'il entrait, celui-ci demandait : « Ce sont les Allemands ? ». Puis on répondait : « Oui, ce sont les Allemands ». Alors tout était en ordre, si c'étaient les Allemands… » (Rosemarie M.).

Quand ils sont tombés malades, certains Saxons ont été envoyés en Allemagne, pour se faire soigner, et beaucoup sont restés là-bas. D'autres sont revenus, même après plusieurs années, dans leur famille en Roumanie. Par exemple, le père d'Auguste D., 74 ans, s'est intégré en Allemagne, il a envoyé de l'aide à la maison, il a appelé sa famille à la rejoindre, mais, vu que sa femme n'a pas eu d'argent pour faire ses papiers d'identité pour partir, il est revenu en 1956 : « Et mon père, alors, s'il est resté tant d'années en Allemagne, il a voulu nous emmener là-bas, que toute la famille parte là-bas, mais ma mère n'a pas pu, parce qu'il fallait de l'argent ! Où trouver cet argent, on n'a pas pu faire tous les papiers » (Auguste D.).

La communauté roumaine se souvient du départ des Saxons en Allemagne, en soulignant que seuls ceux qui pouvaient « graisser la patte » avaient cette possibilité, ceux qui avaient des relations à Bucarest.

Les Saxons déportés n'ont jamais accepté cette injustice. Revient, comme un leitmotiv, le fait qu'eux, en tant qu'individus, n'ont jamais fait de mal à personne, qu'ils n'ont enfreint aucune loi : « Donc au bout de cinq ans de détention là-bas, derrière les doubles fils barbelés, il se demandait encore : « Mais moi qu'est-ce que j'ai fait ? Je n'ai rien fait de mal » » (Rosemarie M.).

Le souvenir de la déportation est, jusqu'à aujourd'hui, entretenu par les histoires des déportés présentées sur les chaînes de télévision allemandes, que les Saxons d'Alțâna regardent, au lieu des chaînes roumaines.

Les Roumains se souviennent que les Saxons ont été déportés, mais sans grand détail. Est resté dans la mémoire collective le fait que certains Roumains ont essayé de cacher les Saxons, ce dont les Saxons ne se souviennent pas trop. Eufimia F. se souvient de comment son père a caché son ami saxon d'Alțâna qu'il hébergeait après que les bandits aient attaqué les familles d'Androhiel. Quand ils ont commencé à réunir les Saxons pour la déportation, certains se sont cachés. L'ami saxon a été caché par le père d'Eufimia à Androhiel, jusqu'au printemps, jusqu'à ce qu'il parte en Allemagne: « Et alors ils cherchaient les Saxons, pour les déporter. L'Saxon est v'nu chez nous à la maison, très vite. […] Puis : « Qu'est-ce que j'vais faire, Ana ? », il a dit à ma mère. « Qu'est-ce que j'vais faire, Ana, car ils viennent ». Ma mère a dit : « Tu sais ce que tu fais ? Soulevons le matelas, et tu te mets dans le lit. Et tu mets le matelas par-dessus toi. Ils ne vont pas te chercher chez nous, qu'est-ce qu'ils viennent chercher chez nous ? », mais ils sont aussi v'nus chez nous, ils ont regardé sous l'lit, mais pas dans l'lit ! Donc, quand ils sont partis, la nuit il a dit : « Je pars, j'vais cette nuit chez Sâlvu – chez l'père, là-bas [chez le père d'Eufimia, qui habitait à Androhiel, NDA]. Et j'reste là-bas jusqu'à c'que la situation se calme ». Puis il est parti chez not'famille là-bas, ils dormaient là-bas avec mon père et y'avait un cousin à nous, comme ils avaient des choses à faire là-bas, z'avaient encore des bœufs là-bas, ils partaient l'matin, ils r'venaient l'soir. On envoyait d'la nourriture là-bas chez mon père pi chez l'aut', pi il est resté jusqu'au printemps. Ensuite au printemps l'saxon est parti en Allemagne » (Eufimia F.).

Entre temps, les Saxons restés à la maison (personnes âgées et enfants) n'allaient pas mieux. La réforme agraire a été décrétée le 23 mars 1945 et c'est ainsi que les terres ont été distribuées aux paysans pauvres, aux veuves, aux orphelins et aux combattants de guerre. Les propriétés agraires de tout genre appartenant aux « citoyens allemands et roumains, personnes physiques et juridiques de nationalité (d'origine ethnique) allemande, qui ont

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collaboré avec l'armée nazie » passaient sous le contrôle et la propriété de l'état, pour être distribuées aux paysans ayant le droit à l'appropriation. L'expropriation s'est faite sans aucune indemnisation, les biens devenant immédiatement et totalement la propriété de l'état (Cosmin Budeancă, 2011 : 154). A Alțâna 324 familles sont entrées en possession de terres par le biais de cette loi (E., Crișan, I. Moise, 1997 – 1998 : 10).

Il y a ensuite eu la loi électorale de 1946, qui a exclu les citoyens d'ethnie allemande du scrutin, puis après la nationalisation des « principaux moyens de production » de 1948, les Saxons ont perdus leurs commerces et ateliers, qui sont entrés en possession de l'état. Dans ces conditions, les Saxons se sont posés le problème de leur survie.

La mémoire collective des Saxons, comme celle des Roumains, retient qu'on a confisqué les maisons des Saxons avec brutalité et abus de pouvoir. Les familles des déportés étaient jetées dans la rue, sans leur assurer un abri, et on leur prenait leur nourriture : « Ils sont venus et ils ont pris le lard, ils ont tout pris ! Même la farine du placard ils l'ont mesurée ! » (Eufimia F.).

Rosemarie M. n'était pas encore née au moment de la confiscation des maisons, mais elle garde en mémoire les détails des événements comme les lui ont relatés ses parents et grands-parents ; elle explique : « Ma grand-mère était seule, mon grand-père était à la guerre, deux enfants déportés en Russie, un garçon aussi à la guerre et ma grand-mère est restée ici avec cinq petits, parce qu'elle avait déjà cinq enfants et un petit-enfant de trois ans. Elle a été mise dehors, mais avant d'être mise dehors, avant Noël, elle avait encore un cochon qu'elle n'avait pas tué, parce qu'elle pensait qu'il était trop petit et elle a dit que pour Noël nous allions nous acheter un kilo ou deux de viande, car c'était comme ça qu'on faisait, et on allait garder encore un peu le coc hon avant de le tuer. Ils ne l'ont pas tué pour Noël, mais après Noël le maire est venu, celui qui était à cette époque là le maire ici, au village, et ils lui ont pris le cochon, ils sont partis le tuer et ils ont fait la fête pendant trois jours, ils ont fait des barbecues, de la gelée de cochon. […] C'était un soi-disant décret, comme çà, et ensuite venaient les tziganes du bidonville, c'est un quartier tzigane après le Hârtibaciu […]. Donc ma grand-mère a été mise dehors de cette maison, elle est venue ici, et elle a dû aller s'installer dans le bidonville, dans une petite maison de Tzigane, et ils ont sorti le mobilier, les placards, les couvertures devant la porte à l'air libre […]. Ensuite ma grand-mère n'est pas allée là-bas, le prêtre évangéliste [...] a pris de nombreuses familles là-bas ; il avait de grandes pièces dans la maison paroissiale et ils se sont partagés les chambres de la maison paroissiale avec un placard, un rideau et ils sont restés des années là-bas ».

Auguste D. se souvient comment elle a dû partir de la maison de ses parents et elle désapprouve ceux qui ont déménagé chez eux : « La débandade pour mettre la main sur une maison, pour déménager de la colline à ici, dans les maisons des Saxons ! Moi je ne sais pas comment tu peux te sentir bien et comment tu peux comprendre ça ! ».

Parfois les familles ont déménagé plusieurs fois: « Nous avons déménagé je ne sais plus combien de fois, une fois ici, une fois là-bas. [...] Ensuite je suis allée habiter dans l'école allemande pendant un temps puis l'école a recommencé à fonctionner, on a dû sortir de là-bas. On était trois familles dans la classe ! Ensuite on a trouvé où loger près de l'église orthodoxe, il y avait une vieille école abandonnée. On a habité là-bas, toujours trois familles. On était peut-être douze personnes. Puis de là-bas, comme on était trois familles là-bas, les uns sur les autres, on a déménagé à Todicu [...]. Là-bas il y avait une petite maison. Puis de là-bas encore une fois on a déménagé quelque part, ici, dans la rue, et ensuite dans notre maison » (Auguste D.).

Certains Saxons, surtout ceux qui habitaient dans le centre du village, ils ont perdu leur cour, parce qu'on a installé dedans une institution administrative. Par exemple, dans la maison des grands-parents de Rosemarie M. on a installé la CAP : « Mes grands-parents n'ont pas récupéré leur maison, on a installé la CAP. La CAP a pris quatre cours, chez mes grands-parents ils ont détruit la maison et ils ont fait des granges pour les chevaux et seulement en 1969 ils ont récupéré la cour [la CAP déménageant à l'extérieur du village, NDA]. Et [...] pendant tout ce temps ils ont habité où ils ont pu ».

Cherchant à contrecarrer, autant que faire se peut, les conséquences de la loi, les Saxons ont invité leurs amis roumains à habiter dans leurs cours, pour que ne viennent pas de personnes étrangères. Certains ont accepté, d'autres non. Par exemple, quand l'ami saxon sauvé de la déportation par le père d'Eufimia F. est parti en Allemagne, il lui a demandé d'emménager dans sa cour. Mais le père d'Eufimia a refusé : « L'Saxon a dit à papa : « Non, Silvu, si vous m'avez aidé comme ça, je pars et si je pars, prenez soin d'cette cour ». Et papa n'a pas voulu ! Il a dit : « Moi je n'veux prendre soin d'aucune cour ! Si j'veux une cour, j'ai d'quoi m'la payer, je n'garde pas ta cour, parce que p't'êt' tu vas revenir et qui sait, p't'êt' qu'on va s'fâcher quand tu nous mettras dehors ! ». Il a dit : « Oh ! Laisse au moins Eufimia ici, qu'elle reste ici dans la cour, au moins pour qu'elle n'aille pas chez quelqu'un d'autre ». Et papa n'a pas voulu m'laisser ! [...] L'Saxon est parti confier la cour à quelqu'un d'autre ».

De nombreux Roumains ont essayé d'aider les Saxons, en cherchant des solutions de compromis. Certains ont emménagé chez des Saxons, mais ils ne les ont pas chassé de la maison, ils ont habité ensemble, en bonne entente. Cette situation a eu lieu aussi dans d'autres villages. Par exemple, Ion V., le gendre d'Eufimia F., qui habite à présent à Alțâna, dont le père a été un colon né dans le département de Cluj et qui s'est établi dans une commune voisine, à Marpod, avec 25 autres familles de colons, s'est vu répartir dans une famille de Saxons : « Je suis resté environ dix ans avec les Saxons dans la cour. [...] Au moins mes parents se sont bien entendus avec les Saxons. […] Ils s'aidaient avec mon père, avec la terre, mon père leur donnait à manger, il leur donnait une parcelle de terre et ils la travaillaient, là-bas… Ils s'entraidaient. Ils se débrouillaient ensemble… Ils se prêtaient des choses… Chez nous s'est formée une relation proche, parce qu'après les Saxons venaient chez nous et nous allions chez eux. Après quoi nous avons construit notre maison là-bas, à Marpod ».

Les Saxons se sont débrouillés chacun comme ils ont pu. Auguste D. se souvient comment sa mère les a élevées, elle et sa sœur, après l'expropriation : « Elle d'vait aller travailler au jour le jour ! Où elle trouvait, pour laver, pour nettoyer, pour sarcler, l'été... L'hiver elle devait filer la laine, toujours pour les autres, parce qu'elle n'avait plus de terre, elle n'avait plus rien ! ». Dans ces conditions, les Saxonnes âgées se souviennent, reconnaissantes, des Roumaines qui, en leur donnant du travail et en les payant pour cela, les ont aidées à survivre, conscientes qu'en cette période difficile tout le monde avait du mal à s'en sortir, et que la majorité des Roumains se débrouillaient comme ils pouvaient, surtout qu'ils devaient respecter les quotas, si accablants, au point que les Saxons se souviennent aussi « qu'il ne leur restait rien » (Sofia B., Saxonne, 60 ans).

Dans ces conditions, il n'est pas étonnant que certains des Saxons accusent en bloc les Roumains aujourd'hui encore pour les avoir déportés à cause de leur appartenance ethnique, sans faire de différence entre les Roumains en tant que peuple et les autorités communistes, sans plus tenir compte du fait que les Roumains aussi ont eu à souffrir des déportations, des nationalisations et des emprisonnements : « Et ensuite, ils ont raconté, comme ils ont raconté là-bas en Russie, qu'les Russes eux y'z'ont dit qu'ils n'ont pas d'mandé de mamans, ils n'ont pas d'mandé d'Saxons, ils ont seulement d'mandé d'l'aide ! Nos Roumains n'ont pas envoyé d'Roumains, seulement des Saxons… » (Auguste D.).

De plus, certains Saxons ont désapprouvé l'empressement avec lequel les Roumains sont rentrés dans leurs maisons, comme dans une course, en cherchant à mettre la main les premiers sur une habitation saxonne, sans s'occuper de la famille jetée à la rue. Cela est arrivé aussi parce que les Roumains ont considéré les maisons des Saxons comme étant supérieures aux leurs, comme les choses que font les Saxons en général : « Le terme « saxon » pour les Roumains ne signifie pas une ethnie, mais plutôt une catégorisation. Comment dire, une norme de travail. Comme quand on dit : un travail saxon et un travail tzigane. On ne se réfère pas au fait que c'est le Saxon qui l'a fait. On se réfère au fait que c'est un travail bien exécuté. Les Roumains ont inventé ces expressions, pas les Saxons » (Eugen V.).

Les Roumains ont ressenti la colère des Saxons, même si les Saxons ne l'ont pas manifestée directement : (« Ils avaient une rancune, comme ça, contre les Roumains, mais ils ne la montraient pas… » – Livia V., 60 ans, fille d'Eufimia F.) et ils ont construit un discours de justification au niveau de la communauté, concernant l'évacuation des maisons saxonnes. Premièrement, ils mettent en évidence le fait que la loi a été appliquée par le gouvernement communiste du pays ; mais au parti communiste sont entrés au début les gens pauvres, les analphabètes, les Roumains et surtout les Roms : « C'étaient deux Tziganes qui ont donné l'ordre [d'évacuation des maisons saxonnes, NDA], toujours les Tziganes avec leurs pauvres gens, leurs gens mauvais, les gens biens ne sont pas allés rejoindre les communistes » (Livia V.). Deuxièmement, ils soutiennent que ce sont surtout des Roms qui sont entrés dans leurs maisons, et, parmi les Roumains, ceux qui sont appelés « mauvaises choses » dans la communauté roumaine, c'est-à-dire des Roumains pauvres, que la communauté roumaine elle-même désapprouve. Troisièmement, selon ce que dit Eufimia F., les jeunes qui ne voulaient plus habiter, selon les coutumes anciennes, dans la cour des parents, ont aussi demandé à la mairie une maison nationalisée. Quatrièmement, la communauté roumaine a valorisé les Roumains qui se sont bien comportés avec les Saxons. Ainsi, concernant le colon de Marpod qui a vécu avec les Saxons dans leur maison, sa belle-fille d'Alțâna, Livia V., affirme : « Ils ont cohabité là-bas et le grand-père est resté considéré comme un homme d'honneur dans le village ». « Homme d'honneur » à l'extrémité positive de l'échelle des valeurs de la communauté roumaine, et « mauvaises choses » à l'extrémité négative, voilà les deux pôles entre lesquels se sont situés les Roumains en ce qui concerne les maisons nationalisées, chacun avec ses problèmes et chacun cherchant à réconcilier la loi non écrite de la communauté, qui demande une bonne entente, de la tolérance et un comportement moral, avec la loi officielle, qui a nettement favorisé les Roumains et a défavorisé les gens d'origine allemande, au moins pendant la première étape.

Les Roumains non plus ne comprennent pas pourquoi certains Roumains qui ont pris les terres des Saxons ont été cruels. Concernant Susana, une saxonne de 73 ans actuellement partie en Allemagne, Eugen V., Roumain, affirme : « Donc ils n'avaient plus rien, ils n'avaient plus de quoi vivre. Et elle allait sur ses terres une fois que les Roumains avaient récolté. Elle regroupait les épis oubliés. Les Roumains venaient et ils la chassaient de sa terre. Même les épis ils ne la laissaient pas

les prendre. Seulement quelques grains ».

Cependant, il n'y a pas eu de troubles importants au village sur des critères ethniques. En ce qui concerne les stratégies de cohabitation avec les Roumains, les Saxons ont été « diplomates ». Eugen V., qui a vécu longtemps avec les Saxons, considère que les Saxons ne répondaient pas aux provocations, ils ne sortaient pas faire de scandale, parce que c'est ce qu'impose la loi morale de la communauté. « Celui qui produit un scandale, chez nous il est considéré comme le dernier des hommes ». Mais les Saxons sont conscients aussi qu'aucune démarche n'aurait eu de résultat, vu les conditions historiques.

Les stratégies de cohabitation pacifique ont réussi et, avec le temps, la réconciliation est venue.

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L'époque de la coopérative: entre destruction de l'ordre et réconciliation

Ultérieurement, les communistes ont fait passer une loi qui a frappé aussi les autres citoyens roumains : au bout d'un an, l'état exproprie toutes les propriétés agraires de plus de 50 hectares, puis il décide de collectiviser. Après quelques années, une nouvelle loi passe, qui redonne aux Saxons leurs maisons, mais pas leurs terres, qui reste la propriété des Roumains. Les Saxons reviennent dans leurs maisons, les Roumains et les Roms dans les leurs, et l'épisode de l'exode des Saxons de leurs habitations s'achève, laissant des séquelles profondes dans la conscience de la génération des adultes et de leurs enfants, entretenues, au niveau familial, par le récit répété des ces événements. Se perpétue, ainsi, un sentiment de faute de la part des Roumains et un sentiment de frustration et de colère légitime de la part des Saxons pendant encore au moins une génération. C'est ainsi que le comportement de certains membres des deux communautés dans certaines circonstances a dégénéré en un conflit à coloration ethnique et que toute la communauté a été considérée coupable.

Ainsi, Rosemarie M. se souvient comment, pendant son enfance, dans les années 60, les enfants roumains les traitaient encore de nazis : « Parce que, c'est vrai, de nombreux jeunes garçons étaient allés à la guerre avec les SS, ils ne faisaient pas la différence entre nous et les nazis : « Allez-y, bandes de nazis, allez voir Hitler » ».

D'autre part, Emiliana B., professeur d'histoire, se souvient d'un fait qui a eu lieu dans les années 70 et qui a mis en évidence le conflit interethnique transmis involontairement aux enfants par le récit des événements douloureux du temps des déportations et des expropriations : « Le premier conflit qui m'a heurté : avec les enfants de 5ème nous allions exécuter un rituel traditionnel [pendant lequel on récite des vers qui évoquent la sortie de la charrue au printemps et on joue du tambour à friction, dont le son ressemble au mugissement du bœuf, et des clochettes, NDT], à la mairie, un grand événement ! On prenait les Saxons et les Roumains car on avait une section de roumain et une section d'allemand. Et quand ils ont vus les enfants saxons, ils sont devenus furieux : « Nous on ne fait pas le rit-

uel traditionnel » ; ils ont commencé à déchiré la nappe. Il y avait une nappe rouge dans chaque classe. Je sors : « Que s'est-il passé ? ». C'était justement le fils de la femme qui gardait nos enfants. « Non, parce qu'ils ont pris nos terres ! », c'est ce qu'on dit les enfants. « Nous on ne fait pas comme eux, parce qu'ils ont pris les terres de nos parents ». Et ils ont commencé à faire un scandale, ils étaient très furieux ! Ensuite ils n'ont même pas voulu faire la fête de fin d'année avec les Roumains ».

Les Saxons et les Roumains d'Alțâna ont transmis involontairement à leurs enfants les conflits interethniques douloureux qui ont obscurci les premières années d'après-guerre, par le biais du récit répété en famille des expériences douloureuses, qu'eux, en tant qu'adultes, ils avaient dépassé. Mais c'est caractéristique de la culture infantile de s'emparer et de conserver des éléments folkloriques disparus du folklore des adultes, des attitudes, des valeurs que les parents ont modifiées ou pour qui elles ont perdu leur signification. Cela explique l'existence de certains conflits interethniques chez les enfants. Le fait que les Saxons et les Roumains n'avaient pas l'intention de perpétuer les conflits se voit dans le fait que pendant la période communiste ils ont trouvé, ensemble, un moyen de cohabiter et de collaborer pacifiquement, sur d'autres bases que celles d'avant la guerre.

Et, comme partout, il y a eu des exceptions : Maria C., 73 ans, a eu une vie différente d'autre Roumaines de sa génération. Elle a habité avec des Saxons dans leur maison pendant les expropriations. Des enfants saxons, avec qui elle est restée bonne amie toute sa vie, elle a appris à parler la langue saxonne, mais elle l'a oubliée, car l'apprentissage de la langue allemande ou du dialecte saxon n'était pas valorisé dans la communauté roumaine, contrairement à ce qui s'est passé une génération plus tard. Pendant sa jeunesse elle allait observer la danse des Saxons. Elle admirait la beauté des Saxonnes et de leur costume et elle allait à l'église évangélique, voir les confirmations des filles. Elle allait voir les mariages saxons, surtout quand les filles chantaient le chant de la fourche à la mariée. Et elle n'était pas la seule à participer à la vie cérémonielle des Saxonnes, et inversement : par exemple, quand elle a accouché, les Roumaines, les Saxonnes et les Roms sont venues avec des cadeaux.

En 1950, la coopérative agricole de production a été créée dans la commune d'Alțâna, qui comprenait à cette époque 131 familles de paysans pauvres et de classe moyenne, avec un patrimoine de 395 hectares. En 1955 s'est terminée l'électrification de la commune, ont été construits un centre culturel, un complexe commercial, un magasin d'eau gazeuse, une boulangerie et un immeuble de huit appartements pour les spécialistes. En 1960 on a créé une coopérative agricole de production à Benești ; ces deux coopératives fusionnent en une seule, avec un patrimoine de 3121 hectares (E. Crișan, I. Moise, 1997 – 1998 : 10).

Ce que déplorent aujourd'hui les Saxons et les Roumains, c'est la destruction de l'ordre. Pour Auguste D., cette destruction signifie la disparition de toute l'organisation antérieure, la confiscation des terres des Saxons, qui ont dû réorganiser leur vie en travaillant à la coopérative agricole de production, la destruction des sources des terrains et des hangars quand s'est organisée la CAP, qui a regroupé les terres en grandes parcelles. Sans autre possibilité de gagner leur vie, les Saxons restés sur place et ceux rentrés après la déportation sont entrés immédiatement à la CAP, sur la base du titre d'expropriation, parce qu'ainsi ils regagnaient le droit de récupérer les maisons et un salaire pour vivre.

Les Roumains ont eu plus de mal à entrer, parce qu'ils tenaient à la terre, aux animaux, aux outils qu'ils avaient gagnés à la sueur de leur front. Eufimia F. raconte sa propre entrée à la CAP : « Quand z'ont fait les coopératives au début, surtout les tziganes sont rentrés là-bas. Après est venu un Roumain, un aut' Roumain… L'président v'nait au village, « Allez, oh, à la coopérative », avec son fré, Ion [le frère du mari d'Eufimia F., NDA], l'était président à l'époque quand j'me suis mariée. Pi

après not' mariage, il vient chez nous pi il dit maint'nant : « Maint'nant, que j'vous dise… », après l'mariage, rapidement, tu sais ? « Non, allez, Ion, allez, dis-nous... ». Il dit : « T'sais c'que vous faites ? » « Rentrez à la CAP ». J'ai refusé ! J'ai dit : « Bon, oh, Ion, pourquoi rentrer là-bas… » « Toi ! Tu vends le ch'val de ta famille (il connaissait les biens de la famille), tu vends les ch'vaux de vot'famille et les maisons », celles-là n'étaient pas prêtes, celles-là qu'on avaient. « Vous terminez les maisons, tu prends ta houe et tu vas à la coopérative. Parc'que la coopérative se monte et il va falloir qu'tu leur donnes tes chevaux et t'auras plus rien ». On est allé dans not'famille pour leur dire, et qu'est-ce qu'ils ont dit. Papa a dit : « Hé ben merde, vous mettre dans la coopérative, pas question, toi, l'gamin, c'est pas bon ! Vous n'donnez pas vos ch'vaux ! ». Mais c'est comme ça qu'ça s'est passé, on a donné nos ch'vaux, la charrette, le harnais, la charrue, tout c'qu'on avait, ils ont tout emmené à la coopérative ».

La mentalité collective roumaine désapprouvait ceux qui s'installaient en ville, où sont partis seulement les personnes éduquées et les « mauvaises choses », qui n'avaient pas de terre : « Les Roumains, ceux-là, plus pauvres, comme ça, qu'avaient pas d'terrain, ils sont partis à Sibiu. Et ils sont dev'nus des messieurs, comme on dit ici ! C't'à-dire qu'ils sont dev'nus des messieurs au travail. Pi z'ont fait beaucoup de maisons, ils sont partout à Sibiu… Et ceux-là sont des citadins. Ceux qu'avaient des terres ils n'y allaient pas, c'était honteux » (Eufimia F.). Les Roumains qui possédaient des terres ne sont partis en ville que plus tard. Le mari d'Eufimia F. a cherché un travail à Sibiu seulement après vingt ans de travail à la CAP.

Tant que possible, les Saxons, comme les Roumains, ont gardé leur mode de vie traditionnel. Les Saxons étaient artisans (chauffeurs de tracteur, forgerons, meuniers), les Saxonnes n'ont travaillé à la CAP que pour faire les jours de travail nécessaires pour avoir le droit au lopin de 15 ares. Les Saxonnes ont aussi travaillé comme couturières à la maison.

Par exemple, de nombreuses Roumaines achetaient leurs « robes » (des jupes d'étoffe de couleur sombre) cousues aux Saxonnes, parce qu'elles étaient semblables à celles des Roumaines.

A la CAP, les Saxons et les Roumains ont dû travailler dans la même équipe, ce qui était considéré comme salutaire pour les Roumains et aussi pour les Saxons, car « grâce à la collectivisation, les gens se sont réconciliés, puis ensuite est venue la nationalisation, elle a pris les terres de tout le monde, personne n'a plus rien eu, donc tout le monde devait aller travailler à la coopérative. Là-bas se sont formées des équipes, il n'y a pas eu d'équipes de Saxons, d'équipes de Roumains, mais les gens se sont mélangés. Donc là-bas, je veux vous dire, des amitiés se sont liées entre Roumains et Saxons, entre Saxons et Roms, entre Roumains et Roms, aussi bonnes que les relations d'amitié d'autrefois seulement entre Saxons ou seulement entre Roumains » (Rosemarie M.).

Comme le travail était très dur et le gain très faible, les gens, les Roumains et les Saxons, ils prenaient, quand ils en avaient l'occasion, des produits de la CAP, s'ils n'étaient pas contrôlés : « Par exemple, le vieux là de la colline des Saxons, quand il venait de là-bas, de l'église, avec le foin, tu vois ? A côté du mur de la citadelle, il surveillait en bas et en haut et s'il n'y avait personne dans la rue, il n'allait pas à la CAP et il ramenait tout à la maison ». (Rosemarie M.). Le besoin a forcé les Saxons et les Roumains à faire appel aux mêmes stratégies de survie.

Les Saxons ont été très appréciés pour leurs qualités de travailleur, pour leur honnêteté et pour leur efficacité aussi au temps de la CAP. Un Saxon a été président de la CAP et les Roumains considèrent : « Oui, il était correct le Saxon... » (Livia V.). En général, les Roumains préféraient que, en cas de problèmes extérieurs, au travail par exemple, il aille voir les Saxons et pas les Roumains, car on considérait qu'il résolvait le problème des Saxons à coup sûr.

Eufimia F. se souvient des fêtes que les équipes organisaient le dimanche et pour les fêtes, quand les communistes obligeaient les

paysans à travailler : « Quand on était au travail un jour de fête, on y allait, on restait un peu, puis on fêtait. Et là-bas dans la parcelle on faisait la fête. Il y avait un arbre, un peu d'ombre, comme ça… On apportait de l'alcool, on cuisinait quelque chose, mais on ne faisait pas de gâteaux comme maintenant ! De simples beignets ! ». Après avoir fait la récolte, en s'inspirant d'une fête saxonne, les équipes fêtaient le Jour de la récolte, toujours dans les jardins des Saxons. Comme on peut le voir, la tentative des communistes d'éloigner les gens de l'église en les obligeant à travailler le dimanche a eu un effet positif involontaire.

En ce qui concerne les fêtes, la veille de Noël, pendant un temps ils ont obligé les enfants saxons à aller à l'école, pour regarder des films avec des nazis. Les Saxons ne passaient pas les fêtes (Noël, Pâques, Pentecôte, Fête des mères, Toussaint, bals, etc.) avec les Roumains, mais dans l'intimité de la communauté. Cependant, Rosemarie M. se souvient que personne n'a interdit aux Saxons, pendant la période communiste, d'avoir les heures de cours de religion, nécessaires pour la confirmation.

Les Saxons ne se mariaient pas avec les Roumains pendant la période communiste. Les mariages mixtes ont été extrêmement rares. La religion les a empêchés. Certains de ceux qui se sont mariés étaient des chrétiens non pratiquants (chose favorisée par les communistes), qui n'allaient ni à l'église orthodoxe, ni à l'église évangélique. Et si un Roumain se mariait avec une Saxonne pratiquante, en général le Roumain entrait à l'église évangélique. Les Roumains se sont mariés un peu plus souvent avec les Saxons après les déportations, parce qu'il n'y avait plus de jeunes Saxons, qui étaient morts à la guerre ou en déportation. Leurs enfants ont été baptisés dans la religion luthérienne.

L'époque des départs: avant et après la Révolution

Les mécontentements des Saxons ont perduré après la Révolution ; les anciennes colères ont pris un nouvel essor, jusqu'à la rétrocession des terres. Des conflits interethniques sont réapparus parce que les Saxons et les Roumains ont réclamé les mêmes terres, qui avaient appartenues aux Saxons avant l'expropriation, puis aux Roumains après l'appropriation. Le premier maire d'Alțâna après la Révolution, Ion V., et la commission qui gérait les rétrocessions, ont décidé que les terres devaient être données intégralement aux Saxons et aux Roumains, même si initialement la loi prévoyait la rétrocession de seulement 50 ares aux Saxons. A cause de cela, comme les terres de la CAP ne suffisaient pas, ils ont alloué aussi les terres qui avaient appartenues à l'Entreprise Agricole d'Etat (IAS en roumain) voisine. Les problèmes sont apparus quand les Roumains ont demandé de bonnes terres près du village, qui avaient initialement appartenues aux Saxons. Livia V., ingénieur agronome et membre de la commission, se souvient des violentes discussions et du fait que les Roumains de la commission, étant plus nombreux, ont fait peser la balance pour une répartition des terres par parcelles et pour la rétrocession des mêmes surfaces qu'avaient eu les Saxons initialement, mais sur des parcelles différentes, de première, deuxième et troisième catégorie, plus proches et plus éloignées du village. Voilà comment un élément de géographie symbolique a donné lieu à des conflits dans le village, et comment certains des Roumains ont demandé à occupé une meilleure position sociale symbolique, la position des Saxons. Les Saxons ont dû chercher de nouvelles solutions pour contrer les nouveaux mécontentements et conflits interethniques, et d'autres stratégies pour la coexistence pacifique avec les Roumains. S'est ajouté, à la même période, comme une nouvelle source d'amertume pour la communauté saxonne, le départ définitif de la plupart des Saxons, dont une partie n'a

même pas réclamé ses terres. Le mécontentement continue jusqu'à aujourd'hui, dans la mémoire collective latente (Sanda Golopenția, 200 : p. 41) ; cela se ressent, par exemple, dans l'ironie avec laquelle Auguste D. parle de « nos Roumains ».

Immédiatement après l'ouverture des frontières, les Saxons se sont dépêchés de partir. Rosemarie M. considère que « si Ceaușescu avait donné le droit aux Saxons d'aller [en Allemagne, NDT], de voir comment c'était là-bas et de revenir de nouveau à la maison, je suis convaincue que très peu seraient partis. Mais s'il ne nous en a pas donné le droit, et si la porte s'est ouverte après 1990, sont alors partis ceux qui ne voulaient pas partir ! Par peur ».

Cependant, de nombreux Roumains et Saxons ont gardé leurs relations d'amitié formées pendant la période communiste. Certains Saxons, lors de leur départ définitif en Allemagne, ont vendu leurs habitations aux Roumains. Vivre dans une maison saxonne et dans le quartier saxon est resté, encore aujourd'hui, une valeur positive pour la communauté roumaine. A côté du nombre réduit de personnes qui ont acheté une maison aux Saxons qui sont partis, il y a encore quelques Roumains qui vivent dans des cours saxonnes car ils y avaient été invités par les Saxons avant leur départ, pour avoir la satisfaction de savoir que dans la maison des ancêtres habitent des gens biens. Et il y en a encore quelques-uns qui ont reçus des maisons saxonnes nationalisées et qui les ont achetées pendant la période communiste ou après la Révolution. Aujourd'hui dans le quartier saxon habitent des Roumains et des Roms, car les Roms ont reçu pendant la période communiste des parcelles de terre dans le village, dans la rue principale, dans l'alignement des maisons saxonnes, et grâce à des emprunts financiers des coopératives de crédit, ont construit des habitations.

D'autres Saxons ont gardé, jusqu'à aujourd'hui, leurs habitations. Ils viennent avec leurs enfants chaque été. Jusqu'alors, leurs voisins ou amis, souvent Roumains, prennent soin de leurs habitations. Revenus au pays, les Saxons rendent visitent à leurs amis roumains, et entre

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temps les mariages mixtes se sont multipliés, sous l'égide de l'église évangélique. Mais les Saxons ne se marient pas seulement avec les Roumains, mais aussi avec les Roms, comme les Roumains avec les Roms, parce que les jeunes sont partis en ville et que les jeunes filles saxonnes ou roumaines restées au village ont un choix de partenaire beaucoup plus restreint.

Cependant, il y a aussi des Saxons qui ne désirent pas partir. Maria B., qui a été déportée, se sent chez elle ici et veut mourir ici. Même s'il a été déporté et exproprié, le père de Rosemarie M. n'est plus parti, même pas du village. Il a préféré rester paysan et travailler à la CAP, même s'il était au départ charpentier, juste pour ne plus quitter sa maison.

Entre deux communautés et deux identités

Je voudrais terminer en présentant un destin qui contredit partiellement les conclusions générales de cette étude. A Alțâna, Eugen V. a

été une présence singulière dans le paysage des années 80-90. Né en 1981, quand à Alțâna les Roumains et les Saxons vivaient séparément, profitant de relations interethniques amicales, Eugen V. a fait le lien entre les communautés d'une manière peu habituelle. Le fait qu'il n'a été rejeté par aucune des communautés, mais au contraire, soutenu par les leaders d'opinion des deux communautés, et le fait que son exemple a été repris timidement par d'autres locaux, montre qu'il a représenté le début d'un important changement de mentalité collective dans le village, qui a mené à la valorisation des propriétés de la langue et de la culture saxonne par les Roumains. Nous ne cherchons pas à étendre ces affirmations à d'autres communautés de cette région ou d'autres régions, ou à d'autres ethnies. En ville, la conception de l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère à un âge précoce dans une autre communauté, entouré de locuteurs natifs, s'est répandue plus tôt. Eugen V. a représenté un tournant dans l'évolution des mentalités de sa communauté, et son intégration en tant qu'enfant à la communauté saxonne a eu des conséquences au niveau de son identité personnelle.

Pour la communauté roumaine, un rôle important dans la formation d'Eugen V. a été joué par ses parents. Son père, Ion V., est né dans une famille de colons originaire de la zone montagneuse du département de Cluj, qui s'est stabilisée à Marpod lors de l'appropriation en 1945. Il a grandi dans une famille de Saxons, dans une maison que ses parents avaient reçue lors de la répartition et il a appris l'allemand, chose rare à cette époque, quand seuls les Saxons apprenaient le roumain. Il est devenu professeur de sport à Alțâna, où il s'est marié avec Livia F., ingénieur agronome, elle-même fille d'une famille qui a beaucoup risqué en cachant un Saxon dans leur maison d'Androhiel, pour qu'il échappe à la déportation. Ensuite, en tant que maire, Ion V. a intégralement rétrocédé les terres aux Saxons et a soutenu la rétrocession aux anciens emplacements.

Ion V. a décidé que ses enfants apprendraient l'allemand. Comme son épouse, étant ingénieur agronome, travaillait toute la journée, ils ont cherché dans le village une Saxonne disposée à élever Eugen, le fils aîné. Ils ont trouvé une Saxonne d'environ 40 ans, femme au foyer. La Saxonne, qu'Eugen et plus tard son frère ont appelé Moni, surnom qui a ensuite été repris par la famille des enfants, et partiellement par la communauté saxonne, a pris Eugen chez elle à l'âge de cinq-six mois. Plus tard, ses parents y ont mis aussi Ștefan, le frère d'Eugen, plus jeune de deux ans, à un âge encore plus précoce, à environ deux mois. Ils sont restés chez elle jusqu'au début de l'école. Elle prenait soin d'eux jusqu'au soir et les enfants ont d'abord appris le saxon, puis le roumain. Livia V. relate qu'elle payait très bien la Saxonne : des 1800 lei qu'elle recevait en tant qu'ingénieur agronome, elle lui donnait 1200 lei pour s'occuper les enfants, mais elle était satisfaite de l'éducation reçue. Les enfants ont aussi reçu cette bonne éducation à la maternelle et à l'école allemande, où ils ont été acceptés justement parce qu'ils parlaient la langue. A l'école allemande, les enfants ont appris l'allemand, différent du dialecte saxon.

Le fait que les garçons ne jouaient qu'avec des enfants saxons de la rue de Moni a contribué à leur apprentissage de la langue : « Ils habitaient dans le quartier saxon et ils n'avaient que des amis saxons et ils jouaient avec les Saxons, et c'est grâce à ça qu'ils parlaient si bien et qu'ils parlent encore aujourd'hui si bien le saxon, au point que tu ne peux pas te rendre compte qu'ils ne sont pas Saxons. Pendant très longtemps, probablement jusqu'à ce qu'Eugen soit en CM1, les garçons ont parlé saxon entre eux. Personne ne les a forcé à cela, mais ils parlaient saxon à la femme qui prenait soin d'eux, donc ils n'ont pas pensé qu'à la maison ils devaient parler roumain, bien qu'en famille on parlait roumain. [...] Mais par la suite ils se sont rendus compte qu'ils n'étaient pas saxons et ils ont commencé à parler roumain entre eux » (Rosemarie M.).

Les premiers souvenirs d'Eugen date de l'âge de quatre ans et « sont liés à cette famille de Saxons, parce qu'on vivait plus avec eux qu'avec notre famille. Avec mon père, c'est vrai,

nous faisions beaucoup de choses avec lui, on faisait du vélo, il nous emmenait skier, c'était un sportif, mais c'est elle qui nous a éduqué et nous sommes plus proches d'elle, de la Saxonne, que de notre famille ».

En ce qui concerne l'identité, « je me considérais Saxon. Parce qu'à l'école nous avions une seule classe d'allemand et que toutes les autres classes étaient composées de Roumains et de Tziganes, parce que les Roms allaient dans les classes roumaines. Et je sais qu'à chaque récréation nous nous battions. C'était la bataille entre les Saxons et les Roumains. J'étais le Saxon le plus fort ! C'était peut-être un motif ethnique, mais ce n'était pas à cause des parents. Parce que personne ne nous parlait de ça, mais les garçons doivent se battre pour quelque chose quand ils sont petits et donc nous nous battions, au football, à chaque récréation on jouait au football et ensuite on se battait. Les équipes de football étaient faites selon l'ethnie, il y avait une seule classe de Saxons et le reste de Roumains. Et c'est clair que je jouais du côté des Saxons ! J'étais d'une certaine manière un leader d'opinion là-bas, j'étais aussi un bon élève, je n'avais que de bonnes notes ».

La conscience de son identité roumaine apparaît plus tard, au fur et à mesure qu'il s'intègre, lentement, à la communauté roumaine : « Chez Moni il n'y avait pas de Roumains, chez moi il y en avait encore. On allait aussi avec eux, mais très rarement. On était plus avec les Tziganes, on jouait au football, on était plus près d'eux que des Roumains ».

Ainsi, Eugen assume son identité pendant plusieurs années. Il se sent lié à la communauté saxonne, de ses amis saxons, mais pas de la langue allemande, qu'il apprend à l'école par pure obligation : « Pour moi le saxon était ma langue maternelle, l'allemand je devais l'apprendre. A cette époque je n'ai pas aimé l'allemand, alors que j'aimais le saxon, je réfléchissais même en saxon ».

Quand il part à Sibiu en CM1, Eugen a des problèmes d'adaptation au début, parce que le niveau scolaire et les attentes des professeurs étaient plus élevés à Sibiu, même si ses camarades étaient en majorité roumains, les Saxons avaient déjà quitté le pays. « Mais j'avais l'avantage de parler correctement l'allemand, ce qui est une chose très difficile. Peu de personnes peuvent le faire. Il faut grandir dans une famille allemande pour bien le parler ».

Sans le vouloir, déjà au début il s'est heurté aux problèmes ethniques. Ses amis d'enfance saxons l'avaient accepté parmi eux, mais ils ne le considéraient pas comme un Saxon, même si Eugen participait aux fêtes avec eux : à Noël, aux Rameaux, à Pâques il allait arroser avec ses amis saxons. Il s'habillait aux fêtes saxonnes, encouragé par ses parents, qui lui avaient fait faire un costume : « Maman m'a donné aux Saxons. Elle aussi voulait que je sois à leur niveau. Elle voyait cela comme une chance, que je sois avec les Saxons ».

Sa tentative de s'intégrer dans la communauté saxonne culmine à sa confirmation luthérienne qu'il fait, comme tous ses amis saxons, à 14 ans, sans cependant se poser véritablement le problème de la foi. Cependant, il suit scrupuleusement les cours de religion luthérienne par le biais desquels les candidats se préparaient à la confirmation. Ses parents, de foi orthodoxe, mais non pratiquants, ne l'empêchent pas de se convertir. Il est allé plus tard à l'église roumaine, vers 16 ans, quand il a senti le besoin d'une élévation spirituelle, parallèlement à la fréquentation hebdomadaire de l'église luthérienne. Il a ressenti le besoin de porter le costume populaire roumain quand il a commencé à collectionner des objets traditionnels roumains et il a demandé à sa grand-mère de lui coudre une chemise.

Quand il est allé à l'école à Sibiu, il avait accepté son identité roumaine, mais il avait des valeurs saxonnes. Il avait accepté d'être roumain quand les Roumains l'appelaient : « le Saxon ! », et parfois il ripostait. « Je savais que je n'étais pas Saxon, ce n'était pas mon ethnie, mais j'étais avec les Saxons ». Les Roumains lui reprochaient d'être saxon et d'une certaine manière ils l'excluaient, mais ils l'enviaient aussi. En même temps, ses amis saxons ne lui disaient pas qu'il était saxon, « je ne crois pas que j'ai jamais fait véritablement

partie, à cent pour cent, de leur communauté, car c'est impossible. Pour cela il faut l'histoire, la généalogie, c'est comme pour la famille, ou bien tu fais partie de la famille ou bien tu n'en fais pas partie ». Il est devenu conscient que la langue peut être un facteur de stabilisation des identités ethniques, mais ce n'est pas le seul et il n'est pas décisif : « Tu sais qu'on dit : « Quelle est ta langue ? ». « Celle dans laquelle tu penses ». Mais souvent ce n'est pas comme ça. Les Saxons qui sont restés dans la région se sont « roumanisés », beaucoup d'entre eux, et ils parlent roumain même entre eux, parce que la communauté n'existe plus. Ce qui ne signifie pas que je ne suis pas saxon. Donc ce n'est pas totalement vrai, le fait que la langue dans laquelle tu réfléchis, c'est celle-là ta langue maternelle ».

Même si Eugen est entré à l'église luthérienne, même s'il a toujours été soutenu par Rosemarie M., son ancienne institutrice, administratrice de l'église, leader d'opinion de la communauté saxonne, même s'il a assumé avec passion l'identité saxonne, les Saxons « d'une certaine manière ils me considèrent à moitié. Chez eux tout fonctionne selon la communauté. Moi je suis venu de l'extérieur, je ne suis pas un des leurs. Mais maintenant, avec ma génération... Ce sont les vieux qui [me rejètent], mais la nouvelle génération.... eux ils ne tiennent plus vraiment compte de l'ethnie».

Heureusement, entre les deux identités d'Eugen il n'y a jamais eu de rupture. Il a su choisir ce qui a été le meilleur des deux : les valeurs spirituelles saxonnes et les valeurs roumaines, l'honnêteté, l'organisation et le côté travailleur des Saxons, l'humour et la gaieté des Roumains. Une fois parti à l'Université à Bucarest, Eugen n'a jamais eu de difficulté d'adaptation. Aujourd'hui il est architecte et il consacre une grande partie de son temps et de son énergie à sa région natale, dont il essaie d'élever le niveau de vie par le biais de projets culturels.

Prenant comme exemple la famille V., un autre couple de professeurs du village, Emiliana et Ion B. ont cherché une Saxonne pour prendre soin de leurs deux enfants, pour leur apprendre l'allemand. Mais une fois l'école primaire allemande terminée, les enfants sont passés au collège roumain. Cependant, eux aussi ont continué à étudier l'allemand. A présent, à l'école allemande du village il y a plus d'enfants roumains et tziganes que saxons, car la communauté saxonne s'est considérablement réduite. Cependant, l'institutrice saxonne, Rosemarie M., leur enseigne avec le même soin et essaie de leur transmettre les valeurs de la culture saxonne. L'époque de la séparation entre les communautés saxonne et roumaine s'est terminée.

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MARTOR

Title: "The Beginnings of the Repression against the German Minority in Romania: A Case Study of Transylvanian Saxon Communities, 1945-1949"

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How to cite this article: Jerca, Laura. 2012. "The Beginnings of the Repression against the German Minority in Romania: A Case Study of Transylvanian Saxon Communities, 1945-1949". *Martor* 17: 101-115.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

The Beginnings of the Repression against the German Minority in Romania: A Case Study of Transylvanian Saxon Communities, 1945-1949.

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ABSTRACT

During the period between 1945 and 1949, the rural communities of Transylvanian Saxons experienced tragic circumstances. The repressive measures of the communist regime, installed with Soviet support, were varied and harsh. They ranged from the confiscation of goods – carried out under the provisions of the March 23, 1945 Law of Agrarian Reform and affecting a significant part of the ethnic German population – to intimidation, abuses, and terror. Following the decision of the Soviet authorities to deport them to forced labor in the USSR, many Romanian Germans who returned home, particularly after 1948, discovered that they had no future in their own country. They were denied basic rights such as the right to work, to an education, to a decent standard of living. After 800 years of settlement in Transylvania, the oppressive policies of the communist regime, the decline in living standards, as well as the agreements between the Romanian authorities and the West German government resulted in the massive emmigration of ethnic Germans from Romania. This article is primarily based on documents in the Archive for the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives and the Romanian National Archives.

KEYWORDS

Ethnic Germans, minorities, 1945 agrarian reform, installation of communism in Romania.

Introduction

The history of Transylvanian Saxons spans eight centuries[1], but the communist regime that came to power on March 6, 1945 put an end to their presence by means of the repressive policies it adopted during the mid-1950s. Subsequently, the decline in living standards and the agreements concluded between the Bucharest regime and the Federal Republic of Germany led to the massive emigration of ethnic Germans from Romania. The exodus continued during the 1990s. Consequently, the German community in Romania presently consists of only 36,900 people[2].

Confiscation of goods, abuses, violence, and terror were elements of daily fife during the installation of communist rule in Romania. In fact, the war was not over, but continued on the home front, in the name of class struggle against real or presumed enemies, who had to be liquidated. The authorities used various mechanisms for this purpose: expropriation, intimidation, maltreatment, and violence – including killings (Troncotă, 2003). The deportation of ethnic Germans to forced labor in the USSR, undertaken following pressures from the Soviet authorities, irremediably altered the relationship between the German community and the Romanian state. Nonetheless, the Romanian communist authorities, unlike those in Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Hungary, did not seek to drive them out of the country.

Alongside the rest of the population, Romania's ethnic Germans endured the horrors that accompanied the installation and consolidation of communist rule. The communist authorities applied a policy – dictated and su-

1) Originating from the Rhine and the Mosel River areas, the Transylvanian Saxons were invited as "hospites" by King Geza II of Hungary during the 12th century. During the Reformation, they converted to Lutheranism. This enabled them to maintain close contact with their native language. The Evangelical Church of the Transylvanian Saxons played a major role in forging the social identity of the community. This differentiation along confessional lines explains the autarchic and relatively closed character of the Saxon village social system. Until the middle of the 19th century, their socio-political status was defined by a set of medieval privileges.

2) By comparison, the 1930 census recorded 745,421 ethnic Germans living in Romania.

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pervised by Moscow – that sought to destroy the bases of Saxon homesteads, precipitate their exodus to other rural communities in Romania, and dissolve traditional German rural settlements by forcing the inhabitants to look elsewhere for a chance to survive and an income to support their families.

Between 1918 and 1940, the Saxons provided the economic, political, and cultural leadership of the German community in Romania[3]. During the period in which the German Ethnic Group (GEG)[4] exercised control, the organization applied intense pressure to downplay and equalize regional identities, emphatically insisting they all "belonged to the German people." In May 1941, the group went as far as to prohibit the use of the terms "Saxon" or "Swabian", even in dealings with the Romanian authorities[5]. During the Second World War, the German community in Romania came under the direct control of Berlin and participated in the Third Reich's war effort. The GEG became the vehicle for the transmission of funds to Berlin. These monies comprised taxes, excises, and other contributions paid by the ethnic Germans of Romania. By the end of 1943, approximately 60,000 ethnic Germans had enrolled in the Waffen SS and over 15,000 in the Wehrmacht, the Todt Organization, or the armaments industry. These numbers represented over 10% of Romania's ethnic German population, and their unprecedented regimentation in the Reich's war effort would have dramatic consequences.

The situation of the German community underwent a radical transformation after August 23, 1944. New laws came into effect that outlawed the German Ethnic Group, confiscated its goods, and sent numerous ethnic Germans to detention camps. Romania was now at war with Germany and ethnic Germans were considered a threat, particularly since the GEG was attempting to organize a resistance movement against Romania's new course. The reports of the Security Police Directorate describe the discovery and neutralization of 35 resistance cells on Romanian territory. These groups were composed of German military personnel and members of the legionary movement, and they were active even after the cessation of hostilities in May 1945. In total, 946 persons were arrested and subsequently remanded to the justice system (Moldovan et al., 2006). Furthermore, orders were issued for the arrest of GEG leaders and all ethnic German who continued to resist alongside them. On August 27, 1944, the Regional Inspectorates of the Gendarmerie received instructions to compile lists of all ethnic Germans over sixteen years old by requiring them to register with the local police or gendarmerie. Based on these records, many were deported to the USSR for forced labor.

The authorities had various proposals, plans, and legislative projects concerning the status of the German minority, particularly in regards to impounding their assets. The overall goal was to confiscate their houses and lands, as well as to concentrate the population in just a few localities. However, the practical

3) In the 1920s, Transylvania had 5,113,124 inhabitants. Of these, 2,930,120 were ethnic Romanians (57.5%), 1,305,753, (25.53%) were ethnic Hungarians, and 534,427 (10.45 %) were ethnic Germans – Saxons and Swabians. The statistical weight of ethnic Germans was particularly preponderant in the following districts: Arad (7,9%), Bistriţa Năsăud (17,02%), Braşov (29,7%), Caraş-Severin (12,39%), Sătmar (12,09%), Sibiu (29,5%), Târnava Mică (17,93%), Târnava Mare (42,87%), and Timiş-Torontal (37,67%). Ethnic Romanians constituted the majority population in 15 out of Transylvania's 22 districts (The Minority Question in Transylvania, 1925).

4) The decree-law of November 21, 1941 concerning the founding of the German Ethnic Group established the

application of these measures encountered opposition in the field. It was also necessary to avoid severely disrupting agrarian resources and the harvest. This meant that the solutions could not be as radical as originally envisaged.

Fearing reprisals, many ethnic Germans left Romania in the autumn of 1944. However, towards the end of the year, they returned on rather their own initiative or because they were sent back under guard to the Romanian frontier by the Soviet command. The Soviet authorities disregarded the fact that the ethnic Germans who had left for the Reich based on the October 22, 1941 Romanian-German Convention had lost their Romanian citizenship, after being reimbursed for the value of the assets they left behind. The Soviets nonetheless sent them back to Romania. Those who had left under the terms of the May 12, 1943 Romanian-German Military Convention were able to retain their Romanian citizenship, while also becoming German citizens. As far as their property was concerned, the Armistice Convention – signed on September 12, 1944 – stipulated that the assets belonging to the Reich, to Hungary, or to their citizens must be preserved. It further mandated that they could be exported or expropriated only with the consent of the Soviet Military High Command. Moscow willfully misinterpreted this provision and insisted that this category of assets be turned over to the Soviet Union (Şandru, 2007).

In October 1944, the decree authorizing the restoration of the 1923 Constitution was modified to empower the Council of Ministers to prosecute and punish those responsible for the alliance with Nazi Germany, respectively those culpable for the "country's disaster" and the war against the United Nations. To this end, special laws were to come into effect. Although the 1923 Constitution prohibited such a procedure, there were also serious discussions about confiscating the property of the guilty parties[6].

Immediately after the events of August 23, 1944, the communists initiated an intense propaganda campaign in favor of agrarian reform[7]. Conditions at the local level deteriorated severely due to the land redistribution actions coordinated by the Ploughmen's Front. The situation was aggravated by the presence of the Red Army, which had supplanted the local authorities in their role of maintaining public order. Its subordinates, however, robbed and committed numerous other abuses. Thus, for all practical purposes, the public authority of local Romanian administrative bodies had ceased to exist. Because the new authorities did nothing to prevent such acts, peasant land seizures and redistributions of large estates intensified after March 6, 1945. This was despite the fact that some of the occupied lands were state property (Dobrincu, Iordachi et al., 2005).

The 1945 Agrarian Reform and the Condition of Transylvanian Saxons' Rural Communities

The Agrarian Reform Law of March 23, 1945 failed to solve Romania's agrarian problem. At most, it leveled the social structure. The communist authorities believed that the small size of peasant landholdings, as well as the lack of any criteria for distributing land with the goal of enhancing economic performance, would soon demonstrate the unavailability of such farms and offer solid arguments for the abolition of private property, thereby affirming the superiority of collective farming. Nevertheless, in the first years following their accession to power, the communists issued no public declarations on the subject of collectivization. They acted with prudence, rightly concerned about the predictable opposition this process would generate in the countryside (Prost, 2006). They focused instead on consumer cooperatives, on syndicates for the processing and commercialization of agricultural products, as well as on the common use of tractors. Throughout this initial period, the communists proclaimed themselves firm defenders of private property[8].

organization as a public Romanian legal entity. It also stipulated that all Romanian citizens who had been recognized and recorded in the national registry as ethnic Germans by the group's leadership belonged to the GEG.

5) ANIC, Fond Preşedinţia Consiliului de Miniştri – Serviciul Secret de Informaţii, dosar nr. 18/1936, f. 25.

6) ANIC, Fond CC al PCR, Secţia Cancelarie, dosar 28/1944, f. 22.

7) On February 10, 1945, in Scânteia, The Ploughmen's Front published a manifesto calling on peasants to take matters into their own hands and implement the agrarian reform. The manifesto exhorted peasants to seize large estates, insisting that the government had no intention of granting them land. The next day, the Front's representatives withdrew from the commission tasked with analyzing the modalities whereby the agrarian reform could be accomplished.

8) On December 23, 1945, during a meeting of the Ploughmen's Front, Petru Groza affirmed that Stalin had told him that the ṣRomaniant peasants must chose their own path; that nothing should be done by means of coercion or force, and that he should avoid imitating the kolkhoz and sovkhoz type of farms. Before the elections of 1946, the communists continued to pose as defenders of peasant property. They maintained this stance until 1948. Beginning in 1948, there appeared numerous disparaging references to the individual peasant farm, initially in Russian sources and subsequently during the plenary session of the PMR (Romanian Worker's Party) – which took place on March 3 - 5, 1949. During this session, the small peasant farm was characterized as "tottering and lacking in future

prospects compared to the Collective Farm, which will insure the genuine welfare of the agriculturalist!"

9) It is said that H.O. Roth told Petru Groza that German smallholders typically did not own more than 20 hectares.

10) On March 20, 1945, the Council of Ministers decided that explicit references to ethnic Germans would bestow a racial character upon the law.

11) The 1945 agrarian reform law expropriated 1,469 million hectares. Pursuant to Article 6 of the Decree-Law no. 187 of March 23, 1945, all agricultural stock (tractors, threshers, harvesters) located on these lands became state property. Landless peasants or those who owned less than 5 hectares were to receive land. The agrarian reform enacted by the government led by Petru Groza chipped away at the private property regime and contributed to the destruction of properties larger than 50 hectares.

The March 23, 1945 Law of Agrarian Reform affected over 60% of the ethnic German population in Romania. Several bills were under consideration at the time. Therefore, the references regarding German property owners vary according to the bill in question. In the first phase, it was proposed that the property of all those who had collaborated with the Reich be confiscated. Persons who had not colluded with the Nazis would have been allowed to keep a maximum of 20 hectares. The main criterion for expropriation was ethnic origin[9]. Petru Groza admitted that, initially, the intention was to confiscate all properties held by ethnic Germans. Subsequently, however, this idea was discarded as excessively "anti-democratic."[10] Other targeted categories were permitted to keep 50 hectares as personal property.

Article 3 of the law defined the types of properties subject to nationalization and subsequent redistribution to peasants. The first category included: the assets and lands of Nazi collaborators of German descent who held Romanian and/or German citizenship; the goods and terrains of war criminals and of those responsible for the "country's disaster"; the possessions and lands of persons who had left Romania after August 23, 1994 or were currently residing abroad (i.e., "absentees"). Furthermore, the law stipulated that the state would appropriate the assets and lands of all Romanian citizens, regardless of ethnic origin, who had volunteered to fight against the United Nations. Last but not least, the state would nationalize tracts over 50 hectares – including pastures, lakes, and marshes. Vineyards and forests were not included in this normative act.

After March 6, 1945, the Romanian Communist Party encouraged brutal and abusive behavior towards Romania's German population. Persons who condemned this attitude were labeled "defenders of Hitlerism." The property regime was modified in close connection to ethnic origin. The German population came within the purview of the agrarian reform legislation in accordance with the provisions of Article 8, paragraph 9 of the abovementioned law. The expropriation targeted all assets: houses, lands, agricultural stock, and farm animals. Previously, pursuant to Article 8 of the Armistice Convention, persons classified as "absentees" – a category in which German inhabitants who had left their homes during the war or during the retreat of German troops – were especially likely to fit in, lost their assets, which became "enemy goods." These properties were managed by the Department for the Administration and Supervision of Enemy Goods (CASBI). If the assets belonged to "German subjects," the profits accrued from leasing them were deposited at the Sovrom State Bank in Bucharest. Alternatively, the rents from properties belonging to "Romanian subjects of German origin" went into the CASBI account at the Bank for Savings and Consignations (Dobrincu, Iordachi et al., 2005).

The Law of Agrarian Reform[11] of March 23, 1945 specified that only ethnic Germans who had fought in the Romanian Army were exempt from nationalization. The language of the law described them as "entitled." The rest of the ethnic Germans were allowed to live in their own homes, as long they paid rent to the state, now the new proprietor, and only until Romanian colonists moved in. The deployments of colonists constituted an attempt to "Romanianize" German communes and destroy their traditional solidarity. Nonetheless, the colonists did not receive plots to built houses. Moreover, they were in a precarious legal situation similar to that of the German population. For the state was considered the owner of all assets, hence master of the rural world. The documents reveal that ethnic Germans proposed to the authorities to build houses for the colonists in exchange for reclaiming title to their own homes. However, their offer was refused. It was only in 1956 that the German population was able to reclaim the buildings expropriated in 1945 (Dobrincu, Iordachi et al., 2005).

The communists insisted and succeeded in having all ethnic Germans be treated as an

undifferentiated bloc of Nazi collaborators. The norms governing the implementation of the agrarian reform law, published on April 2, 1945, stipulated that collaborationists were subject to complete expropriation. Consequently, the entire German community fell under the purview of this provision. This stipulation also extended to the following categories of persons: Romanian citizens who had been part of the German Army or the SS; their descendants and heirs; Romanian citizens who fled the country during the retreat of the German and Hungarian armies; Romanian citizens of German descent who had been members of GEG; all persons implicated in Nazi propaganda. The latter group was vaguely defined. This made possible the abusive categorization of some people, thereby making them liable for the full penalties of the law. As mentioned before, the law also targeted the descendants and inheritors of the categorized persons, although not even the relatives of war criminals were subject to punishment. Furthermore, it surely ignored the fact that the GEG had been a legal organization. Finally, yet importantly, ethnic Germans whose communist past dated to the party's underground days also fell within the scope of this punitive provision.

Although other categories of Romanian citizens were exempt from this measure, the Germans had their vineyards and forests confiscated under the provisions of the Decree-Law No. 187/ 1945. Postwar documents show that, in many villages and communes, both the local authorities and the other inhabitants actively supported the process of dispossessing ethnic Germans, whom they accused of collaborationism. In fact, they were masking their goal of taking over their assets. Consequently, the law was applied abusively. Persons of German descent had their tools, lands, cattle, and houses confiscated. Stripped of their personal possessions, they were left with no source of income[12].

In villages where ethnic Germans were the minority or away to forced labor in the USSR, resistance to the expropriation process was not very strong. On the other hand, in areas where they lived in compact groups, opposition was significant and the process unfolded slowly, with fits and starts. Drawing on their tradition of solidarity, the Germans attempted to resist the pressures exercised upon them and defend their rights with all their might, especially since they faced the prospect of dispossession and the cessation of all income. Initially, they were able to exploit the weaknesses of a communist regime still in the early phase of consolidating its influence over Romanian society. The regime's relative lack of confidence was reflected in its actions. In the first stage, only the houses abandoned by Germans or those of notorious Nazi collaborators were confiscated. It was only after the regime established firm control over the country that it was able to implement firm measures that would affected the mass of the German population.

Priests and schoolteachers played a critical role in preserving the German communities' sense of solidarity. They vehemently opposed the arbitrary measures of the authorities, at least during the early phase when the balance of power was not irreversibly in favor of the regime. The (Lutheran) Evangelical Church sent the text of the agrarian reform law together with its own interpretation – which emphasized that the normative act did not mandate the confiscation of houses and their surrounding plots – to all its consistories. The overall assistance and legal support provided by the Church enabled the German population to resist pressures from the local authorities, gendarmes, or representatives of the agrarian committees. Consequently, the colonists feared to take over the lands and houses of ethnic Germans. The situation was similar in cases when the local Romanian population attempted to appropriate Germans goods. Therefore, in the rural world, in the villages inhabited by Germans, the atmosphere was tense and uncertain. Bishop Friedrich Müller undertook repeated démarches, not only with the Romanian authorities but also abroad, asking that the mistreatment of Romania's German population be stopped[13].

12) ANIC, Fond CC al PCR, Sectia Cancelarie, dosar nr. 28/1944, f. 24

13) ACNSAS, Fond documentar, nr. 3414, Uniunea Sasilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 334

At least during the first two years of communist rule, the situation of the colonists sent by the authorities to take over the properties of the ethnic German population was deplorable. They lacked sources of income, tools, even clothes. They were typically poor peasants, sometimes from villages neighboring German settlements, but generally from the southern part of the country. Many of them showed no interest in cultivating the land or in husbanding the goods they had received, which subsequently fell into disrepair. The farm animals confiscated by the state from the Germans were distributed to the colonists. However, the latter either lacked the ability to care for them or sold them to abattoirs or at the market. The General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie reported numerous thefts of German possessions, as well as unauthorized occupations of their houses by Romanians and Roma from neighboring villages. Although they had received the lands and houses belonging to ethnic Germans, as well as all their goods, the colonists failed to establish prosperous farms. In the absence of help from the state, which was impossible at the time, the colonists tolerated the presence of the former owners who now worked the land in exchange for a share of the crop. On the other hand, the colonists felt insecure about holding rightful title to their newly acquired possessions, as they were considered usufructuaries of state assets[14].

14) Ibidem, f. 6-7

The Law of Minorities was adopted on April 4, 1945. One month later, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested that the Council of Ministers instruct local authorities to prohibit the entry into the country of persons who did not hold or had lost Romanian citizenship – as defined by the new law. Nevertheless, in many instances ethnic Germans did manage to return to their place of residence. In these conditions, they could not be compelled to leave the country without the agreement of the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission. For reasons that remain unclear, the commission did not agree with such measures. The number of Germans who returned to Romania was therefore significant. This contributed to an attitude of revolt against the confiscation measures enacted by the authorities.

Following the preliminary stages of 1944-1947, the repression intensified in 1948. The methods employed included arrests, assassinations, jail terms, forced domicile, and the social marginalization of opponents.

Approximately one million people endured various forms of incarceration such as prison, force d domicile, and deportation (Ionescu-Gură, 2005). Yet the repression had much larger dimensions. The families of those considered enemies of the regime also became a target. They were subjected to interrogations, searches, had difficulty in finding jobs, their children were expelled from school, etc. "The enemy constitutes the great justification for terror; the totalitarian state cannot survive without enemies. If they do not exist, they must be invented. Once identified, they deserve no mercy." (Neculau et al., 2004: 307). Subsequently, the authorities became concerned that dispossessing entire villages and areas densely populated by Germans could result in an economic disaster, because their role in agriculture and typically efficient work could not be easily replaced (Docea et al., 2003).

Although proposals to confiscate the assets of all ethnic Germans in Romania and throw them into work camps were vehiculated at the local level, the Bucharest authorities discouraged such attempts during the period from the end of 1945 to 1946. This was due to the country's dire internal situation. The central authorities emphasized that the previous attempts to resettle German communities with Romanian colonists resulted only in the destruction of patrimony and the failure to perform agricultural work effectively. This resulted in an extremely poor harvest and further destabilized Romania's economy, which was already suffering under the strain of reparations payments to the USSR (Budeancă, Olteanu et al., 2008). The Minister of Interior Affairs, Teohari Georgescu, reported that only Germans considered a threat to the country's

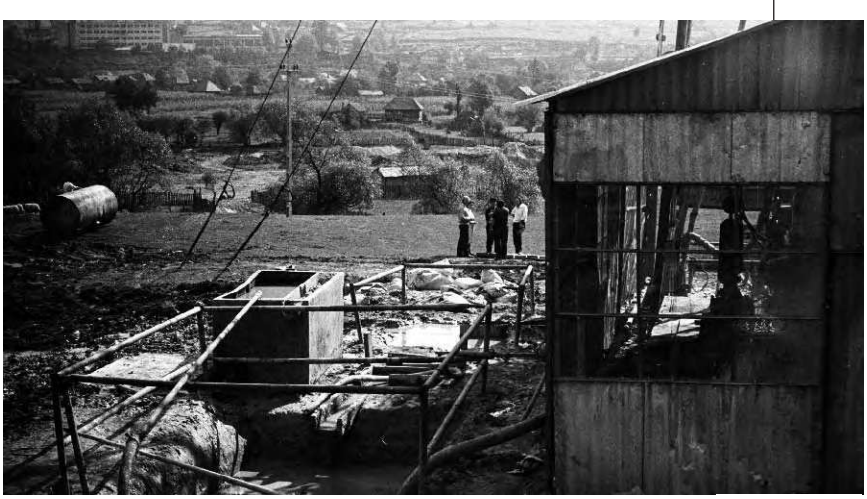
security had been sent to work camps – approximately 15,000 people. For the time being, he explained, the main problem resided in the completion of necessary agricultural works. He demanded that local authorities comply and that all measures must be subordinated to this imperative, at least temporarily. In this context, only those Germans who refused to work the land were to be sent to the camps (Docea et al., 2003).

In October 1945, the Central Commission for Agrarian Reform issued Order no. 993, which clarified the norms governing the application of the Law of Agrarian Reform. These clarifications were necessary, given the fact that collecting the harvest and the seeding of fields needed to be accomplished in a manner as efficient as possible. In order to facilitate these operations, the colonization process was temporarily halted. In areas inhabited by ethnic Germans, two categories of persons were established. The first group consisted of persons who had left Romania and did not return until the cutoff date of May 9, 1945. Their assets were classified as state property, in view of the fact that they were regarded as abandoned. The second classification comprised persons already in the country. Their situation had to remain the same as when the order was issued (Docea et al., 2003). If they refused to till the fields, the Germans were accused of sabotage. Half the crop accrued to the state, while the classification system, together with the taxes levied by the authorities, disheartened the German population.

The documents reveal that the local authorities were hostile towards ethnic Germans; an attitude encouraged by the propaganda of the Romanian Communist Party. In their reports, many officials insisted that other political forces were promising the Germans support against the repressive measures to which they were subjected. They further maintained that Order no. 993 encouraged the German populace to mount fierce opposition against the regime's agrarian policy. They argued that the reforms measures implemented so far had failed to destroy the strong foundation of Saxons and Swabian homesteads and the solidary spirit of their communities. Local officials therefore proposed radical plans, some of which involved the forced resettlement of the ethnic German population in order to redeem marshes for agriculture. Alternatively, they floated schemes to relocate entire villages in remote areas so that they can be transformed into agricultural terrains. These proposals, however, lacked support from the central authorities[15].

Nonetheless, contrary to the provisions of Order no. 993 issued by the Central Commission for Agrarian Reform, local officials continued to issues evacuation orders. In doing so, they were neglecting the fact that some German families had one or several members who had served in the Romanian Army or, alternatively, fitted into categories exempted by the law. In many localities, Germans were condemned en masse as supporters of the German Ethnic Group and of Nazi policies, without regard to any differences that may have existed amongst them. Any démarche to prove otherwise was not perceived as an attempt to establish the factual truth, but as a

15) ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar nr. 3414, Uniunea Saşilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 15



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move to preserve one's wealth and enviable economic status in the community.

In many instances, the German population opposed the abusive actions of the authorities and intimidated the colonists into abandoning the houses and lands they had received. Many of those who defended their rights with conviction were returnees. Some had served in the German Army, while others had left during its retreat. Amongst them were even repatriates who had left as early as 1940 or 1941, under the provisions of certain Romanian-German agreements. Based on these facts, many local authorities proposed the evacuation of the entire German population from the region under their administration. To do otherwise, they argued, would render the agrarian reform almost impossible to accomplish.

Because of this precarious situation, there was a great deal of apprehension in the German community, the more so since the Czech and Polish authorities were already proceeding with the mass expulsion of ethnic Germans. They feared that the Romanian authorities were also contemplating this option. Their fears were not groundless; it does seem that the Minister for Nationalities, Gheorghe Vlădescu-Răcoasa, was drafting a bill towards this end. There was also a rumor circulating in the German community that the Romanian government was trying to obtain the Allies' consent for the expulsion of ethnic Germans to Germany (Docea et al., 2003). However, although there were voices demanding such a measure, the Romanian government never formally adopted such a policy. After January 1946, this issue was taken off the table. Nevertheless, the repressive measures continued. Ethnic Germans were still subject to arrest, confined to work camps, and deprived of rights and property. This was particularly the case after the enactment of Decree no. 6/ 1950, which mandated the internment of persons hostile to the regime in work units (Budeancă, Olteanu et al., 2008).

Between 1945 and 1947, the communists were constrained by the necessity of governing in coalition with other political parties. Hence, they were cautious about applying the quota system adopted from the Soviet model. Nevertheless, the state took firm measures to provision the towns, controlling the collection, transport, and commercialization of agricultural products. New laws came into effect, requiring peasants to retain a sufficient quantity of cereals and/or other plants necessary for subsistence and seeding. The rest had to be turned over to the state, under the threat of prison terms ranging from four to twelve years[16]. Hence, the period from 1948 to 1952 fully revealed the harshness of the regime (Ivan et al., 2009).

The communist strategy of acquiring control over the rural world was gradual. In order to prevent the loss of peasant support, the real goals were revealed only after the November 1946 elections. The drought of 1946 and the terms of the armistice accentuated the poverty of rural areas. The imperative of supplying the towns and the occupation troops, as well as the delivery of grain to the USSR and the adherence to other armistice terms, caused the government to alter the quota system, which became increasingly burdensome and abusive. New restrictive measures, designed to strengthen the control of the state, were adopted in 1947. It was the year 1949, however, that proved decisive in the unprecedented transformation of the Romanian rural world according to the Soviet model (Iancu, Țârpău, Trașcă et al., 2000).

Significant numbers of police and security forces were mobilized in order to preclude revolts and exercise control over the countryside. They were tasked with implementing the policies of the communist leadership and of reporting the "activities of the class enemy in the villages." Persons kept under surveillance by the Securitate (secret police) included even those responsible for organizing collective farms. The Securitate also reported if conditions for their establishment existed (Cătănuș, Roske, 2000). The accusations brought against presumed class enemies – whether fabricated or based on facts – were swiftly framed as sedi-

16) Law no. 68/ 1946 provided for the detailed regulation of the quota system. Decree no. 112/ 1948 instituted the State Commission for the Collection of Cereals, tasked with collecting, depositing, and transporting of cereals in order to insure the population's food supply. Decree no.125/ 5 July 1948 stipulated that producers were obligated to sell their surplus to the state, in order to secure food for the "working population of cities and of regions lacking their own sources of supply." The decree applied especially to wheat, rye, barley, and oats. Producers' contributions increased proportionally to the cultivated area.

tion. Those accused were liable for severe penalties, including the confiscation of wealth, which was of particular interest to the communist authorities. It was only after 1956 that the inventory of goods seized beginning in 1945 got under way. Unfortunately, numerous objects of pecuniary and/or historical value had already gone missing, while the houses had been earmarked as premises for mayoralties, cultural syndicates, etc (Budeancă, Olteanu, 2009).

The Impact of the 1945 Agrarian Reform on the Transylvanian Saxons' Rural Communities

The German community was especially affected by the process of agrarian reform. Although the law had a powerful impact by means of its formal provisions concerning certain categories of ethnic Germans, its implementation was marked by misconduct and flagrant disregard for the rights of ethnic Germans as Romanian citizens (Zach, 2005).

The colonization of villages inhabited by ethnic Germans proceeded systematically, while their opposition to this process manifested itself in proportion to their numerical density in the region.

The conflict between the German inhabitants and the local agrarian reform commission that erupted in the community of Richi?, located in Târnava Mare district, is a typical example of conditions in Romania's countryside in the year 1946. The dispute erupted when the authorities announced that circa 30 colonists from the counties of Alba and Prahova, as well as from the commune of Ighișul Vechi – Târnava Mare, would be quartered in the houses of Germans residents. The Evangelical priest Andrei Herbert, who was circulating amongst the gathered populace, requested that the commission actually show the orders mandating the housing of colonists and told the assembled crowd that they were meaningless. The General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie described the mood of the Richiș German community in note no. 37999/ 4 September 1946: "throughout this time, Gustav Stoltz affirmed in a loud voice that they will not allow colonists in their house even if blood was spilled. Ioan Schlosser likewise declared that, if a colonist was lodged there, he will burn down his property."[17]

Shortly thereafter, the committee, led by the mayor, the notary, and the commander of the local gendarmerie, accompanied the 30 colonists to the houses assigned for their lodging. "However, the gates to the residences of all 30 Saxons were locked. In front of house no. 15 there was a group of Saxons who clamored loudly; a fact that determined the authorities to give up and to return to the townhouse." In order to end the resistance of the residents, the gendarme commander summoned Andrei Herbert to the town hall for interrogation. Alarmed by the detainment of the priest, the ethnic German population began a demonstration in front of the townhouse demanding his release. Various incidents took place, resulting in two wounded. In response, the authorities charged Andrei Herbert, Gustav Stoltz, and Ioan Scholer with sedition and requested that they be tried under arrest[18].

Similar situations occurred in the majority of communities inhabited by the German population. This prompted ethnic Germans to send numerous petitions to the authorities, including to the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Interior Affairs[19]. Furthermore, following the abuses signaled by the Saxon Democratic Anti-Fascist Union from Sibiu, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie sent to the General Police Directorate a detailed report (no. 158784/ 15 January 1947) about the aforementioned cases. The report concluded that the majority of German grievances were unfounded[20].

As far as the district of Sibiu is concerned, records show that 70 Saxon houses were relinquished in the community of Șelimbăr. The former residents were compelled to relocate in 25 houses. The new lodging arrangements involved four to five families living in one house.

17) ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, Dosar nr. 3414, Uniunea Saşilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 88

18) Ibidem, f. 89

19) Ibidem, f. 129

20) Ibidem, f. 170

The sources further indicate instances in which widows and disabled war veterans were forced to abandon their homes and/or were expropriated[21]. In the commune of Seleuțul Mic – Târnava Mică district – there was a dispute between the Evangelical Church and the local committee for agrarian reform. The latter had appropriated the parish house and used it as the town hall. The two sides eventually came to terms and the mayoralty evacuated the premises[22].

Police reports abound in descriptions of abuses and violence directed at ethnic Germans by colonists or members of the agrarian reform committees. Because of the overall situation, many victims refrained from filing formal complaints. There were also instances, however, when those guilty of violence against ethnic Germans were deferred to justice[23]. The memos and reports filed by the representatives of the German community, as well as the efforts of the Evangelical Church, motivated the central authorities to investigate the alleged cases of misconduct. However, the conclusions of the investigation were not surprising. Most complaints were deemed baseless.

In 1946, the Legion of Gendarmes from the city of Brașov investigated the abuses committed by the agrarian reform commissions in the communes of Cristian, Râșnov, and Codlea – Brașov County. Their report stated that most complaints lodged by the Saxon inhabitants were unfounded, and that the property seizures had been carried out in the spirit of the agrarian reform law. There was only one officially confirmed case of abuse perpetrated by the authorities tasked with implementing the agrarian reform. This was in Cristian, where the assets of the Evangelical Church had been confiscated. The report further shows that the violations committed by the administrative authorities had been investigated by the local gendarmes, and that some files had been cleared by the judicial system, while others were in the process of being closed. Moreover, the report emphasized that the *"abuses and so-called maltreatments are due to the well-known fact that the Commissions implementing the agrarian reform legislation encountered great difficulties in the field, because in most instances the Saxons used different methods to resist the expropriation."*[24] The inquests pertaining to the "alleged abuses and arbitrary proceedings of the administrative authorities while applying the agrarian reform" continued throughout October 1946, especially in cases involving war widows or veterans mobilized on the Western front after August 23, 1944[25].

There were also instances in which ethnic Germans, who were never members of the German Ethnic Group and had fought in the Romanian Army from the beginning of the war, were stripped of all assets. The declaration filed by Ioan Kilos from Râșnov on December 6, 1946 is revealing:

…in the name of my son-in-law Otto Streidferd who, together with his wife Erna, née Kloos, was arrested on 13 January 1945 and sent to Russia for obligatory labor, leaving in the care of the undersigned [Ioan Kloos] a 5 year old boy. Neither my son-in-law, nor my daughter were enrolled in the German Ethnic Group. The aforementioned [Otto Streidferd] was mobilized from 1939 until the date of his discharge, rendering 1107 days of service on the field of battle with his unit, the 10th Mechanized Cavalry Regiment. All of the above statements can be confirmed by the Prahova Territorial Administration[26].

Any attempt to seek justice from the authorities or the judicial system was destined to fail. The justice system had been purged and was now serving the new regime of popular democracy. Persons who had been arrested had to wait years until their trial date was set. The trials were politicized and often public, so that they may influence public opinion and discourage others from similar actions. The accused were presumed guilty and their sentences established in advance (Ivan et al., 2009).

In 1948, under increasing pressure from petitions and interventions from the German population, the Evangelical Church, or other organizations, the authorities tried to evaluate the stage and consequences of the expropria-

21) Ibidem, f. 173
22) Ibidem, f. 174
23) Ibidem, f. 175
24) Ibidem, f. 177-178
25) Ibidem, f. 180
26) Ibidem, f. 222

tion process. They likewise attempted to assess the Germans' socio-economic situation[27]. In the opinion of the authorities, the expropriated German families were obligated to leave their homesteads after the eviction order was issued. Colonists or newly propertied peasants were to take their place. Practically, however, it was impossible to place the German families in other residences. Consequently, a compromise solution emerged. The ethnic Germans remained in their former homes and/or homesteads until the authorities assigned them other accommodations, or until they found another domicile on their own initiative. Many of the expropriated Germans managed to remain in their homes by reaching an understanding with the new owners.

Nevertheless, numerous disagreements arose between the newly propertied and the dispossessed Germans. The authorities intervened in favor of the former and evicted the Germans, who were still living in their former homes. For example, in the community of Apoldul de Sus, Sibiu district, 40 families were expelled. The homeless families were placed with other ethnic Germans who had not been expropriated. A somewhat similar situation existed in other communities throughout the district: 57 expulsions were registered at Tălmaciu; in the community of Bradu, there were 26 cases; in Avrig, only two instances were recorded. Most of these expulsions took place in 1945 and a few in 1946[28].

In 1948, numerous ethnic Germans returned to Romania from forced labor in the USSR. Thus, the number of expulsions rose dramatically compared to previous years, the more so since the authorities were eager to dispel the tensions caused by rumors that the German population would receive back the lands, houses, and goods confiscated under the terms of the agrarian reform law. On the other hand, the German populace was hoping for equal rights and a just settlement of their situation. In their interpretation, this meant the return of their houses and goods. The repatriates' attitudes are noteworthy. They regarded the confiscation of their assets as unjust and insisted that German city dwellers had been spared such measures. At the same time, local authorities recorded conflicts between ethnic Germans and persons who had received their goods[29].

The Braşov Securitate Regional Directorate reported serious disagreements between the colonists and the German population, especially in the areas of Braşov and Făgăraş, which had received a large influx of colonists. The principal cause of conflict was the attitude of the colonists. They did not work the land they had received and resorted to the former Saxon owners or other members of the German community for agricultural labor. Moreover, although there were verbal agreements in place providing for the equal sharing of the harvest between the colonist and the person who worked the land, many colonists reneged on them because they desired the entire crop.

In addition, although they often lived on the same premises, the Germans expected the colonists to maintain and repair the buildings, since they regarded them as the new owners. On their part, the colonists demanded that the Germans maintain the houses. This they refused to do, arguing that the properties were no longer theirs. As a result, the neglected buildings decayed. Oftentimes, the colonists sold the agricultural stock – ranging from tools to farm animals – they had received. Other colonists were alcoholics or provoked fights and arguments, especially with the German population. Still others exhibited a complete lack of interest in maintaining their new assets, reasoning that the collectivization process would soon be underway. After documenting over twenty disputes between colonists and Saxons over housing, accusations of theft etc., the Securitate concluded that in the Braşov region "the general mood is very tense." [30]

Most times, the colonists reached an agreement with the former owners and worked the land together. The Germans usually paid the colonists in kind, either with a share of the crop or by helping maintain the homestead. The records of the Securitate men-

27) ACNSAS, Fond documentar, Dosar nr. 3414, Uniunea Saşilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 182

28) Ibidem, f. 355

29) ACNSAS, Fond documentar, Dosar nr. 3414, Uniunea Saşilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 356

30) Ibidem, f. 401

tion many such concrete cases[31]. Nevertheless, the very same records state that the Securitate did not have a complete picture of this phenomenon, because the agreements were verbal and kept secret. At the same time, the official inquiries reveal that in communities also inhabited by Germans the labor force for agricultural projects was recruited entirely from their ranks. On the other hand, the records describe the emergence of a new attitude in the German community: *"Following the establishment of the German Anti-Fascist Committee, the German population partially abandoned their attitude towards the settler and native population, and speak openly that, once enrolled in this democratic organization, they will regain, at least in part, their former properties, especially their houses."*[32]

Colonists who had sold the entire agricultural stock received from the state and were working the land with the help of ethnic Germans also appear in the records of the Securitate. The list is long, comprising tens of cases in several communes, especially in the Făgăraş region. The authorities were also concerned about cases such as those recorded in the subdistrict of Ciuc, where the colonists had sold all the wheat and, because they lacked seeds, had left 90% of the agricultural land unseeded.[33]

In the Cluj region, three conflicts were recorded in October 1949 between settlers and the German population; in Dedrad commune – Mureş district, six colonists were identified as working the land with the help of ethnic Germans[34]. The document, written by the Cluj branch of the Securitate, also refers to previous conflicts, particularly those that had erupted in the summer of 1946, when some of the ethnic Germans who had fled the country in September-October 1944 began to return home and found their households and lands utilized by settlers or newly propertied natives.

Thus, in the commune of Terpiu-Năsăud, the returned Saxons started to demand their property rights, especially over houses and movable goods. Differences arose on these grounds, resulting in the eviction of the Saxons by the settler and the newly propertied natives. At the time, the expulsion was carried out by means of brutal acts and, to this day, no Saxon dares to establish himself in this [formerly] purely Saxon community. The Saxons expelled from their native communes established themselves in Romanian communities – such as the case of the Saxons from Terpiu who settled in Blăjenii de Sus and Blăjenii de Jos.[35]

Because of the hostile climate and disputes with settlers or newly propertied persons, many refugee German families who had returned to Romania in 1945 left the country again in the period from 1946 to 1947. They crossed the frontier clandestinely in order to reach Austria or Germany (Ionescu-Gură, 2005). The authorities were particularly concerned about such cases in the communes of Satul Nou, Petriş and Chiraleş. There were also instances in which the economic situation of ethnic Germans was better than that of the colonists, mostly in the communities of Iad, Sângeorzul Nou, Lechinţa, etc., where state farms existed. This is because they were in a position to benefit from their training as viticulturists, veterinarians, and horticulturalists. As employees of the state farm, they were entitled to ration coupons, could eat at the canteen, and were exempt from taxes. The following example is illustrative: "[…] *the case of Grişier Toma from Iad commune, who practices the occupation of veterinary technician and for this reason the population respects him, [as well as] the case of Grosser Ioan from Lechiţa, viniculture and fruit growing specialist, who is consulted not only by the populace, but also by the state farm, etc."*[36]

Following the expropriations and abuses that took place based on March 1945 Law of Agrarian Reform, there was an acute housing shortage in the German community. Barred by the colonists from living in the houses that they had previously owned, many families of German descent were forced to seek shelter in school buildings, cultural centers, or abandoned parish houses. Particularly noteworthy cases occurred in the communes of Dumitra, Iad, Lechinţa, Sângeorzul, Nou Sâniacob, and

31) Ibidem, f. 402

32) Ibidem, f. 409

33) Ibidem, f. 404

34) Ibidem, f. 406

35) Ibidem, f. 408

36) ACNSAS, Fond documentar, Dosar nr. 3414, Uniunea Saşilor din Ardeal (1946 – 1949), f. 410

Dorlea – in the region of Cluj. As late as 1949, in Dorlea there were four families comprising roughly fourteen persons each living on the premises of the former German religious school. Although the authorities admonished them to vacate the school, both the locals and the settlers refused to take them in[37].

The Sibiu People's Security Regional Directorate estimated that a conflictual situation persisted between the colonists and the ethnic German population. There were various reasons for this state of affairs, but there were also cases, such the one in Gârbova, where the Provisional Committee had decided to evict and move to other housing all ethnic Germans who shared premises with the colonists, but the latter insisted that the German families stay. The two sides had come to an agreement, whereby the Germans gave the colonists various household goods in exchange for remaining on their former properties. The documents also detail 26 disputes between Saxons and colonists involving housing and/or the apportionment of the harvest, as well as 103 cases of settlers using Germans to work the land without even residing in the locality where they had been given property[38].

In the Deva area, yet also in the communities of Batiz, Reciu and Gârbova, colonists were given significant quantities of rye seeds, but they lacked the necessary agricultural expertise and compromised the harvest. Consequently, the Provisional Committees decided to stop giving settlers the necessary seeds. Furthermore, many colonists abandoned the homes they had received. Thus, the buildings fell into disrepair. German families therefore petitioned the authorities for permission to move back into their former homes, committing themselves to undertake the necessary repairs[39]. The Cluj People's Security Regional Directorate reported in address no. 12/ 28263 of 10 November 1949 tens of specific conflicts between colonists and ethnic Germans[40]. In the Făgăraş area, the situation was likewise tense (Roşca, 2007), as there was a great deal of resistance against the measures imposed by the authorities.

Conclusions

After August 23, 1944, the repressive measures adopted by the Romanian authorities against ethnic Germans were applied without conviction. They were interned in camps or sent away to labor detachments. This lack of zeal annoyed the Soviets, who insisted on harsh actions that included deportations to forced labor in the USSR. In the period from 1945 to 1949, Romania's German community experienced tragedy. Its members were deprived of rights, regarded as enemies, and blamed for the country's catastrophic condition. Thus, they lived in constant fear of the forms and methods by means of which the communist authorities implemented their repressive policies. They were terrorized at the prospect of deportation to the USSR, of being sent away to labor brigades, of having their wealth confiscated – especially in rural areas. The label "Hitlerite" justified the unimaginable cruelties perpetrated on the members of this community, and, for that matter, on the entire Soviet occupied country.

Seeing that they were deprived of the right to work, to education, and to a decent life upon their return after four years of forced labor in the USSR, many ethnic Germans hardened their belief that they had no future in Romania (Ionescu-Gură, 2005). Some of them even asserted that the USSR had at least insured that they had food. People who described the terrible ordeals they were forced to endure came to the attention of the Securitate and, in some cases, were sent to labor camps. Others took the significant risk of trying to flee the country in the hope of reaching Austria or Germany. However, many ethnic Germans chose to stay in Romania, hoping that the situation will improve. The hostility towards the German population diminished in intensity after 1949, at least on the rhetorical level. This new course was dictated by the change in Moscow's discourse and methods. Following the creation of the two German states, the Soviets were trying to gain the sup-

37) Ibidem, f. 409

38) Ibidem, f. 416

39) Ibidem, f. 418

40) Ibidem, f. 421

port of the German population for their plans to reconfigure postbellic Europe. Unlike the mass expulsions of ethnic Germans that occurred in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary towards the end of 1944 and in 1945, in Romania their situation was entirely different. This fact is proven by the large number of ethnic Germans who fled Romania alongside the German Army in 1944 for fear of persecution by Soviet troops, but returned in 1946-1947.

Having come to power by force, the communist regime employed terror and repression in order to gain control over society. Because they were regarded as a threat to the regime, members of ethnic minorities, alongside outstanding personalities and regular people from all social categories, were deprived of rights, put under surveillance, arrested, deported, or killed (Ernu, Rogozanu, Șiulea, Țichindeleanu et al., 2008). The communist regime took radical decisions, targeting Germans for collective punishment as a distinct ethnic group by means of confiscating their wealth. Their opposition to the arbitrary expropriation measures decreed by authorities intensified the virulence of the repression against them. The objective of the communist regime was to eliminate the homesteads of the Saxon peasantry and deprive them of their livelihood, thereby forcing their move to cities in search of work – frequently to entirely different regions of the country. In this way, the unity and solidarity of the German communities from Transylvania and Banat would be destroyed. The Evangelical Church lent strong support to the community, but was unable to stop the devastation of the Transylvanian Saxon rural world by the communist regime.

After 1956, the regime adopted a more tolerant policy towards Romania's national minorities. However, the decline in living standards and the agreements between Bucharest and Bonn prompted the mass emigration of ethnic Germans to the Federal Republic of Germany during the 1970s. The exodus reached another highpoint during the 1990s. The census numbers help form an overall comparative picture. In 1930, 745,421 persons identified themselves as being of German origin; the 1956 census recorded only 384,421 ethnic Germans; in 1992, the statistics mentioned only 111,301 persons of German ethnicity.

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MARTOR

Title: "Everyday Propaganda. Images from the Archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum"

Author: Simina Bădică

How to cite this article: Bădică, Simina. 2012. "Everyday Propaganda. Images from the Archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum". *Martor* 17: 116-156.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

Martor is indexed by EBSCO and CEEOL.

Everyday Propaganda.
Images from the Archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum

a selection by Simina Bădică

Simina Bădică is the managing editor of Martor and a researcher and curator for the Romanian Peasant Museum

The illustration for this issue dedicated to everyday life in the Socialist Republic of Romania comes from the archive of the Romanian Peasant Museum. The black-and-white images spread throughout the texts of the volume are amateur photographs taken mainly in the 1970s and 1980s by two photographers, Vlad Columbeanu and Cornel Radu. They kindly agreed to donate parts of their photographic collection to the museum. Their recording of the usually grim reality of everyday life in Socialist Romania stands in contrast to the colorful, enthusiastic, and joyful images created for the propaganda industry.

Unlike the everyday life, amateur images gathered purposefully for the museum's visual archive, the propaganda posters you are about to see in this visual insert were for a long time an unwanted inheritance in the basement of the Peasant Museum.

The Romanian Peasant Museum was re-established in 1990, on February 5th, barely one month after the demise of the Romanian Communist regime. The building assigned to it was built at the beginning of the 20th century as an ethnographic museum. The Museum of National Art was removed from the building in 1952, and the V. I. Lenin - I. V. Stalin Museum (which was later renamed the Marx-Engels-Lenin Museum) installed in its place. In 1958, another propaganda museum was brought to the left wing of the building, namely the History Museum of the Romanian Workers' Party. The two museums functioned simultaneously until 1966, when the Marx-Engels-Lenin Museum was silently dissolved into the new History Museum of the Communist Party, of the Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania (informally called the Party Museum), which occupied the building until 1990.

The transformation of the Party Museum into the innovative Peasant Museum (awarded with European Museum of the Year Award in 1997) is the story of a struggle symptomatic of the wider efforts in Romanian society to overcome the Socialist past. However, unlike the majority of Romanian institutions, the Peasant Museum had the courage and inspiration to transform this unwanted heritage into a permanent exhibition (The Plague, inaugurated 1997). This exhibition is to this day the only permanent display in a Bucharest museum dedicated to the exploration of Romanian Communist heritage.

The propaganda posters in this visual insert are not showcased in the permanent display. They were photographed and processed in collaboration with Atelierul de Grafică.

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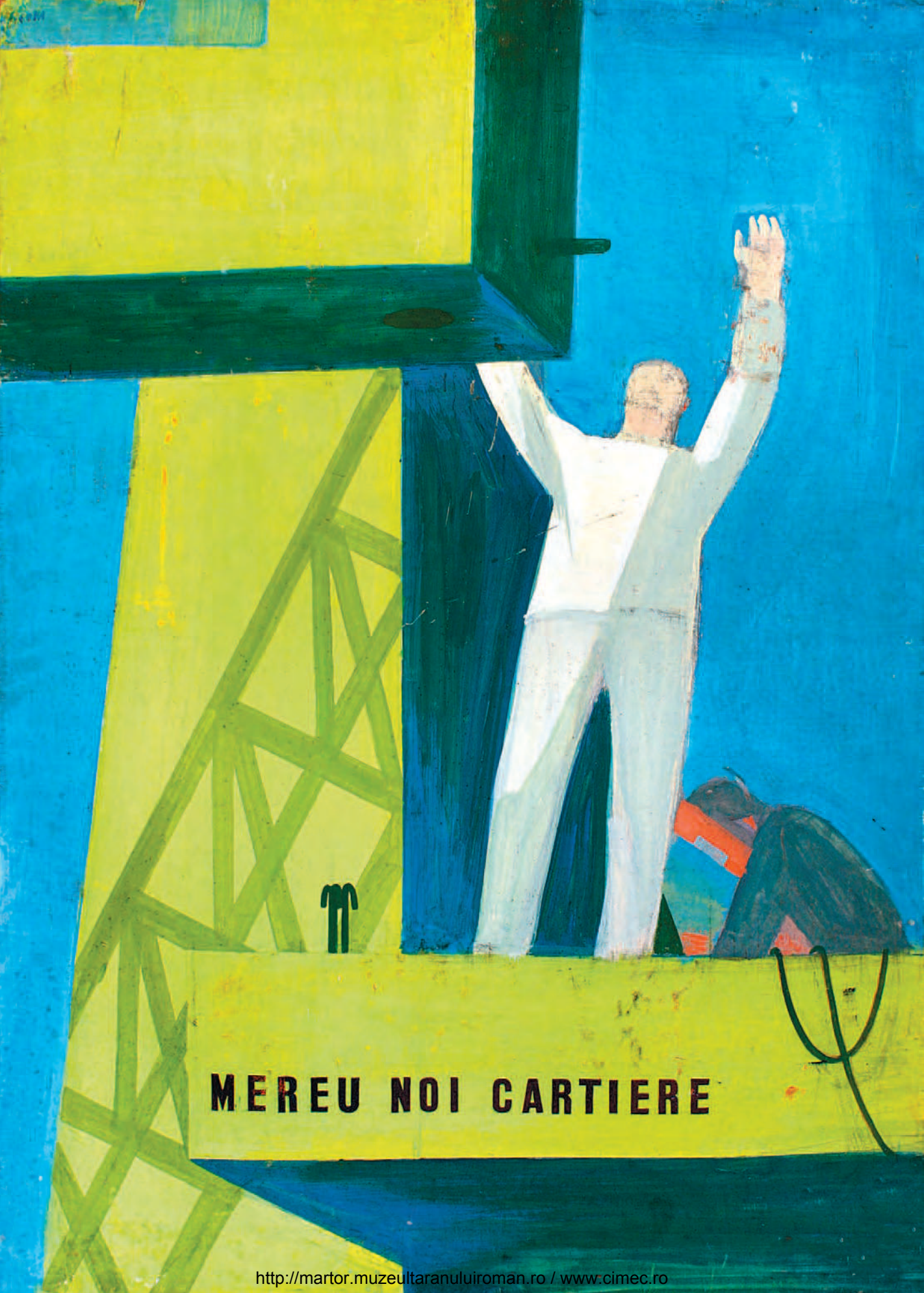

TRĂIASCĂ

23 AUGUST

ZIUA ELIBERĂRII ROMÂNIEI DE SUB JUGUL FASCIST

TRĂIASCĂ

A XX-A

ANIVERSARE A ELIBERĂRII PATRIEI

CONGRESUL PARTIDULUI COMUNIST ROMÂN

4 AUG 1969

VIITORUL=MUNCA+PACE

INAINTE PENTRU FE

1921

RICIREA POPORULUI

1972 CONFERINȚA NAȚIONALĂ A PARTIDULUI COMUNIST ROMÂN

TRĂIASCĂ AL X-LEA CONGRES
AL PARTIDULUI COMUNIST ROMÂN

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ZIUA SOLIDARITĂȚII INTERNAȚIONALE A OAMENILOR MUNCII

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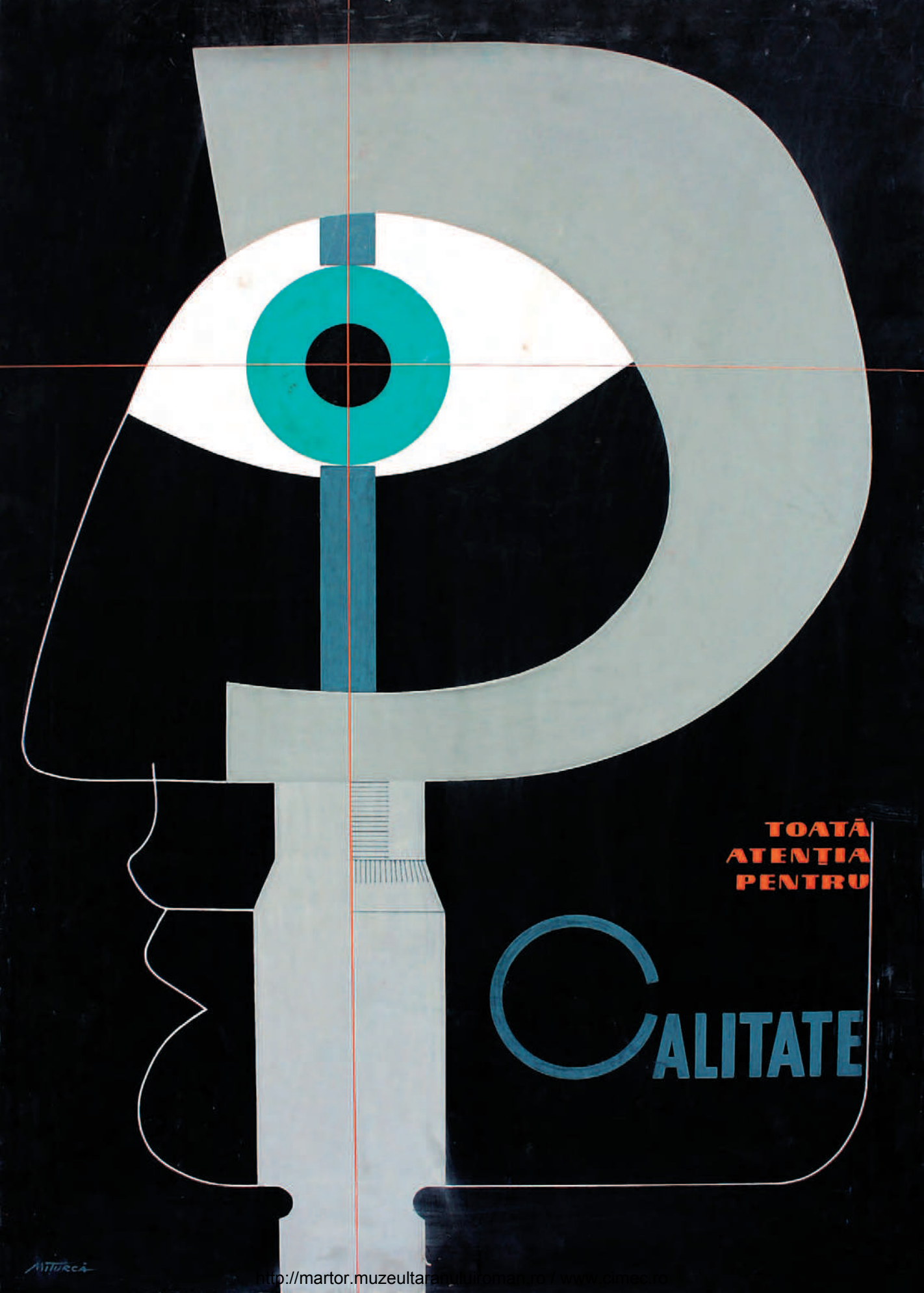

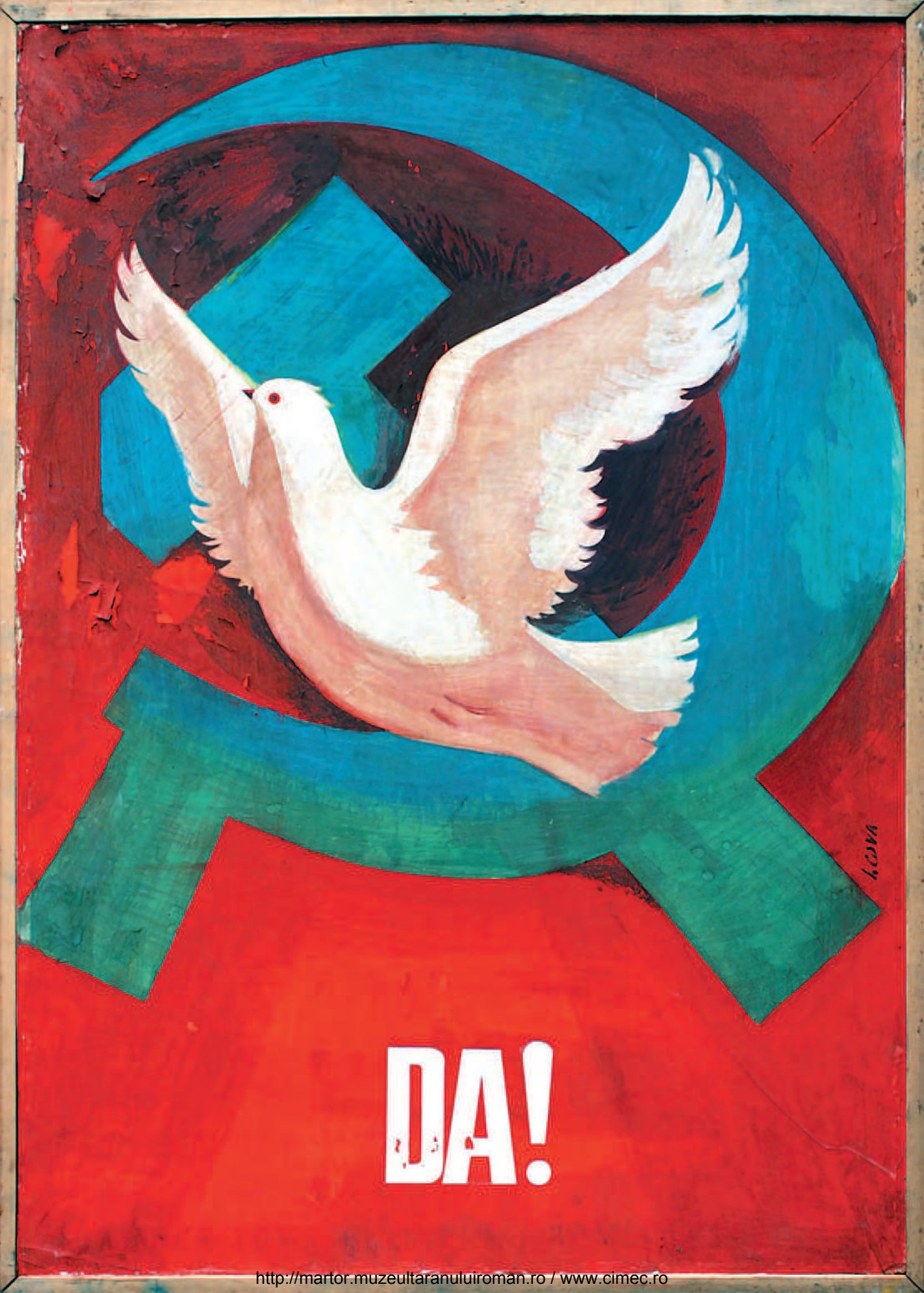

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I. Cova

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MARTOR

Title: "The Restructuring of Free Time in 1980s Communist Romania. The Case of the 23rd August Works"

Author: Adriana Speteanu

How to cite this article: Speteanu, Adriana. 2012. "The Restructuring of Free Time in 1980s Communist Romania. The Case of the 23rd August Works". *Martor* 17: 157-172.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

Martor is indexed by EBSCO and CEEOL.

The Restructuring of Free Time in 1980s Communist Romania. The Case of the 23rd August Works

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ABSTRACT

This paper represents an analysis of the nature, contextualization, and implications of the phenomenon of time restructuring in the industrial sector in late communist Romania in the context of difficult economic circumstances. These temporal modifications resulted from a channeling of resources and labor into various industrial activities that served to alter workers' control over their own free time.

KEYWORDS

Time, industry, factory, working class, communism.

The structure of time in communist countries can be viewed within the parameters of a structural modification imposed by the ideologized targeting of resources and the workforce. The vision of advancement towards an egalitarian societal form led to a process of temporal remodeling in relation to a priori conclusions resulting from the problematic interpretation of segments of Marxist theory dealing with the theory of value.

The socio-economic particularities of communist systems gave rise to an intermediary category of time, beyond the ordinary patterns, such as work time and free time. This restructuring forms part of an ideologization of time. The first great temporal modifications in human society occurred during the Industrial Revolutions, when chronological space became subordinated to the mechanisms of production. It was at this point, around the 1790s (Thompson, 1967: 69), when time became structured at an individual level for the purpose of improving the structural efficiency of production activities through the connection established between temporal units and a factory-dependent "modus operandi". Beyond the compulsory nature of a salary-based workday, this new form of what I would call a "time-bound consciousness" was established through the distribution of personal clocks and watches. This technologically determined modification of the worker's relationship to time served to stabilize a pre-existent category of time, whose delimitations had been flexible up to that point.

The attempt, in countries governed by Stalinist bureaucracies, to transpose radical socio-economic restructuring into reality, resulted in a different process in terms of temporal criteria. Given that social and spatial policies were subordinated to production imperatives (Sampson, 1984: 54), this represents a contextualization of a new category of time in which human relationships are neither individual nor collective, but alienating, for they presuppose the forced rallying to the utopian projects of the decision makers. We should note that this process, although apparently connected to a series of ideologically based decisions, is more related to certain economic processes, such as industrialization or the more recent corporatization of capitalism, all of which lead to various degrees of social alienation (Gupta, 2002: 70).

Any form of cultural analysis of time implies the social system in its entirety. In com-

munism, time for the first time becomes a form of capital in the possession of the state, a bureaucracy posing as a revolutionary actor that governs it, manipulates it, and restructures it. In 1980s Romania, far from being accelerated, time gradually slowed down, was flattened, immobilized and rendered non-linear (Verdery, 2003: 63). The non-linearity of time was anchored to a set of newly introduced milestones: the dates of official anniversaries, the commemorative days in the communist calendar, parades, and state sponsored holidays that emphasized, through their predictability, the pre-modern circularity of time[1]. Accordingly, the forms of official discourse had a recurrent nature that suggested the same conclusion. On account of the cyclical nature of time, the present as manifested in the official discourse was a corporeal present with a spatial dimension.

Is there a dynamics in the compression of time? How did people relate to individual and collective time? What did the communist conception of time presuppose? The theoretical approach to time as a social construct must state the political context in which time is experienced and the policy by which it is created. From a cultural point of view, the social construct of time must be understood as a political process (Verdery, 2003: 71). Therefore, political and economic constraints in the later stages of the Ceaușescu regime led to new typologies of control.

Norman Manea proposes the term "statization" of time, in the sense of a planned seizure by the state of the private time belonging to the ordinary citizens (Manea, in Verdery, 2003: 72). Similarly Verdery defines the effort invested in the partitioning of time as a struggle between the authorities and the general population. The communist party dominated, through various means, a large part of the time people would normally have allocated to their personal use. Through parades, official visits to production facilities, Party meetings, daily work schedules, and decrees, the state apparatus imposed its control over time itself, obliging people to become involved in certain activities. The feeling of time monopolization is experienced differently in

1) For communist holidays, see S. I. Ducaru, "Religia cincinală – funcțiile sărbătorilor comuniste", in L. Boia (ed.), Miturile comunismului românesc, Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 1995.

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the rural environment in comparison with the urban environment. It can be said that the tendency of the decision makers to manipulate the segmentation of time itself was unavoidable, given that the artificial economic crisis occurred in a political space still dominated by the Stalinist paradigm.

In light of these considerations, it is necessary to perform an analysis of the various meanings attributed to the time spent in a large factory. This can be achieved by extrapolating on the representations of memories formed within the private sphere by different socio-professional categories, both in urban and rural environments (i.e. commuting workers). This type of analysis is made possible by an understanding of the relationship between the different hierarchies of bureaucracy and the informal structures of society. The nature of this relationship could vary from being parasitic to being a complementary manifestation of socio-economic interaction (Sampson, 1991: 18). Conclusions can also be drawn by ascertaining the extent to which the possible consequences of the arrhythmicity characteristic of late Romanian communism were, in fact, the maintaining of the people in a state of continuous imbalance, the undermining of a rational societal order, and the establishment of uncertainty as an existential reality. In the context of an integrated functionality of socio-economic elements, temporality, as well as space, can be transformed from a natural element into a political project (Verdery, 2003: 63), for they are susceptible to manipulation through decisions emanating from the political sphere.

In understanding the self as an ideological construct that institutionally binds individuals to social environments through normative restrictions and distinguishing them from the surrounding world, Verdery observes that "temporality can be deeply implicated in definitions and redefinitions of the self, as selves become defined or redefined in part through temporal patterns that mark them as persons of a particular kind" (Verdery, 2003: 93).

The reconfiguration of time in the context of ideologically motivated economic decisions led to the erosion of sociability and had a negative impact in terms of relations between those in positions of socio-economic proximity. In the case of Romania, this change can be considered to be the result of ideological assumptions, but when taking into account the same alienating effects of present economic realities, such as corporate capitalism (Perelman, 2005: 21), this ideologized world view appears only an ad-stratum to what were pre-existent objective economic realities.

The economic condition of Romania in the 1980s determined, through the contracting of large loans and the attempt to repay them within an unreasonably short period, a modification of cognitive patterns developed in relation to a fluctuating typology of time. The logic of production of late communism contradicted the paradigm of a relationship to time as it is allocated in the West based on criteria determined by the absorption of products resulting from economic processes.

The crisis, which resulted from the erroneous long term calculations of economic planners, reversed the way people related to the daily rhythm of life. The concentration of economic activity on the production sectors of heavy industry led to a form of restructuring of the socio-economic system and a changing of temporal reference points. Anthropologists like Gerald Creed emphasize the constant tensions and contradictions resulting from the integration of the political, economic, and social structures into a bureaucratic network of coordination. The paradoxical nature of this determinism lies in the fact that the attempt to stabilize certain sectors and to find solutions was intrinsically related to the condition of other areas of society (Creed, 1995: 531). Romania's economy in the 1980s can be placed in the heterodox category of economies centered on the production of goods that were non-assimilable on the internal market. This directing of goods towards export with the purpose of eliminating the foreign debt led to the birth of a shortage economy and an alteration of the

internal consumer market.

Under normal circumstances, the level of production of consumer goods determines the nature, structure, and contextualization of leisure time. This relational typology, implied by the prioritizing of certain economic activities, led to a restructuring of the notion of free time. The practical impossibility of reducing the salaries of workers imposed the need to develop artificial means of avoiding a rise in the inflation rate. This was generally achieved through increases applied to durable consumer goods. It is important to note these issues, given that free time also signifies a monetary exchange implying the acquisition of symbolic or utilitarian products.

The general policy of concentrating production by following the logic of extensive growth determined an increase in the number of hours spent at the workplace and led to the paradoxical situation of state monopolization imposed on a type of time that would otherwise be used for other types of economic activity and monetary exchange. This negation of the potentiality of another type of productive behavior, albeit a consumerist one, in the sense of the production and assimilation of consumer goods, was made possible by the emphasis placed on the production of industrial goods destined for export as a means to generate hard currency. Thus, the workers were faced with an intrusive adjustment to their free time, in which they could have been engaged in certain types of absorptive economic activity, based on the results of their own labor.

A decree issued in 1981 emphasized the need for discipline in the state enterprises, and industrial units were managed in strict fashion. Incentives for the boosting of production were increased, salaries at all professional institutions were linked strictly to output, and the minimum wage was discarded, a measure that stood in contradiction to the principles of socialism. Although levels of pay were determined by production efficiency, this decision did not affect individual salaries, which remained on a similar level, because state enterprises were obliged to accept a global agreement that set wages based on a general factory contract. This meant that more highly productive workers, who exceeded the required output, did not obtain higher salaries than their peers, but contributed to a general rise in salaries in their section or factory. Absenteeism was also penalized through pay. As a result of these measures, worker productivity was supposed to rise by 10% between 1982 and 1983 (Durandin, 1998: 334). According to the Official State Bulletin of 1983, while on paper a worker could have an unlimited income, in reality his earnings were limited to the provisions stipulated in the individual contract and depended on the fulfilling of the "Target" itself by the factory where he worked. The "stabilizing" component of the contract presupposed provisions through which workers had their employment guaranteed for five years, but the socio-economic conditioning was pre-existent to the employment itself. By restricting the choice available to young people, the authorities channeled them in the direction of production activities, be this secondary education mixed with labor or obligatory postings to a factory after completion of vocational school (Kornai, 1992: 216). During the "trial" period, which lasted for one or two months, a new employee received only half of a Category I salary, the other half being stored in the bank by the factory management and withdrawn only if the worker did not leave the factory during this period. This latter situation, although rare, would have meant a loss of this amount of money in terms of cumulated salaries, but also the years of experience as recorded on the work permit (Shafir, 1985: 121).

The discursive function in the process of reconstructing social and individual space is essential as a justification mechanism of the assumed economic choices. Chris Hann rejects the idea of an analysis in terms of "discourse" for communist Europe, believing that the relationship between practice and discourse can be applied to any society, without negating the specific characteristics of communist discourse and ideology (Hann, 1994).

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Also important is the way in which such a discourse can affect social practice. Even if there are common characteristics in communist ideology, there are also differences in its implementation among Eastern European countries. Hann suggests that a model of separating the practices of different communist parties can be undermined by closely inspecting the activities of ordinary citizens against communist regimes. The difficulty of establishing a generic model of late communism also relates to the problems of correlating factors, such as the economic conditions in Hungary and those in Romania during the 1980s.

Time in late communist Romania was of a paradoxical nature: while apparently static at a macro level, it was unpredictable on an individual level in the sense that it modified the plans and perceptions of ordinary people. For the Party, time was conceptualized as flowing to an undefined chronological moment, as the grand project of achieving, through socio-economic engineering, the ideal of a communist reality gradually became more and more distant. Pavel Câmpeanu describes the sentiment of temporal accumulation and transformation: "Becoming was replaced by unending repetition. Emptied of substance, history itself becomes atemporal. The perpetual movement is replaced by perpetual immobility. [...] History [...] loses its lasting quality." (Câmpeanu, in Verdery, 2003: 99).

The rhythm of the "new man" was not characterized by religious holidays, but by secular holidays, like the National Day of 23rd August, New Year's Eve, 1st May, Woman's Day, and Mother's Day, to which were added the anniversaries of Ceaușescu, other communist leaders, war heroes, and various rulers from Romania's past.

Recurrent parades, a typical means of communist symbolic justification, represent a structuring factor of time in the proximity of the sphere of industrial production. By replacing the time dedicated to labor, the parades represented an attempt to emphasize the worker's necessary solidarity with a system whose aim was the achievement of communism, but they also underlined the presupposed intrinsic connection between the working class and the Party. The employees of the 23rd August Works participated in parades

in impressive numbers. The staging of a parade was organized in advance, usually a month before the event, by the Party secretaries and by those of the U.T.C. At factory level, some 7,000-8,000 people participated, the lists being drawn up by the Party secretaries and by the president of the union. Those exempted from participating in these events were pregnant women or elderly or sick workers. In theory, in one form or another, everyone was obliged to participate. Those selected were taken from their various production sectors to specially designated places for rehearsals. Usually, these were also Party members. The clothing permitted did not include flamboyant colors: men, for example, had to wear dark trousers and white shirts. The most important parades were those held to mark 23rd August and 1st May, alongside those held in stadiums for the commemoration of historical events. The meeting point was Piața Aviatorilor, where the official viewing platform was set up. The parades began with members of the army and the Patriotic Guards, who were followed by the main sequences composed of workers and sportsmen. Although they began at 9 am, the participants had to assemble much earlier, at 5 or 6 in the morning, at various different meeting points, either at the factory or along the parade route. As a propaganda symbol of solidarity and unity, the parades were broadcast on national television, almost in their entirety, until around 1-1:30 pm. After the parade, the rest of the day was free, but participants had to return to work the following day.

As the factory was closely monitored by Ceaușescu's party apparatus, the parade had to proceed without incident. The spectacle created during the parades implied an appropriate direction, the script being developed by professional choreographers, supervised by the Party secretary.

In the following section of this article, by using a selection of excerpts from a series of interviews, conducted in the period 2004-2010 with former employees of the 23rd August Works, I will establish the structure of personal relationships to the temporal modifications inherent to the abstracted socio-economic directions of the 1980s in the case of former employees of the factory.

The stringent control of time within the parameters of the bureaucratic organization of activities, with their planning and purpose, had a series of consequences in the event of non-participation in these parades, predominantly on a professional level. This might affect the frequency of promotion exams or the position on the waiting list for apartments – a worker's absence met with the negative consequence of losing the points he had accumulated. A. R., a locksmith, describes the constraints imposed by the absurd logic of "voluntaristic" participation:

It was a constraint. If there was a promotion coming up, it wouldn't be given before 23rd August. The economist would come to you and say: "You have to be there; otherwise you can kiss your promotion goodbye!" Or anyone who needed a place to stay, even if he or she worked on the Oltenița Line. They would blackmail you, give you the thumbs down. Everybody would attend out of obligation.

The repercussions are also described by S. S. and N. B. The former talks of the consequences on a professional level, while the latter describes the way in which a refusal to respect the rules of participation could contribute to stigmatization by fellow workers. There was a fear that failure to participate could affect group cohesion and placed a certain section of employees in a delicate situation in relation to the administrative and Party authorities:

They would keep an eye on you, you know... They would often give you trouble... if you wanted a promotion, they would say: "Well, you didn't come to the Party meetings or the parades."

Wait till you hear what happened to me there, in the Locomotives section. This guy comes to me, a Gypsy from my neighborhood, who used to be part of one of the work teams, and says: "Hey, B., we're in the same row!" "See you there, then!" But, in the end, I didn't go. He

kept on saying to me, every day for a month: "Hey, you're in row 3!" "Row 3, mister!" But when the day came, I didn't go. Afterwards, I went to work, I was on the night shift; this is how the shift was. [...] I get to my machine, and I see 100 men who'd come for a trade union meeting. It was as if I were on death row. "Where were you? What were you up to? Who were you talking to?"

M. P., a foreman in the factory's Motor department, recalls other types of public gatherings people were forced to attend against their will. In spite of the glorifying images of a society advancing towards a utopian ideal, the practical result of the presumed "proletarian solidarity" manifested itself in the effect of alienation, which could be seen as paradoxical in a societal model supposedly opposed to the values of competition inherent to capitalism. It was a time of waiting, an intermediary space, neither work nor leisure related:

Then, there were the parades held in stadiums, where you had to wear certain clothes, a white shirt if it was too hot, a coat and trousers in dark colors, and a tie…. It wasn't to everyone's liking. Sometimes you would get sleepy, tired, all sweaty, but you had to stand still. We'd often wait a whole hour for Ceaușescu to come; we weren't allowed to move, drink water, or go to the toilet; some would literally pee on themselves.

From the account given by the engineer G. A., conflicts of interest resulted from the non-participation in parades. Consequently, despite the Party's intention to strengthen social solidarity through public gatherings at which the achievements of the 23rd August Works were presented as constituent elements of the process of moving forward towards communism, the practical result was exactly the opposite: the emergence of a conflictual situation between those who participated in the events and those who were absent from them:

For instance, people would sometimes refuse to go, but then the others would come and say: "He didn't go, how come I have to go even though I'm older and he gets away with it?

You should remember that when handing out bonuses!"

Commuting workers were also not exempt from participating in the parades. Here the mill operator N. B. again describes, with a certain amount of humor, his only participation in such an event, which didn't even span on the entirety of the parade:

When the Patriotic Guards were established in '68, they put me on the list for the parade. "Hey, B., you have to come, too, there's no one else left!" So I went. When I got to Dinamo, at the Calea Floreasca crossroads, we were standing together in a wedge-shaped formation, when Tram 24 pulled up, and I said: "What if I get into the tram!?" I went to the front of the tram,

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and who do you think I see at the back? The very boss who'd called me. "Well, son, where do you think you're going?" "You should be ashamed of yourself?! You call me "from Bulgaria", and then you go home yourself?" "Shut the hell up! Let's go home!" After that I didn't go anymore, that was the first and the last time.

If parades represent one of the systemic niches for the ideologized monopolization of time, especially in the sphere of those involved in industrial activities, then queues for foodstuffs and other household products can be viewed as a determining factor for the spending of even the small quantity of free time that still remained. This situation came about as a result of the inefficiency of the aforementioned economic activities. Consequently, it

can be said that Romanians found themselves in the paradoxical situation of being obliged to glorify, by means of a parade that took place in the first half of the day, the economic achievements of the system – only later, during the same day, to be obliged to spend a number of hours standing in queues, something which in fact contradicted the presumptions made during the parade itself.

Queues for food products in big cities were among the most frequently published images in the Western press during the 1980s in respect of the situation in Romania. According to Pavel Câmpeanu, queues functioned as agents of accumulation, reducing the opportunities when money could be spent. They also consolidated the power of the administrative centre, reducing the number of occasions in which money could be spent, and served wider central accumulation processes through an unequal exchange, which was their practical content (Câmpeanu, 1994). Another reason was to avoid growth in the inflation rate. The artificial economy resulted in this shortage of consumer products that unavoidably led to long queues. A large section of the urban population, with the notable exception of Party or Securitate members, was obliged to allocate a significant part of its free time to standing in queues. The procurement of food imposed on many Romanians the necessity of developing a system of relations through which overpriced products that were non-existent or scarce on the market could be obtained. Because the economic system was unable to cope with demand, and because of corruption, the Securitate tacitly accepted this illicit commerce, which eventually became a parallel economy. After the compulsory introduction of ration cards in the early 1980s, access to food products[2], in the sense of staple foods like bread, milk, sugar, oil, and eggs, became a constant problem for Romanians. G. A., an engineer, describes this state of precariousness and the reality of the creation of underground trade that ensured access to certain products, simultaneously creating a new category of time dedicated to the search for and establishing of relations:

... It was difficult, we had no food, we had to stand in the line, as you know, or read; the stores were almost empty. But the strange thing is everybody had a full fridge. [...] Everybody had a fridge full of everything that could be found. There was an underground supply system. If you had a "connection" at a restaurant – a waiter, a cook – they would sell you pork for 100 lei per kg, when the official price was 38 lei.

The paradox of the command economy centered on exports is that, although the level of remuneration was relatively high relative to general prices, money earned this way could not be spent. Another engineer, N. D., acknowledges that the system of relations offered everything that was needed. In this way, informal relations became a form of social capital, possession of which influenced the structuring of time at an individual level, having the capacity to eliminate the hours lost spent queuing in front of grocery stores:

I can't say I ever went hungry. The paradox was that we had the money, but there was nothing decent to buy; people had to wait in long queues, but they would manage. This was a community in which you could always find people with connections. […] Although the food was scarce, everybody had everything they needed in their fridge, due to these connections. You were able to buy anything if you had a connection.

The importance of connections in terms of access to foodstuffs is also emphasized by E. C., an engineer, and M.P., a foreman:

You came to realize what it meant not to have this kind of connection at a food store or a cafeteria. Even if you had the money, you were likely not to find what you needed unless you had such connections...

People would wait in the line from evening until the next morning, when the store got a delivery of cooking oil. What could you do? Kill each other over a bottle of oil? So, instead of 11 lei you paid 20 lei. This was what you spent your money on, and, God forbid, you had to make a choice. I needed one connection to buy my coffee from, another to buy my meat from…

2) See the analysis on the meaning of food and eating habits by S. Vultur, "Daily Life and Constraints in the Communist Romania of the Late 80s. From the semiotics of food to the semiotics of power", www.rememberingcommunism.org.

M.Ş., an engineer, remembers the problems of procuring and preparing food in a context of mono-alimentation:

Problems with the supply; I'm not one to take pride in the fact I used to eat soya salami: I didn't eat it because I liked it. But, sometimes I'd manage to get hold of food through connections; I used to eat a lot of poultry, as it was the main source available, but I had no idea how to cook it differently, so it would look different.

S. D., an electrician, expresses the same general state of powerlessness caused by the large amounts of time spent procuring food. This situation affected the time reserved for other activities, like time spent with the family. In these circumstances, queues became an atypical space of socialization, of conversation, and even of spending time with the children:

We all used to wait in queues a lot, sometimes several queues at a time, and then wait until the next delivery... [...] Even in ...'88-89, we used to switch queues. My daughter grew up carrying the basket from one queue to another.

The memory of never ending queues in which all the family members would stand is also described by the worker L. N.:

Don't mention the queues! I had to wait in them with my kids, sometimes getting something on the run. […] You had to stand in the cold for your ration, to get your ration of sugar or oil, and only from the food store you had been allocated to. Sometimes, the kids would stand in the queue, too…

P. I., an engineer, describes this uncertain rhythm of life in his own words:

You'd be up at 5 in the morning to get your milk at 7; you'd have to stand several hours in line for 1 kg of cheese or chicken legs, wings and necks.

E. C., also an engineer, recalls the feeling that people were reaching the limit of their endurance:

It felt like we were always waiting: how much longer could we take it? There were many restrictions. There was no hope. You would stand in those queues like a fool; I remember I once waited four hours for a box of detergent, four hours in the rain!

Nonetheless, opinions as to the insecurity of life tend to differ from case to case, depending on the occupation of the interviewee. For example, E. P., a worker, believes that standing in queues allowed people to procure enough food to last a long time:

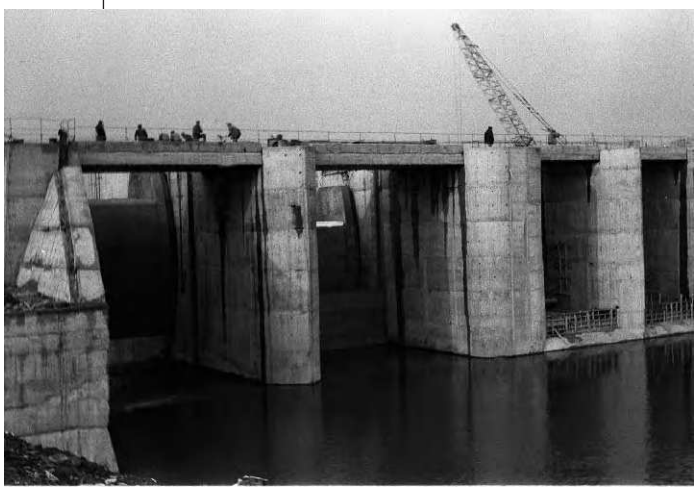
Somehow, we managed to get by, despite all the restrictions... The stores were full, but we had to stand in immense queues… and that's what we did, we would get our supplies for two weeks, a month... We used to put everything in the fridge, and then buy more still, if we could find it...

The systemic inefficiencies of economic planning and the imperative of a high export rate led to the reality of a shortage economy. This became a generalized condition of centrally planned economies during the 1980s, due to the chronic imbalance between supply and demand at the micro and macroeconomic levels (van Brabant, 1990: 161). The 23rd August Works also featured the phenomenon of parallel networks for supplying workers with products such as meat, coffee, and cigarettes. M.P., a foreman, describes the proliferation of this form of commerce, which represented a form of social capital extended to an organizational level:

Do you want to know how we used to get our food? There were these guys at work, at 23rd August, who brought steak. [...]100 lei per kg. They would bring 3,5, or 10 kg, however much you wanted. They would trade anything, coffee, instant coffee and other things; you could buy anything if you had the money. Prices were how they were...

Another means of supply, especially for those from the rural environment, was provided by trips to the villages to procure meat. This presupposed the dedication of a certain amount of time to travelling, on weak infrastructure, and, last but not least, the possession of an automobile and the fuel it required. N.D., an engineer, is conclusive in this matter:

They [the workers] used to go to their relatives in the countryside to slaughter sheep, lambs, pigs, or a calf – in the latter case illegally. So, nobody went hungry, let's be serious! We



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shouldn't complain about it...

The phenomenon of commuting was also a constant feature of life in Ceaușescu's Romania. The unrelenting pace at which industrialization proceeded, through the procurement of a large labor force from the rural environment, was typical of the policies put into practice by the Romanian Communist Party. The lack of housing in Bucharest meant that more than half of the factory workers came to work from the rural environment, mainly via the Oltenița to Bucharest rail connection. A considerable proportion of the population of the villages lying along this route also worked at the 23rd August Works. The asymmetry of labor time, occurring as a consequence of the interaction between intervals of inactivity and periods of intense activity dedicated to meeting the requirements of the "Target", led to feelings of dissatisfaction, especially among workers living outside the capital. Many of these had plots of agricultural land in their villages, the cultivation of which required time and effort.

The large number of commuting workers that had to use buses or trains to reach the factory sometimes faced the problem of a lack of transport, the only alternatives being the bicycle, walking long distances, or, on rare occasions, a car. That being said, possession of a car presupposed access to fuel, which was also rationed. The commuter trains were, in turn, excessively crowded, most of the workers having to travel in a state of physical discomfort. As P. I., an engineer, recalls:

Half our men commuted. They were from the countryside. For instance, almost the entire village of Frumușeanu worked at our factory. There were entire villages of workers, some of them Romanians, some Gypsy.

The 8-hour schedule was longer for those who commuted to get to work. It would take several extra hours for them to complete the journey by train, or by bus and train, depending on whether or not their village had a railway connection. For example, N. B., a mill operator, would get up at 3 in the morning in order to be at work by 7, thus spending four hours on his way to work and another four for the journey back home. He describes the commuting conditions:

... I have been a daily commuter here for 30 years, on foot, through the rain, wind, storms...

The irregularity of commuting times correlated to the degree of discomfort. This condition expanded the spectrum of existential uncertainty:

If the travel schedule was regular, it would take no longer than 45 minutes; but it could take as much as two hours with the Gypsies delaying it...

The irrational industrial decisions of the late Ceaușescu regime created dysfunctions between urban and rural sociability networks that could still be felt even after 1989. Many former commuters were made redundant and obliged by their new circumstances to concentrate solely on agriculture. For example, N. B., after 30 years of commuting to the 23rd August Work, defines himself as a farmer, and not a worker.

Beyond the relationship vis-à-vis ideological conditioning or the rationalization of non-durable goods, another form of perceiving time in 1980s Romania is constituted by the holiday-event-celebration triad, which provides a good viewpoint from which to analyze everyday life. Everyday life overlapped with public holidays and vacations, and represented the opposite of the daily work schedule, defined by routine. We have noted how, during

the 1980s, time was to a large extent confiscated under different forms by the authorities. As Sundays in some instances gradually became working days, the time spent at the factory amounted to a larger temporal entity than that dedicated to free time. While views on this problem vary from one group to another, workers as well as engineers were both confronted with the same chronic lack of time.

Time tends to be invested differently at a socio-professional level. Employees with a higher level of education were inclined to spend their free time reading, listening to music, going to concerts, the cinema, and the theatre, or practicing sports (this was one of the few activities where engineers and workers interacted). Workers also participated in group activities, like walks in the parks, day trips, or going to a bar or to the stadium to watch a football match. Individual activities consisted of holidays spent at seaside or mountain resorts, usually in accommodation provided by the factory through the system of trade union packages.

The factory itself in turn offered the possibility for employees to spend time in groups through activities organized by the Factory Club. This meant evenings of socializing, film screenings, concerts and day trips; however, this controlled environment was not to the liking of the younger employees, who preferred the seaside as of 1st May.

Although the number of destinations was limited, the holidays spent during the communist era are viewed positively by most respondents, given that most of them only rarely got to travel after 1989. The length of holiday was decided at the level of each work team by the foreman. Those with the most seniority enjoyed 30 days of holiday, while new employees got 15 days.

For some types of production activity, Sunday also became a work day, being compensated for by a free day during the week. The control exercised by the Party over time is exemplified by the fact that Romanians had the longest working week in Europe. Personal time was increasingly controlled and limited in terms of the number of free days. An unstable work schedule affected the rhythm of everyday life, which was already affected by the lack of electricity, foodstuffs, and heating. As noted, those who worked on Sundays got a free day during the week in return. Despite the regulatory eight-hour work schedule of three shifts (7 am-3 pm, 3 pm-11 pm, 11 pm-7 am), the administrative staff, the foremen and the team leaders usually worked overtime. However, not all employees of the plant went to work on Sundays. For example, as N. B. and B. R., both workers, the former also a commuter, recall:

I didn't go to work on Sundays that often. [...] Working on Sundays was a mess...

This was the logic of the Party. I used to tell them at work: "Leave me the hell alone, why should I come to work on a Sunday?!" "You shouldn't just sit around doing nothing, you should always be busy with something or you'll lose your mind!"

The possibility of skipping a working Sunday was denied to E. C., an engineer and a member of the Design department. In her position, missing a Sunday at work was out of the question, unlike for other workers:

The hell you could refuse! Excuse me! The production departments, the workers maybe, but here we always came to work on Sundays. You couldn't afford to say no...

P. I., an engineer, describes in a similar manner the factory work schedule on a Sunday:

I'm telling you, on Sundays we actually worked with a diminished workforce. And we, the management, came to work at least two Sundays a month.

Some positive connotations of time are determined by its association with the youth of the persons interviewed. It was an archetypal time, whose value, albeit within certain limitations, produces the consciousness of a positive and unrepeatable condition of existence. M. Ș., an engineer, explains:

The good thing was that we were younger, sort of carefree, we had our group of friends who had no children or family obligations yet; some

of them were still single, and we used to go to the mountains.

Holidays at the seaside and in the mountains constitute a pleasant memory for all socio-professional categories represented in the 23rd August Works. Every year, through its Youth and Trade Union organizations, the factory offered travel and recuperation packages for approximately 10,000 employees at holiday resorts throughout the country. Besides packages for the seaside or the mountains, the factory also scheduled short trips at the weekend. M. B., an engineer, remembers the vacations at the seaside and how the reality of the economic crisis affected people even within the supposedly protected space of the holiday. For example, the restaurants at the seaside stayed open until only 6 pm because of systemic food shortages:

What we did have and enjoyed were the student camps, which were affordable; then there were the annual vacations on the seaside, which we would always look forward to. We could afford them, we could afford to save money since there was no food; and so you could save money for a whole year to go to the seaside. But once you got there…the restaurants would close at 6 pm. But we still enjoyed the sea, the sand, the water… and that was about it. So, in the end, so much for having fun at the seaside!

C. A., an engineer, describes the atmosphere during days off, accompanied by the disregarding of certain rules by restaurant managers and the necessity of procuring products on one's own:

We used to go to the seaside and it was cool, there were so many people and so much fun that some restaurants would disobey the rules and close later in the evening, at 10 pm, when they had students there. Generally, once the exam session was over, the students would be everywhere: at the seaside, in the mountains, Sinaia or Predeal. You would go for a walk in Sinaia and bump into your fellow students. Students would also go to the seaside on 1st May. They took everything with them – soda, cigarettes…

R. B., a laboratory technician, is one of the employees for whom time spent at the seaside represented a positive chapter. In his capacity as head of the Sports-Tourism factory department, he organized trips for 1st May:

1st May was the best occasion to have fun, everybody had a few days off and went to the seaside. You're too young...[...] For those who were irritated by the "Workers 1st May", where they had to clap their hands… […] this was a unique chance to go to Vox Maris in Costinești, where it was full of students and you had the chance to do lots of things for those times and strike up brief friendships. It was interesting how the railway company wouldn't schedule any extra trains, so we travelled on slow trains, one of top of the other, literally.

The structured distribution of time was in some instances the responsibility of the Party-affiliated bodies, like the Workers' Trade Union. For performances that took place at the factory club the tickets were handed out for free, while for those that took place in the city the tickets were sold for a fee. Tickets for football matches were a great success. As O. R., a locksmith, recalls:

We would also get tickets to see the football team Metalul; so that's where we went. We would meet on Sundays and go there in an organized way. At 11 am, we'd have a wash, get dressed and off we went, accompanied by our foreman.

Football matches provided a way of eliminating occupational hierarchies, these being the moments that brought together distinct professional groups, as, for example, workers and engineers. R. I., a worker, explains:

Take the interdepartmental football championship, for instance. The finals were played with an audience. There was also the Spring Festival, there were shows that culminated with the Final. Of course, it was interesting to see the foreman, the locksmith, the engineer all playing together… People would go; the stadium was full, here at 23rd August.

Tickets for the Opera or the Athenaeum suffered an unpredictable fate, given that the person in charge of handing them out found few willing recipients. I. B., a locksmith, illus-

trates this case:

What need was there for me to go to the Opera? I didn't go because I lacked the rich culture needed to go and listen to an opera or a symphony. Why should I go?

Hence, the factory offered tickets for the theatre, pop music, and folk music. This system was supervised by the Trade Union and by the Communist Youth Union (U.T.C.). N. B., a psychologist, was a beneficiary of such tickets from the share reserved for the factory by the institutions organizing the events:

There were Trade Unions representatives who kept in touch with the theatres and concert venues, and they assigned a number of tickets for the workers from the factory. I often went to the shows with tickets I got from the factory. This lasted until 1990.

Holidays spent at the seaside and in the mountains were usually more accessible to those living in Bucharest. Commuter workers were tied to the rural environment, many choosing to use their holidays to work in the field. Still, in some exceptional cases, they also enjoyed short holidays:

I used to spend my spare time at the C.A.P. [agricultural cooperative]. I didn't go to work on Sunday much. But I used to work the night shift, so I would sleep for four hours and work the other four. I had my vineyard and everything I needed here, but I would take leave in autumn, on 15th September. And where to spend it? Harvesting the beet... [...] The hell I went [on holidays]?! But I did go on a holiday in '81, because I fell sick. I suffered from facial paralysis three times in thirty years and when I got sick in '81, they sent me to Mangalia to recuperate. That's when I saw the sea for the first time in my life...

The Stalinist ideological context determined the attempt to apply supposedly voluntaristic principles. The real purpose was, in fact, the quantitative reduction of paid labor. Voluntary or patriotic work organized at the level of the state enterprise by the Party apparatus, the Trade Union, and the U.T.C. was, likewise, a practice in which employees were obliged to invest a part of their free time. Performed on a Saturday and Sunday, this type of

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work presupposed that people be placed on a list for activities like sweeping, digging, planting trees, cleaning the streets of leaves and removing snow. Each department of the 23rd August Works was assigned a cleaning area. The area in the immediate proximity of the factory, including Titan Park, represented a priority area. These activities were supplemented by the patriotic work performed in the village of Cățelu, where the factory owned livestock farms, vegetable gardens and greenhouses. Another area where the workers of the factory where assigned cleaning activities was the pier on the river Dâmbovița, where, after the working day came to an end, the workers were sent to sweep.

R. I., a worker, and M. P., a foreman, describes the moment they performed "voluntary" work at the inescapable request of the state:

...There were 4, 10, or 15 of us from each department, sweeping every day after work; then we'd go out for a beer, a movie, or play football.

...During the work schedule, they would create groups of 30, 40, or 50 men and say: "18 Decembrie Boulevard, as it's called now, you have to clean away the snow between post X and Y!"

...They used to send us to 30 Decembrie Boulevard to plant roses, sweep the pavements. [...] This kind of patriotic work needed to be done twice a month. But it was done in stages;

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it was impossible to send out an entire section. There'd be 10-20 this Saturday, other 10-20 the next Saturday...

M. P., a foreman, describes the general state of the patriotic work performed towards the end of the 1980s. Voluntarism, as a work practice, lost its meaning in a paradoxical way, becoming imposed by the state itself, and not resulting from personal choice. This type of labor came to be a means of achieving an increasingly stringent control over personal time:

...The plant was in sector 3, and coordinated by the Party secretary over there. Each of them used to work with their people. We would work during working hours or on overtime, but mostly during working hours, because afterwards there was hardly anybody willing to stay on, they would throw away their shovels and leave.

Participation in agricultural activities constitutes another chapter of patriotic labor. Given a shortage in the workforce in the rural areas because of the commuting of the population from the villages to the cities, the Party was obliged to resort to the unpaid labor of high school pupils, university students, and factory employees. At a factory level, a contract was drawn up with a State Agricultural Enterprise (I.A.S.) through which younger employees in particular were obliged to work in the fields. During the autumn, the factory sent workers to harvest corn, potatoes, sugar beet, and grapes. These moments could constitute temporary spaces of socialization. For E. C., an engineer, this agricultural work represented a means of relating to a period of her own youth:

Then there was the work in the field, but, as I told you, I didn't take it personally or as an affront, it's also part of my youth.

Recreation outside of holidays was also an important factor in the process of analyzing the temporal structure of late Romanian communism. The means of recreation seemed insufficient and excessively politicized for the engineer, I. M.. What in the beginning were positive events were hijacked in the 1980s by Ceaușescu's propaganda. I. M. describes the state of the youth of the day, whose freedoms he saw as being limited:

It was sad because young people, like we

were back then, couldn't express themselves. Apart from the national festival, "Cântarea României", which was mostly political, there was nothing else. Parties where young people would dance would only last one or two hours, the TV broadcast was only for two hours, as the people were supposed to get their rest, to be at work the next day, as they [Party leaders] hoped. Lots of politics...

Again I.M. talks about a categorical separation between the different ways of spending free time in the case of educated people and that of workers. For a society that claimed to be heading towards the elimination of social class distinctions, these were still visible in the structuring of free time by occupational categories:

In fact, there were two ways of living life in that period. There were those who had some kind of education, and there were the great masses of the workers. For them parties meant going to some bars on the outskirts of Bucharest or going for picnics. The others would struggle to get tickets. [...] They screened "The Reenactment" for one week only. It was a miracle I saw it. Then there were Dan Pița's and Veroiu's films...

In terms of the religious calendar, the unofficial policy of the party was to replace it with the economic and ideological calendar. The continuous appropriation of time in 1980s Romania removed people from the usual rhythm of the religious holidays. The holy days in the religious calendar were hijacked by different types of activities. M. B., an engineer, relates how work was used as a means to create artificial calendar priorities:

If you think about it, we didn't even have any spare time. We had no 1st or 2nd January, no Easter, no Christmas. It was all continuous work. They would deliver the materials right before the holidays on purpose. I can also tell you that the hijacking of religious holidays was extreme. We would crack Easter eggs under the table.

The linearity of time was affected in 1980s Romania by hectic production processes, unrealistic targets, and bureaucratic control. The incongruence of time in late Romanian communism led to a transformation of behavioral patterns. We can speak of a modified and atomized form of the human being, in the context of a focus on production, statization, and competition dressed up as solidarity. Behavior was reduced to a cyclical series of choices in the context of daily life, directed by the political-administrative bureaucratic apparatus for the purpose of ensuring production efficiency and eliminating political dissent. Ideological constraints and the abstract ideal of creating the "new man" manifested themselves through the appropriation of private time and the attempt to eliminate religious holidays. Similarly, tactics were devised in order to engender an arrhythmic typology in the case of socialization within the Party, through the organization of meetings at irregular intervals.

The transformation of time into a form of social capital paradoxically contributed to the strengthening of class based differences, a result that contradicted the plans and promises of the Party to gradually equalize socio-economic conditions. Illustrative of this are the conditions endured by commuters, who were obliged to modify their biological clocks, the plight of those deprived access to informal networks of food supply and, last but not least, the workers forced to participate in parades, unpaid labor, and various official events.

From this discussion about temporal modifications in late communist Romania, we can note that in capitalist societies time was also subjected to different phases of modification, beginning with the late 18th century, in the context of the gradual economic processes involved in profit targeted calculations of output and consumption. In communist Romania, this utilitarian component of industrialized societies disappeared in the 1980s due to flawed economic decisions, thus producing the phenomenon of a greater monopolization of time.

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MARTOR

Title: "The World through the TV Screen. Everyday Life under Communism on the Western Romanian Border"

Author: Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković

How to cite this article: Sorescu-Marinković, Annemarie. 2012. "The World through the TV Screen. Everyday Life under Communism on the Western Romanian Border". *Martor* 17: 173-188.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

The World through the TV Screen. Everyday Life under Communism on the Western Romanian Border[1]

1) This paper originates from a project of the Institute for Balkan Studies, Language, Folklore, Migrations in the Balkans (no. 178010), funded by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia.

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the narratives of various people from Timişoara (a city in the Banat region of Romania) who were regular and heavy watchers of Yugoslav TV during the 1980s. These narratives represent fragments of oral history that picturesquely illustrate everyday life in the western border region of communist Romania, a region strongly influenced by the proximity of Yugoslavia. Together with a strong critical attitude towards the Romanian communist regime, all the respondents share a positive view of communist Yugoslavia and its system of values; in other words, they are Yugonostalgic.

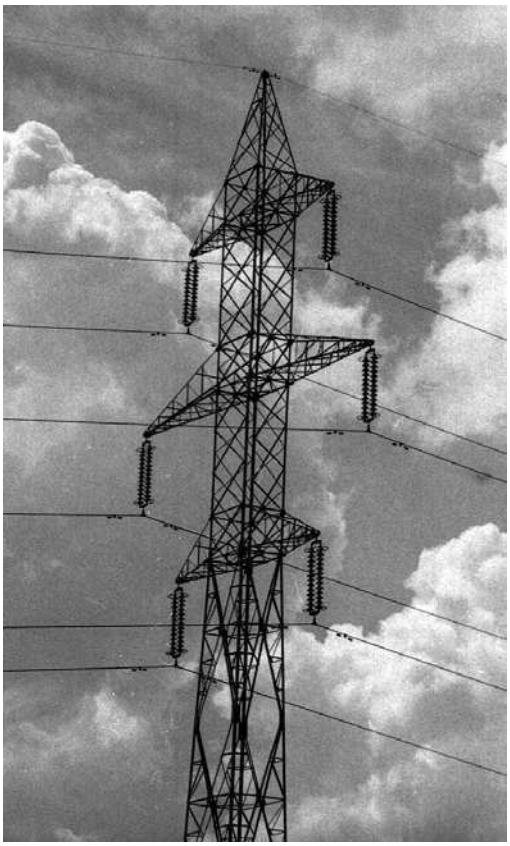
KEYWORDS

Serbian-Romanian border, communism, everyday life, television, Yugonostalgia

Introduction

The present study is based on an analysis of several interviews with Romanian citizens from Timişoara (a city in the Banat region of the country) initially conducted with the aim of investigating the circumstances in which they were able to learn the Serbian language, predominantly by watching Yugoslav TV during the 1980s. Beside their significance in terms of clarifying the context of foreign language learning, the narratives of these people contain fragments of oral history that offer a picturesque view of everyday life on the western border of communist Romania, a region which in the 1980s was strongly influenced by the proximity of the neighbouring communist, albeit far more permissive, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

When the respondents speak of learning Serbian by watching Yugoslav TV during childhood and adolescence, their critical attitude towards the Romanian communist regime is counterbalanced by an admiration for communist Yugoslavia and its system of values, an attitude more recently given the name of Yugonostalgia. Yugonostalgia can be broadly defined as "nostalgia for the fantasies associated with a country, the SFRY, which existed from 1945 to 1991", where "no necessary relationship exists between the temporally and spatially fragmented memories of a Yugoslav past and the present desires, expressed by and through Yugonostalgic representations of this past" (Lindstron 2006: 233). Yugonostalgia is known to be strongest among ex-Yugoslav emigrants and Diaspora communities, many of whom left the ex-Yugoslav region after the break-up of the federation at the beginning of the 1990s (see Marković 2009: 205). Paradoxically, many Banat Romanians are also Yugonostalgic, in a positive sense: they are nostalgically and emotionally attached to the liberal and permissive communist Yugoslav regime, to the idealised desirable aspects of the former Yugoslavia, before its collapse, among which counted economic security, multiculturalism and a more rewarding way of life. As the initial research was designed to look only at a specific period and at the circumstances of the people's language learning, the respondents' narratives can only offer fragments of oral history that are clearly delimited in time and do not tackle the Yugoslav civil wars of the 1990s.



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The interviews conducted in Timişoara acted as a form of therapeutic confession that helped the respondents come to terms with their collective past, with a large swathe of history, by reconsidering and analysing their own smaller pasts. All were eager to talk about the period in question, and our conversations were frequently marked by the respondents' laughter and exclamations, indicating a high level of implication and the active process of remembering. The Others (the Yugoslavs) became part of an identity autoscopy, and the respondents' relations with them were looked upon as enriching exercises in which diversity proved an important real and symbolic resource. Needless to say memory is subjective and fragmentary, and our respondents presented only one of many possible versions of the past, providing a dynamic insight into the period in question and "activating" it.

The nature of everyday life during the final years of Romanian communism

The installation of the communist regime in Romania, on March 1945, when the first Communist Government came to power, undoubtedly marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the country, an era characterised both by political, economic and social transformation at a national level and, in particular, profound changes experienced on an individual level. In the second half of the 20th century, communism became "the overwhelming fact of life for Romanians" (Hitchins 1992: 1080), serving, for over forty years, as the ideological cover for a political and economic system that turned Romania away from Western Europe and towards the East (idem). In 1965, Nicolae Ceaușescu became the head of the Communist Party; two years later he became head of state, assuming the newly-established role of President of the Socialist Republic of Romania in 1974. The rapid economic growth at the beginning of the 1970s, fuelled by foreign loans, gave way to austerity and political repression that ultimately led to the fall of the communist government in December 1989[2].

Towards the end of Ceaușescu's reign the situation had become catastrophic in Romania: "A widespread atmosphere of fin-de-règne was imbued with hopelessness, corruption and universal fear. Discontent was rampant, but in general, however, it seemed that Ceaușescu managed to keep strict control over the country, nipping in the bud any form of dissent and resistance. His cult was unique in its absurdity and pompousness" (Tismăneanu 1999: 159). Since assuming power in 1965, Ceaușescu sought to personalise his power, while leadership of the party and government became a family affair.

Everyday life was marked by fear, intimidation, suspicion that the person next to you might be an informer and extremely violent political repression. As in most communist states, propaganda was viewed as the largest

2) As the history of the Romanian communist regime is not our main concern here, the interested reader will find more on this subject in Cioroianu 2005, Deletant 1997, Tismăneanu 2005, Verdery 1991.

and most effective device for spreading the communist ideology. During the final decades of the communist regime it became a natural part of the everyday environment in which people lived; simultaneously serving as a means of regime legitimation and of mass education, the propaganda apparatus resembled the military in its organisation (Kligman 2000: 108-112).

For ordinary people living in communist Romania, a large part of everyday life consisted in searching and queuing for basic material goods, including food. Stories of people spending hours in long queues to buy meat and potatoes abound, as do tales of the chronic shortages of personal hygiene and health products. Young people spent their days in school, where they were routinely given lessons peppered with Marxist-Leninist ideology and praise for the Soviet Union.

Few people could afford cars, so most relied on crowded public transport or went to school or work on foot. A common sight to which the people awoke each morning and retired each evening was that of a small apartment in a massive prefabricated, high-rise complex, where sometimes more than one family shared two or three small rooms. People systematically stole at work and developed strategies for how to supply their households – a clear reflection of the generalised poverty and shortage of consumer goods.[3]

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Romanian state television

The poverty of consumer goods and entertainment commonly available to Western Europeans was compounded by a drastic reduction in the duration of television broadcasts. As a result of the "energy saving programme" imposed by Ceaușescu between 1985 and 1989, the Romanian television schedule was cut back to a broadcast of around two hours, between 8 and 10 pm, most of which was used for official and state-censored programming. The programmes were meant to reinforce communist party views and were mainly dedicated to the cults of personality surrounding Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena.

In addition to this severe restriction, radio and TV, together with films, theatre and other forms of artistic creation, also had to follow the guidelines presented in the July Theses[4], the aim being that their educational and ideological role should prevail over their aesthetic value, thus rendering them more accessible to the masses, especially the workers and peasants, and stemming the influx of "decadent" western products:

"I only wish to emphasise one thing: we must put an end to the importing of decadent films from abroad, films that introduce the retrograde bourgeois concept. The list of films to be imported must be approved in advance by the relevant Party and State bodies. At the

3) For more on everyday life in communist Romania, see Budeancă and Olteanu 2010, Dragomir 2008, Neculau 2004.

4) The July Theses is the name by which Nicolae Ceaușescu's speech to the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) on July 6th 1971 is known. Its full title was Proposals of Measures for the Improvement of the Political-Ideological Activity and the Marxist-Leninist Education of Party Members and all Working People. The Theses contained 17 "proposals" for discussion by the Central Committee of the PCR in the autumn of 1971. The speech marked the beginning of a "mini cultural revolution" (Verdery 1991: 107) in communist Romania: competence and aesthetics were to be replaced by ideology; the professionals in various fields were to be replaced by agitators; and culture was to become an instrument of political-ideological propaganda (Bozóki 1991: 57). The Theses marked the end of a period of relative cultural "relaxation" and the beginning of severe restrictions and totalitarian measures.

same time, we must take steps to ensure our own film industry begins producing better films. It is necessary that all screenplays be approved by the Party and State bodies. (...) In the end it is our people, the working classes and the peasantry, who commission the work of art, so playwrights and producers must produce films that correspond to the objectives of our communist education. A film is an educational tool. We must put an end to the liberalist, petit-bourgeois anarchist ideas existing in this field" (July Theses 2001: 42).

After the fall of the totalitarian regime, copious memoirs of everyday life in communism were published, many tackling the poverty of TV broadcasts at the end of the 1980s. As Paul Cernat, for example, recalls: "I would watch the entire TV broadcast, even the most stupid of agricultural programmes, everything interested me. In Ploieşti, at my grandparents' house, we would sit together in the old way and watch the entire TV broadcast" (Cernat et al 2004: 25). Cernat goes on to describe the "pleasure, born of curiosity, with which I would watch the burials of important communist state presidents on the TV" (idem), when there was nothing else to watch. Discussing socialist Romania, Ioan Stanomir, on the other hand, contends that the Ceauşescu era was the era of television, an era in which the camera lens was omnipresent: smiling and displays of enthusiasm were compulsory features of reports meant to depict pages from the book of "the New Life"; the Party and its beloved leader were the shining faces the television screen brought into each and every household (Cernat et al 2008: 261).

As a legitimate reaction to the restriction of the broadcasting schedule and the ubiquitous communist propaganda, people increasingly began to seek alternatives that would fulfil their need for information and entertainment. As the television stations of neighbouring states were broadcast using a strong signal (especially in the border regions, though also elsewhere), watching Bulgarian, Hungarian and Yugoslav television became a means of escaping the seclusion, isolation and self-sufficiency imposed by Ceauşescu's policy. Moreover, it became a way of breaking down the imaginary iron curtain separating communist Romania from the West and even other, more permissive communist states of the region. But of all the aforementioned national broadcasters, Yugoslav television was by far the most liberal and had the most diverse and interesting programmes. In addition, it was broadcast using a very strong signal that covered the entire Banat, the highest regions of Transylvania as well as parts of Muntenia and Oltenia, where it overlapped with Bulgarian television[5].

5) The broadcasts of Yugoslav television were also watched intensely in the period in question in the neighbouring countries of Bulgaria and Albania, but to date there have been no studies of this phenomenon.

The Banat region and its privileged position

The Banat province enjoyed a special position during the communist era on account of its proximity to Central Europe, access to the media of both Hungary and Yugoslavia, economic contacts with the Yugoslavs and a rich tradition of multiculturalism and multiethnicity. Its privileged position, both geographically and culturally speaking, manifested itself, even under communism, through an acceptance of pluralism and a critical attitude towards authoritarianism. The Romanian researcher Liviu Chelcea, in attempting to explain the redefinition of Banat Romanian relations with other ethnic groups, cites the economic crisis and shortage of consumer goods during the 1970s and 1980s as one of the reasons behind this development (Chelcea 1999). He goes on to describe how it was beneficial for Romanians to nurture closer ties with Germans, for example, because the latter had access to goods that were for all intents and purposes non-existent in communist Romania. Furthermore, the existence of shortage led to a redefinition of ethnic relations not only with the German population, but also with the Hungarians and Serbs in the region: "Since the 1960s on, the neighbouring Hungary and Serbia had much more liberal and consumer oriented policies, compared with heavy industrialisation path of Romania. The

local Diasporas, but also the population from the border regions of the two countries was also helpful in the circulation of goods and images from the West" (idem). Victor Neumann also observes how the contact between the Germans, Hungarians and Serbs in Banat and their co-ethnics in Germany, Hungary and Serbia, respectively, helped maintain the flow of information between these countries and Romania. During the economic crisis, "the proximity of the former Yugoslavia and Hungary constituted an opening for diversity. Until 1989, the world could be watched through TV channels broadcast from Budapest, Belgrade and Novi Sad" (Neumann 2000: 122).

The communist regime in Yugoslavia

In 1946, a communist government was established in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia[6]. The six constituent socialist republics that made up the country were Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia and Serbia, as well as the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo. In 1963, when Josip Broz Tito was named president for life, the republic was renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). After Tito's death in 1980, the absolute arbiter, the Presidency came to power. The Presidency, consisting of the representatives of all six republics and the two autonomous provinces, rotated leadership every year so as to avoid any ethnic/national domination. However, ethnic tensions began to grow in Yugoslavia and a rise in nationalism in all the republics was observed: Slovenia and Croatia made demands for looser ties within the Federation, the Albanian majority in Kosovo asked for the status of a republic, while Serbia sought absolute authority over Yugoslavia. Wars broke out when the new regimes tried to replace Yugoslav civilian and military forces with secessionist forces. Under the pressure of enormous financial obligations, an old-fashioned economic and political structure, as well as a radicalisation of inter-ethnic/national relations, Yugoslavia fell apart in 1991. That same year, Slovenia and Croatia became the first republics to declare independence from Yugoslavia, being followed a short time later by Macedonia, in 1992, by Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro in 2006, and Kosovo in 2008[7].

Communist Yugoslavia, which lasted from 1946 to 1991, was in many respects a model of how to build a communist, multinational state. The country's communist period was essentially characterised, beside the absolute authority of the Communist Party, especially President Tito and his subordinate inner circle, by the many social, political and economic reforms ("self-management") that were intended to make the country functional and keep the people satisfied without questioning the ruling communist dogma. After breaking from Stalin's USSR, Yugoslavia became a "ratified country" to both opposing blocs and a desirable buffer zone. Unprecedentedly, it also became involved in international affairs, especially through the non-alignment movement. More than any other East European country, Yugoslavia was open to the influence of the West. Starting with the 1970s, contact with the West was relatively easy. A common desire for a better standard of living, a trend toward rising expectations and the difficulty of finding employment and housing drove more than one million Yugoslav workers abroad in the late 1970s, primarily to the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Austria and Sweden. Remittances to relatives back home were huge[8]. After the economic slowdown in Western Europe, in an attempt to cushion the impact of returnees the Yugoslav government expanded the economy and created new jobs, encouraging small businesses and private enterprise to meet these goals. By the end of Tito's reign Yugoslavia had developed out of a rigid centralism to a state of a growing federalism and confederalism that sought to alleviate interethnic tensions and keep the country in a tolerably functional state, while standards of living and social security reached levels unheard of

6) For the wider Balkan historical context, see Jelavich 1983.

7) More on the violent break-up of Yugoslavia and the region's wider struggles with post-communist transition in Lampe 2006.

8) For a highly readable introduction to the history of the Balkans after the Second World War, with a special emphasis on Yugoslavia's communist regime, see Crampton 2002.

in any other communist country in the region.

9) Parallels can be drawn with the memories of watching Bulgarian television among people living in the south of Romania, but these memories are significantly fainter, as the quality of Bulgarian programmes did not compare to those of Yugoslav television (Cernat et al. 2004: 7, 127).

The literary corpus on the Yugoslav influence in Banat

The last twenty years in Romania has witnessed the blooming of an entire literary corpus (articles, interviews, essays, short stories, novels, etc.) on everyday life under communism by authors living in Banat, where the people's memories of watching Yugoslav television ("the Serbs", as it used to be called) and contact with the Yugoslav neighbours are among the most vivid[9]. As Robert Şerban, a writer, journalist and TV presenter, born in Turnu Severin and today living in Timişoara, recalled in an interview:

10) A similar phenomenon is worth mentioning here: in the 1960s, shortly after the introduction of the radio, the Vlachs of north-eastern Serbia began listening to Romanian radio broadcasts, which they only partially understood owing to the difference between their version of Romanian and the standard Romanian language used in the broadcasts (for more on the differences between the Vlach dialect and the Romanian standard language, see Sorescu-Marinković 2012b).

"My entire adolescence was influenced by the contact with our neighbours across the Danube, with our 'cousins', as we used to call each other. There was a Serbian market in Turnu Severin, where the Serbs would turn up with Pepsi, jeans, coffee and many other delicacies – unimaginable things during the final years of communism.

But this was not as important as Serbian television, where I got the chance to watch big films, shows and music concerts... I learnt Serbian because, watching them all day long, you were bound to learn it, sooner or later." (Şerban 2009)

He reinforces the fact that Serbian culture was very liberal, with the result that people from this region matured more rapidly, culturally speaking, than those living in other parts of Romania, where all you could watch on television were the two hours of communist propaganda.

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Radu Pavel Gheo, a novelist, essayist, editor and translator, born in Oraviţa and today also living in Timişoara, remembers spending his childhood, adolescence and the beginning of adulthood in a border town that was closer to Novi Sad, Belgrade and Sarajevo than Bucharest. In time he grew fonder of Yugoslavia than his own country, as it represented a "more beautiful world":

"Before 1989, we tried to make our own choices in a world ruled by Romanian communism, which blocked almost every possibility of choice. The Party was one, the leader – one; sugar and oil – only of one kind; clothes – all the same; music – ever more monotonous and stupid. So we, those of us who could, headed for a world that was not very accessible in reality, but was more beautiful, and we turned our backs on the grey and unattractive world we lived in. In time, as more and more people did this, a sort of transition world was created in the area around the border with Yugoslavia, a mass of people who were living in Romania but whose feelings tended towards Yugoslavia, who admired the Yugoslavs and wanted to be like them. Yugoslavia offered us what we lacked in Romania. It was the most tangible model and the closest to the West. [...] Back then, at the beginning of the 1980s, that's how I saw Yugoslavia. By imitating, we assimilated. In growing up alongside them, we started transferring ourselves mentally to the other side" (Gheo 2006: 122).

Many of the Romanians who write about life under communism on the border with Yugoslavia claim to have learnt Serbian by watching Yugoslav TV[10]. The same claim can be heard in everyday conversations with people from Banat, who frequently greet people from ex-Yugoslavia by saying Dobar dan! Kako ste? ("Good afternoon! How are you?") or sing loudly the old songs of Bajaga or Bjelo Dugme

at Serbian new year's eve parties.

Our research

Despite its scale and importance, this phenomenon – Serbian language learning by Banat Romanians – has to date not been studied from a linguistic point of view. This led us to conduct research to determine whether and to what extent the acquisition of Serbian by Romanian speakers in Banat during the communist regime occurred through exposure to the broadcasts of Yugoslav television. This research was conducted in 2010, in Timişoara, with a sample of ten participants (eight men and two women) aged between 32 and 42, which means that, at the end of the target period (1980-1989), they were between 11 and 21 years old. All the participants were born and grew up in Timişoara, with one exception – someone born in Turnu Severin who now lives in Timişoara; none had had any formal lessons in Serbian. Some were selected from among our circle of friends and acquaintances or by snowball sampling. Our respondents are all part of an affective community, to borrow Halbwachs' term, which experienced everyday life in the communist Banat and today has a common perspective on that period.

To assess the participants' language skills, we employed: 1) a semi-structured narrative interview in Romanian about the period when they began watching Yugoslav TV, about how they were able to understand and learn the language, and about other contact with the Serbian language, both before, during and after the period in question; 2) a language test comprising a multiple choice test, the translation of words from Romanian to Serbian and vice versa, the translation of two short texts, from Romanian to Serbian and vice versa, and a reading task; and 3) an open discussion in Serbian with a few of the more proficient speakers. The results of this research were published in two studies (Sorescu-Marinković 2011, 2012a) and showed that, despite a twenty-year gap between exposure to the Serbian language and the carrying out of the research, many respondents still possessed a very high level of communication skills in Serbian. This contradicted our initial hypothesis insofar as it showed that intensive exposure to Serbian-language TV broadcasts over a long period of time resulted in the acquisition of a relatively extensive vocabulary supplemented by acquisitions of grammar[11].

The present study is based on the narratives of our respondents in respect of the social context in which they acquired the Serbian language, narratives for which no place was found in our previous studies but which nonetheless represent invaluable fragments of oral history. These narratives reveal the unique perspective of our respondents on the final years of communism and the experiences that shaped their everyday lives. It is important to note that in the 1980s, when our interlocutors were heavily engaged in watching Yugoslav television programmes, they were actually in their teenage years, so when they talk about that period, they are in fact talking about the process of their growing up. We should also mention that all our respondents were highly educated and eager to talk about the period in question, something which facilitated our research greatly[12]. All instantly understood the purpose of our work; they hailed it as an important and much needed initiative, and even came up with innovative suggestions (see Sorescu-Marinković 2011: 26-27).

As already known, the most controversial and painful memories to emerge in the process of reassessing the communist past are those of survivors of political oppression (Kaneva 2006), the so-called survivor narratives. As for the communist period in Banat, the most distressing narratives are probably those relating to the Bărăgan deportations of 1951 (see, for example, Vultur 1997, Stevin 2002, Spijavca 2004) and the deportations of the thousands of frontierişti ("border people"), people who tried illegally to cross the border with Yugoslavia or Hungary or the relatives of those executed (Steiner and Magheţi 2009, Ar-

11) Of course we should not overlook the natural tendency of the people to learn languages in Timişoara and the fact that multilingualism is still visible even today among many of the city's inhabitants (Neumann 2008:160).

12) Cf. Sorescu-Marinković 2007 for a detailed analysis of the obstacles and problems encountered in the field while interviewing persons from traditional rural communities.

manca 2011). However, for many people in Central and Eastern Europe, life under communism was simply their "normal" way of life, even if it was no less packed with human emotion and struggles than life under any other totalitarian system (Kaneva 2006). The narratives of our respondents are of this latter kind: mundane, ordinary life narratives about the experiences that formed the fabric of their everyday lives, with a special emphasis on the way in which they perceived the "free world" across the border, as seen through the TV screen.

13) To protect the identity of the interlocutors we have used only their initials.

The analysis of the transcribed interviews revealed a few discursive themes around which the narratives of our respondents are structured. In what follows we will present the structures and topics specific to the testimonies of our interlocutors, who place emphasis on the unique character of their experience in communist Romania on the western border, the closest point to the West, to the free world, and talk in highly appreciative terms about Yugoslavia.

Watching television

At our request, at the beginning of our conversations the respondents spoke about their watching of Yugoslav television, as they claimed this was how they learnt Serbian. They practically "grew up" with Yugoslav TV, on which they watched everything: starting with cartoons and music shows, they progressed to sports, documentaries, news, educational programmes, and all variety of films. Consequently, the respondents were exposed to different language registers, from the formal (the news) to the casual and intimate (films, interviews, live broadcasts, etc.). They heard literary language but also dialogue from real life situations, often in dialect, or the simplified language of sports broadcasts.

Many chose to begin the discussion by describing the logistics of television viewing, namely in relation to their television antennas. All of them remembered with joy and excitement the details of the process of how the antennas were manufactured in factories and were installed on the roofs of the buildings or balconies of apartments, and even the names given to the receivers:

Well, you know, these receivers had names. They were called Yagi 1 and Yagi 2, depending on the model. And you could watch Belgrade One, Belgrade Two or Novi Sad, depending on the model. Novi Sad had a programme in Hungarian and a few hours of broadcasting in Romanian. (G. M.)[13]

or:

All our neighbours saved up to buy a joint antenna. Hang on, at a certain moment we also had our own antenna. At a later stage, when I started watching TV more heavily, I even had an antenna installed on my balcony. It wasn't a parabolic antenna, but one with elements. I can't remember the name… It had a lot of bars, like a fishbone. (R. S.)

Mention is made of the fact that anyone who did not know Hungarian or Serbian would still watch Yugoslav TV, as the language was easy to understand and the programmes more interesting. Many respondents also mentioned that even Hungarians from Timișoara would watch Yugoslav TV and learn Serbian.

All our respondents stressed the extraordinary informative nature of watching Yugoslav TV, as the news on the Romanian state television was edited and exclusively focused on praising the deeds of the dictatorial couple. Interestingly, without exception, all talked about vesti ("news"), never translating this expression into Romanian. The same is true of crtani film ("cartoons") and filmski maraton ("movie marathon"). Furthermore, the older participants in the study remember that watching TV was a phenomenon that followed on naturally from listening to Yugoslav radio programmes:

Vesti. There were some dots and a rhythmic tune and tick-tick-tick-tick-tick, that's how vesti would appear. It was really great. There you found out what was really happening. We only had two hours of programmes, between eight

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and ten, then it got even shorter, and the news was only about Ceaușescu. You didn't know a thing about the world if you didn't listen to Free Europe, but our parents wouldn't let us listen back then, because it wasn't allowed. Then, when you grew up, you could listen, but half of it you wouldn't understand. While here… And this is a phenomenon that followed on from listening to the radio, because the first contact we had with the Serbs was the radio, not the television. I'd listened to the radio for years, because all the new music was broadcast there. After 1979 there was nothing in Romania anymore. (G. M.)

The participants also described their favourite programmes. Almost all of them, because of their age, began by watching cartoons on Yugoslav TV, and at a certain point these became an integral part of their daily routine:

Well, yes, there was the classic crtani film at eight a clock, right? [laughs] We grew up with it, with crtani film. Everyone in Timișoara. (G. S.)

and:

Yes, I would always watch crtani film. There was a big TV set and a smaller one. The smaller one would announce the next programme. And when the small TV set appeared and started to dance, we knew crtani would follow. (B. D.)

In 1986, filmski maraton ("movie marathon") started on Belgrade's Third Channel, where different films would be shown, one after the other, from Friday until Sunday. People would spend all night long watching TV and recording movies on video cassettes, with the result that on Saturday the pupils and their parents were unable to keep their eyes open at school and at work:

Then it started, I think it was 1986. There were film nights. Filmski maraton. There I watched my first erotic movies. I can't explain what an extraordinary feeling of emancipation it was! It's impossible to describe what it was like watching movies all night long... That's how I saw the first movies with Robert de Niro. It was incredible. (...) Nobody would sleep anymore, nobody would leave the house. The next day all of us would have swollen eyes. Because we worked and went to school on Saturdays. And filmski maraton would last from Friday to Sunday. And so on Saturday we'd be almost blind. And we'd talk about the films all day long. Because we didn't have anything. The greatest feeling of emancipation was "The Fighter with the Scarf", a Chinese movie with Taikondo. (G. M.)

As to the type of films, American productions were among the favourites. All were subtitled (as opposed to Hungarian television, for example, which used to dub foreign films) and so, making use of their English, people would make connections and learn Serbian words – "lots of them, step by step", as one respondent puts it. As for television series, the respondents recall watching Dynasty, Shogun, 'Allo'Allo! and Mash. Many remember how, as opposed to Romanian films, Yugoslav films featured plenty of erotic scenes, which made them even more appealing:

We knew that in every Serbian film you had at least one erotic scene, while in the Romanian ones – never. (R. S.)

Most of the interlocutors remember watching different sports competitions and championships, both at national and international level, on Yugoslav TV. One respondent even admitted to having taken up basketball "because of the Serbs", after watching their championships and admiring their passion for the sport. The football European Championships or World Cup provided reason for people to come together, first in the homes of those with the best antennas, then those who had colour TVs:

And, yes, football matches were a must. Every second year there was a championship of which our television would only broadcast the semi-finals and finals, while they [the Yugoslavs] would broadcast everything. Every single thing. Every game. So we watched football. We would go to M.'s, let's say, the entire neighbourhood was there, ten to twelve people, and we'd turn on the TV and watch. Just as thirty years ago we were listening to Serbian radio, now we were all watching Serbian TV. We watched the football World Cup and the European Championship. The first World Cup I watched and remember took place in Argentina, in 1978. I watched it at the neighbours'. The World Cup. And after that, in 1982, there was the World Cup in Spain. I didn't miss a single game. I was ten years old in 1978, so I only remember people shouting "Goooaaalll" and two or three sentences. But the Spanish World Cup, that I can describe to you, match by match, play by play, if I have a friend beside me who also saw it. (G. M.)

Many participants even remember the text, music and images from the television commercials they saw, despite not knowing what was being advertised:

They had great commercials. That was the first thing I learned off by heart in Serbian. I remember the commercials for Kiki sweets, Lee Cooper jeans… Lee Cooper commercials had a lot of sex. They were the most attractive. Then there was Eurokrem, Cipiripi and the famous one… for juices. And there was another one I remember, something like krpe za kuću, but I don't know what they were advertising. And there were those with C, with your C markets. And many, many others, back then we didn't even know what they were advertising. (B.D.)

Another vivid recollection among participants in the study is related to the TV guide. They remember how, at the beginning of the 1980s, the Serbian consulate in Timișoara would receive Serbian publications including the Yugoslav TV schedule, and the consulate secretaries would type it out and distribute it around the city. Nobody would leave work on Friday evening before buying the typed TV guide. After 1986, the consulate began receiving more copies of the TV guide, so people could get the real, printed guide:

After that you could buy Serbian newspapers that came with the TV guide. The people at the Serbian consulate would type out the television schedule contained in these publications using a typewriter and then the guide would be distributed around the city. We all knew the Serbian TV guide was issued on Friday, and no one went home from work until they got it. Six or seven secretaries from the consulate would type out the guide and then it spread around the city, and by 5 pm everybody would have it. This happened all the way up to 1986. (G. M.)

As mentioned at the beginning, the subjectivity of memory should not be overlooked. Our respondents talk about events that happened more than 20 years ago, so their recollection of them will be highly subjective, selective and fragmentary. However, all of them talk in appreciative, even eulogistic terms of the Yugoslav TV programmes and can still even visualise parts of the shows, films or commercials they watched, triggering waves of intense, positive emotions. We can thus say that all of the Yugoslav realities our respondents came to know through watching Yugoslav TV and referred to during the interviews have become highly symbolic lieux de mémoire.

Listening to Yugoslav music

The respondents also recall how through various channels they would receive records and tapes of foreign or Yugoslav music from Yugoslavia. One participant in the study admitted that he himself had been a supplier and that he had even set up a lucrative business selling music cassettes from Yugoslavia – on the black market, of course. All the participants talk with great enthusiasm about the chart-topping international music they heard on Yugoslav radio or TV and which they knew by heart. Zdravko Čolić, Oliver Mandić, Lepa Brena, Bjelo Dugme, Riblja Čorba, Bajaga i instruktori and Magazin are among the Yugoslav performers the participants most frequently mentioned and whose lyrics they knew by heart:

We listened to everything, from Zdravko Čolić to Lepa Brena. There were music shows, I recall one where young talents would be discovered, I can't remember the name. There was a guy with a hat, like the Julius Meinl coffee guy... Yes, that's it, Oliver Mandić! Then there were the bands Bjelo Dugme, Riblja Čorba, Bajaga i instruktori and Magazin. The first three played rock music, while Magazin was more rhythmical. And much, much more. (...) And we used to sing along to them, even if we didn't understand all the words. Even now, when I sing Bajaga's songs, I still don't understand half the words. But I still know them off by heart. (G. M.)

Most of the participants can also remember the 1984 concert by Lepa Brena – a Yugoslav music icon – given in Timişoara, to which more than 40,000 tickets were sold. It was a unique event in communist Romania, as no foreign artists could get permission to perform in the country during that period:

And then there was also the Lepa Brena phenomenon. Just imagine, a concert by Lepa Brena in 1984, in the Timişoara stadium, it was simply unimaginable! Not one foreign singer was given permission to sing in Romania during communism. Back then I was 10 years old, and I had just come back from the seaside with my father. When I entered the city there was total chaos. Lepa Brena was giving a concert at the Dan Păltinişanu stadium (B. D.)

The abundance of music they listened to from Yugoslavia was filling the gap that existed in Romania, where, by the end of the 1970s, the state radio and television had almost completely ceased broadcasting foreign music, compounded by a constant decrease in the number of politically desirable Romanian artists:

In Romania there was no music any more. There was only Savoy, that ridiculous guy with a ribbon on his head, and one other, whose name escapes me – my memory's better when it comes to Serbian names. And that says something. Ah, yes, it was Todan, Tudan, Radu Tudan, something like that. A short man with a face like a guinea fowl. Yes, those were the only bands. Oh and Roşu şi Negru, who aren't together anymore. But they (the Yugoslavs) came with their powerful music. What's more, they had all the top foreign songs. That's where I first heard of Depeche Mode, it's where I first listened to the foreign music the entire world was listening to. Radio Cluj stopped broadcasting in 1979-1980... No, 1982. Radio Cluj had the only real music charts in Romania. That's where I heard Prince for the first time. On their last show. (G. M.)

Another respondent talks about how Yugoslav music in fact spread to many regions all over Romania through people studying in Timişoara:

But the most incredible thing is that people from other places would come to study in Timişoara. I failed the entry exam, but I'd still go to the student parties. We'd bring Serbian music and after that the whole country would be dancing to Serbian music. Recently, at a party in Bucharest, some doctors who used to be students in Timişoara, asked me whether I still had any of that music. Because they liked it. (D. P.)

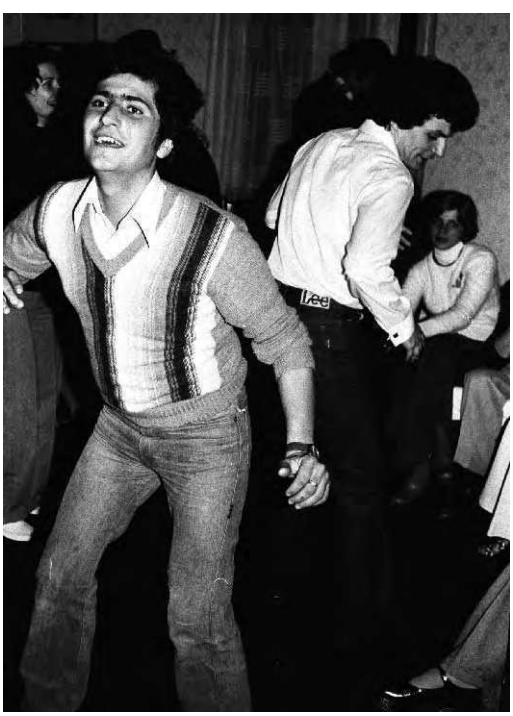
Even today, this generation is still listening to the "golden oldies" of Yugoslav music played at parties in Timişoara. As their memory of listening to Yugoslav music is inherently

connected to the memory of their adolescence, their recollections are mostly positive and centred on the feeling of freedom and superiority foreign music gave them.

Other contexts of language learning

Despite their initial emphasis on the passive reception of oral language through exposure to television, the participants revealed numerous other learning strategies and contexts related to their language acquisition, describing many other forms of interaction that indicate a multitude of situations in which spontaneous language acquisition can occur in general. One such a situation was their interaction with their Serbian neighbours thanks to the existence in Timişoara of a large Serbian community:

When we were children and played football in the street, for example, I had a Serbian neighbour. His father was Serbian and his mother was Hungarian. Can you imagine the combination! (...) Later on, I'd hang out with Serbs much more than with Hungarians, and, I don't know why, but I like Serbian more than Hungarian. Even if I believe it's just as different from Romanian as Hungarian is. (G. S.)



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Another respondent recalled her first boyfriend, a Serb who used to translate song lyrics for her, which she found extremely romantic:

When I was 16-17 years old, I had a boyfriend, my first boyfriend, Vojte, who was Serbian. And that's how I found out about Bajaga, Magazin and many others I can't remember right now. But I remember Vojte would translate the lyrics for me, it was very romantic, as back then there was no Google. Yes, I think I've always loved Serbs. And Vojte was an extraordinary boy. His parents were Serbs and spoke only Serbian in the house. (H. L.)

The interaction at flea markets in Timişoara, where the Serbs used to sell consumer goods highly sought-after in the period of intense economic crisis (e.g. jeans, chocolate, sweets, T-shirts, Vegeta condiment, music cassettes, etc.) was another situation in which Romanians could practice their knowledge of the Serbian language:

Well, it was a moment of joy when you bought a Serbian product. So just the fact that you were wearing something Serbian meant a lot… There were networks of people who would wait for the train from Belgrade to arrive bringing us beer, Cipiripi chocolate, Pez sweets… And on Sundays the Serbs would come to Očko. I'd go with my father to buy jeans, sweets… Saturday was a working day, so on Sundays we'd go to the market. Back then we got along with them just fine. Serbian was a heavily spoken language back then. (B. D.)

This "flea market communication" also continued later, during the embargo against Serbia at the beginning of the 1990s, when Romanians began crossing the border to the neighbouring country to sell various goods. With some of the respondents we also noted a desire to describe these events, too, even if the initial time frame for the research was confined to the 1980s. While their memory of the

years before the Romanian Revolution, when Yugoslavia stood for freedom in their eyes, was still very strong, the same was also true of the period when the Federal Republic disintegrated. The emotions were equally intense, albeit in the former case their emotions were positive and in the latter case their emotions were dominated by feelings sorrow and compassion.

Extending the time frame

Even if the research was initially designed to reveal the context of Serbian language learning during the 1980s, the interviews we conducted were only partially structured and we recorded everything the respondents deemed important to the topic. Thus they also talked about how they went on to discover Yugoslavia after the Romanian Revolution of 1989 and the subsequent opening of the borders. Some of our respondents continued or began actively using Serbian after this date: some worked in the non-governmental sector and started collaborating with Serbian NGOs; others worked for a while in different regions of Serbia and interacted with the local Serbs, etc. Here one of them recalls a time spent working in Russia, where he had ex-Yugoslav workmates:

I also worked in Russia. And when I was there [with the Serbs] I would always speak Serbian. And when you speak Serbian you are a Serb. In the beginning they didn't know we were Romanians. And we got free beer. [laughs] (T. A.)

Another respondent, after graduating from the Medical School in Timişoara, even planned to move to Belgrade to do his specialisation, relying mainly on the Serbian he had acquired by watching Yugoslav TV. Furthermore, when accidentally meeting Serbian speaking people in informal situations, either in Romania or abroad, our respondents gladly tried to reactivate their knowledge of Serbian.

Generalisations and stereotypes

At one point or another during our conversations, the respondents would also address the issue of the Serbian minority in Banat or the Serbs in general (whom they came to know through television or had met in person), which inevitably saw them fall back on generalisations. Thus, one participant recalls his Serbian school mates as follows:

They've always been very good at team sports, they had separate teams and wouldn't mix with us. All of them could play the harmonica, it was a family trait. All of them had to play the harmonica, even the youngest ones. All the boys. (laughs) Yes. And they were, how should I put it, more free, because they knew more, had more, read more, and as a result they could be a little conceited. Violent and good sportsmen. And all our girls were in love with them. (G. M.)

Another respondent transposes the proverbial character of the Mexicans to the Serbs:

They're very passionate, openly expressing their emotions and feelings. It's very clear, somewhat over the top. What they say about the Mexicans is true of the Serbs too: nobody is as sad as a sad Serb, nobody is as happy as a happy Serb, nobody is as evil as an evil Serb... And they're very stubborn. (R. S.)

At our request, other participants in the study reproduced the stereotypes about the Serbs that were widespread in the Banat region:

Well, you know how they say in Banat, there's no such a thing as a green horse or a wise Serb. (T. A.)

In the discourse of all the respondents we noticed that the stereotyped characteristics of the Serbs (stubbornness, determination, violence, the capacity to express their emotions, etc.) were highly appreciated by the Romanians, a people known proverbially as being of a passive nature.

Concluding remarks

In discussing the circumstances of learning Serbian by watching TV, our respondents recall what is, in fact, part of their childhood and adolescence: with great pleasure and emotion all of them describe what can be called a process of maturation. As emotional evaluations are important for cognitive achievements, the stronger the emotional involvement of the participants, the stronger their memories and knowledge. This unique experience of the affective community in question can be credited for the multilingualism and openness of this generation, which was otherwise educated in the spirit of ethnocentrism and unilingualism characteristics of the Ceauşescu regime.

The narratives of our interlocutors masterfully exemplify the active process of remembering (situations, contexts, images, texts, music, etc.) and of making sense of past experiences. The opposition around which the recorded texts are structured is usually that of "we didn't have anything – they had it all", which functions as a real leitmotiv and constitutes grounds for expressing Yugonostalgia.

Last but not least, we must mention that many of the artefacts of Yugoslav culture and everyday life our respondents talk of (see, for example, Eurokrem, Cipiripi, Zdravko Čolić, Lepa Brena, etc.) are also part of the Lexicon of Yugoslav Mythology (Arsenijević et al. 2005), a lexicon created with the aim of amending the rewriting or erasing of Yugoslav history that took place during the course of the 1990s and written in a simultaneously informative and playful style. Thus, the narratives of our respondents can be also read as a nostalgic lexicon of Yugoslav mythology of sorts, with the proviso that the information they contain exclusively represents TV-mediated knowledge of Yugoslav realities.

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MARTOR

Title: "Daily lives in Bucharest 1946–1950"

Author: Sanda Golopenția

How to cite this article: Golopenția, Sanda. 2012. "Daily lives in Bucharest 1946–1950". *Martor* 17: 189-206.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

Daily lives in Bucharest 1946–1950

Sanda Golopenția
Sanda Golopenția is Professor Emerita at Brown University.

ABSTRACT

The text is an excerpt from the author's volume *Viața noastră cea de toate zilele* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2009) narrating memories triggered by reading the Securitate files of Anton Golopenția, surveilled by the political police between 1949 and 1950. Translated in English by Lidia Bradley.

KEYWORDS

Memory, silence, family, Holy Days, Bucharest, Cotroceni.

No. 7, Strada Dr. Lister, Cotroceni

Among the many quarters of Bucharest that I got to know over the years, the first one was green and soothing, a gift.

We lived in Cotroceni, on a street lined with lime trees, across from the Saint Elefterie church, whose greyish and red brick stripes seemed to forebode the colours of a reversed winter coat, dyed wine-red and trimmed at the collar and the sleeves with a sliver of greyish-silvery astrakhan, which my mother would wear day in, day out for all those dark years. In that coat mother looked like a church tower herself, I used to think to myself, while waiting for her to come back from school, on a bench in the tiny rose garden at the corner of our street. In the evening, the round rose bed was watered with punctiliousness by an older man, all skin and bone, about whom I only remember the solemnity with which he held the hose and the meticulous patience with which he would make sure that each of the tall stems ending in a rosy-yellow flower would drink its share. The garden hose has stayed in my memory ever since like a prized possession, inaccessible, till I bought a simple one, the first, here in Providence, far away. The new acquisition and its meaning for my evenings was grafted onto the remembrance of the roses rendered happy in times past by a kind-hearted stranger.

Less showy and rather sagging, the roses in the park were still there when, many years later, one morning in autumn, with my sick mother barely standing next to me, we waited for a taxi that refused stubbornly to come and bring her to the hospital where she would die a couple of months later.

From the lime trees on Strada Lister, which smelled like a huge tea-pot every spring, my brother and I would pick "our" share with dignity.

Sanda Golopenția at the beginning of the 1950s

Anton Golopenția in 1949/1950, before resigning from the Central Institute of Statistics

The male and female blossoms, some orange and mat, others fair and transparent, would be spread out to dry on newspapers, which rendered our tiny living space even tighter. The high point of our contribution to transfiguring our dinners was when we would delicately stuff the dried-out blossoms into small sachets made of a light green cloth, sewn expressly for tea or bread crumbs. Then we would pull the string, green as well, but of a darker shade, and we would make a bow. The light, scented sachet would be placed on a shelf in the pantry. Four to five bags of these homemade sachets would hold us through the winter, we would not have had space for more anyway.

A yogurt peddler went up and down the street each morning. He advertised his wares by shouting. I would run down the three storeys of the building at the back of the courtyard, from which I dreamt every night that I would jump down with deft agility directly onto the asphalt. I would cross the narrow space, running, and come onto the street around "the front building." Yogurt was sold in small blue porcelain pots capped with aluminium foil; I took them from the packed pushcart and ran home with the cool prey in my hands, while the peddler intoned with conviction "yoguuuurt … fresh yogúrt", lengthening the syllables as he disappeared towards Strada Dr. Clunet. It seemed to me that one of these pots should become part of my emigrant's dowry; now, after all these years, I have it close to me, here in Providence, Rhode Island. On it the word "Miorița" stands out in fine handwriting on the pale blue background, the colour of the old houses of Transylvania; I put spring flowers in it, or wild ones, and I feel closer to the murmur of a good Bucharest.

In the wild garden behind the Saint Elefterie church, shepherds would start arriving towards Easter with lambs to sell. For a while there was tumult and wailing in the street. Then all of a sudden it grew quiet again, and our interest would change direction, attracted by the triangular space beside the newspaper kiosk on the Strada St. Elefterie, where tin pans were being mended, minced meat rolls were grilled and sold, and where, sometimes, we could buy layered ice cream.

It was the time of food ration cards. I bought daily three or four slices of clay-like bread, which the baker behind the St. Elefterie Church, a former university professor, weighed gawkily on the scales. From time to time one could find butter at the grocery, sometimes ham, bologna sausage, krakauer, and at the market near Strada Costache Negri, my grandmother would even buy a chicken when we had become fed up with the smelly old mutton from the butcher's.

In "the garden with the statue" between Bulevardul Ardealului and the Dâmbovița quay, where I had once discovered dandelions, we would play the statue game walking, guilt-ridden, on the regularly mown grass, up to the flower beds in the centre.

We lived at number 7, Strada Dr. Lister, in the back building, on the third floor, to the right. Between the building in the front, identical with our own, and ours, two rectangles — with small, wild roses, blood red, raspberry red, cherry red, coral, pink or wine red—

framed both our main door and the back door of the other building. To the left of both buildings, the small wagon that carried the garbage collected at the back of the yard moved on narrow rails up to the street, sliding under the cherry tree in the neighbours' garden, from which we were separated by a high wooden fence. Towards the street, a thick concrete wall two-feet high, topped with thick iron bars looking like the back of a chair, would oftentimes host, also close to the cherry tree, a tall man with blue eyes, and long, white hair; his clean clothes had long ago lost their colour, growing white, like him. He would linger there for hours, serene and silent, and people would set by his side food, some old piece of clothing, or, rarely, money. When this happened, his face cleared a bit, he would bend his head in a dignified sign of gratitude, and the day seemed brighter.

To the right, a low wire fence did not quite manage to separate us from the neighbouring courtyard in which the champion Julieta Namian would hit a tired tennis ball against a green wall, all day long. In the back right-hand corner of the courtyard, the moist shade of a mulberry tree, reaching towards us from the huge garden of nameless neighbours in Strada Costache Negri, would entice braver children, who climbed up and down it incessantly, in ways that are still unimaginable to me. When I grew silkworms, the leaves of the mulberry tree filled my father's office for a time, and our apartment got to know the discreet noise of their rhythmic crunching.

Our apartment consisted of two rooms and a hallway. The largest room was the bedroom in which my mother, father, my brother and myself slept. It also housed my mother's books. The smaller room was my father's study, with his bookshelves and a narrow bed covered with a soldier's blanket, on which, for years, slept my grandmother, who sought refuge in Bucharest after her house in Bozovici had been bombed and, later, sold. Before she came, that bed had served for my father's younger brother, Bubi. Several years after my father's death, when we had grown up, my grandmother moved to live with Bubi and his wife Maria, who had young children.

The bedroom was separated from the hall by a large glass door, covered, like the glass door of the office, with curtains hung from metal rods. I have just one memory of that large glass door being open, for Christmas. A tall Christmas tree stood right between the bedroom and the hallway, from the kitchen came the scent of roasted sweet chestnuts, and, for a moment, bliss alighted on our lives.

The hallway was pierced by doors – towards the two rooms, towards the entrance, towards another small hall by which we accessed the kitchen and the bathroom, towards the narrow, long balcony on which we lay in the sun listening to the sizzling of hot oil and the din of pots and pans put to good use in the kitchens of the front building.

Girlfriends

There were no girls of my age in our apartment building: my name was not called out by children, nor by my mother or grandmother. When I was not at home, I visited my friends in the neighbourhood. One of them lived on Strada Lister, just after the cobbler's at No. 12, and I would go there to play on her swing—I liked to work the swing faster and higher back and forth, back and forth, until I grew dizzy. Another friend, whose second name was Nichifor, was the daughter of one of the powerful men of the moment. She lived in a cream-coloured villa before the pink house on the corner to Strada Dr. Pasteur, both of us would climb into the attic, to taste from the dark grapes hung to dry out on a string. Her parents did not like me. There was Tamara Zambilovici, also on Strada Lister, up towards Gaghel's villa. Gaghel used to own a chain of bakeries. I think it was at Tamara's, or at a friend of hers that I climbed on a ladder into one of the sour cherry trees behind the house. Carmencita Lepădatu lived not far from school, near the art historian Oprescu's house.

Ketty (Alexandra) Nicolau, a strong chess player already, lived somewhat farther away, on Strada Iatropol as I remember. She had all sorts of shells, brought back from the seaside by herself, her brother Claude and her sister Monica. In their house a French chef did the cooking, whose milk rice was unsurpassed, Ketty was the only one in our class who managed to dance the Cossack dance (kasachok); she was my soul mate.

Mademoiselle Economidis

With the Stamatin daughters at Dr. Lister 1, with Dănuț and myself, and others whom I do not remember, our parents had organized a French class and they all paid Mlle Economidis to teach us twice a week. The classes took place at the Stamatins'; we would not have had enough space for them in our home. There, around Christmas, I ate fondants for the first time. I had not known that something so delicious existed in the world. From the Stamatin girls I used to borrow books later on; those I owned had been exhausted long ago, read over and over.

Miss Economidis had short straight hair, dyed like copper. She stood upright, naturally elegant, lived by the Pioneers' Palace, in the same house as writer Nicolae Batzaria, and she asked us to write portraits of acquaintances in French and read them to each other. I remember how I listened to a portrait written by Chiți, the elder Stamatin sister, without realizing it was depicting me. I was likewise surprised, later, listening to my own voice recorded on tape, unable to perceive in it anything familiar. Chiți was speaking about the determination with which I defended my brother against other children.

The cobbler's at number 12, Strada Dr. Lister. A man of about fifty, grave and sad, surrounded by patches of leather sole, shoes, sandals, worn-out boots, soldier's boots, leather of all sorts, shoe cream and dyes, lasts, pliers, drills, blakeys and an unlimited number of tools. It might be because of him that I have taken lately to describing the disorder of papers surrounding me at the office, at school or at home by saying "it's like a cobbler's shop".

This kind, pale, soft-spoken man mended, dyed and straightened the worn-out shoes of the whole district, he helped us all to a lighter step. He seldom smiled, I never saw him standing, only sitting down on his low stool. His workshop was located in a dark garage, we would go down a slope to enter it.

Tram number 14

In my childhood, tram number 14 passed along Strada Dr. Lister. Children would put carbide on the rails, which exploded with a bang when the tram hit it. The tram stop was in front of the Meinl store. Meinl sold coffee, sometimes oranges, each wrapped in its own thin paper wrapping. Close to Meinl there had once been a flower shop, with windows along which water streamed down, mysteriously, at all times – I dimly remember a moment of wonder when, not finding a word for the magnificent flowers, I created one myself, and I sang it like an incantation, over and over again, in front of the window: ciuli (pronounced tschiuli). By 1948 the flower shop had long been replaced by a grocery store to which I would be sent to buy butter, sometimes ham. Butter was brought in large cakes, from which slices were cut off with a big knife, the way they also used to cut the halva in the store across the street. I left the shop with the slice of butter wrapped in white paper and on the way home I would eat from the good cold butter, too good to be wasted on bread, so tasty, sweet and fresh as it was.

A round market

I see it as in a dream. The St. Elefterie Market. An American-like glass-paned bank building

rises now on that spot. Our market was round, with dark shops, each shaped like the segment of a circle, with the goods exhibited outside, at the front. They would sell there butter made out of buffalo cow milk, with patterns stamped on it. They would sell chickens, and when Mr. Vasile the concierge was not to be found, cutting their throats posed a problem. At the corner, in Strada Costache Negri, was the butcher's, where during those years, to my grandmother's dismay, they would sell mostly sinewy mutton with a pungent smell, which she, a Bohemian from Banat, would reject instinctively. Just as the Bucharest people did, as a matter of fact.

House in Cotroceni. Behind it, St. Elefterie church

The C.A.M. kiosk at No. 2, Strada Elefterie

The imprint of the steps that brought us to this kiosk would have dug, in time, visible furrows. There we bought the newspaper, stamps and envelopes with stationery (always slightly crumpled and smelling of cigarettes). There we found matches or fiscal stamps.

Next to the kiosk a peddler of layered ice cream set up his stand each summer. I would run from home with a soup bowl in my hand, pay in a rush and run back home as fast as my legs could carry me, climbing the three storeys at once, with the ice cream dripping slowly, in its different colours, and we all marveled at its festive composition and at the sweet coolness it left in our mouths. About once a summer a man came there to tin pots and pans, or to sharpen knives. Later the minuscule garden next to the kiosk turned into a place with a barbecue for sausages.

Pontiac and Buikeikt

In Bucharest at that time they still used the old cars, from before the war, fixed and patched up endlessly. In the park with the statue, my brother and I would while our afternoon away guessing at which make of car would drive first down the Bulevardul Ardealului. I do not remember what the stakes were, but I still hear the triumphant tone in which one of us would cry out loud: Ford! Plimut! Pontiac! Buikeikt! (Plymouth and Buick Eight, of course, but we had no knowledge of English whatsoever.) That's how we played for hours.

The park as it was before the Opera was built

The alleyways of the park between the Venus Arena and the Faculty of Law were covered in pebbles of many delicate shades which screaked under our feet and slowed us down. The leaves of poplars that I no longer manage to place in the landscape would shiver and shine in the sun. My mother came with a folding chair and with a bag of eye-shaped almonds that she would carefully crack open with a special little nutcracker. Sometimes we would take fruit cakes baked by our grandmother with us, eating with relish the tasty imprints that cherries or apricots had made in the dough.

I ran around on the grass, looking for

flowers, through bushes, gathering branches of Japanese quince or searching for twigs on which snails had blossomed after rain. A man was hiding in the bushes, that I would later learn to call an exhibitionist. I did not quite understand the hurry with which he was calling me, the strange look in his eyes, the insistent way in which he would urge me to get closer. But mother's voice, suddenly worried, would always come to my rescue in time. I would run towards her and forget in an instant the humble, unspeakable gestures.

The Central Institute of Statistics: No. 31, Strada Brezoianu

My father's office at C.I.S. was on the second floor. The big hall of the Office for Studies seems to have been there too. I remember that one day, when father took me with him – he was not a Director yet –, I read out a new slogan on the wall: "Those who will not work, will not eat". "What won't they eat?" I asked, eager to understand this unheard of statement. It was my father's turn, and his colleagues', to wonder. "What do you mean, what?" "Well, won't they eat soup, or stew, or what won't they eat?" I remember answering, and, for a moment, their faces lit up.

Statue of Sanitary Heroes

It was a time of bewilderment. Someone at school had asked a similar question when we said good-bye to each other—and to the French School, which was closing, and sang "To the last one they will perish / the enemies of the people", – "Up till one o'clock when, on what day?" I found out then from the teachers, and my mother confirmed it, that in Romanian până la unu "until one o'clock" also meant până la ultimul, "to the last one." It was not much clearer, but by then I had given up trying to understand in depth every slogan and every song.

Going to school through the Cişmigiu park

In the short time he was director general of the C.I.S., my father had to use the official car more often than usual. He had to get quickly from one of the buildings of the Institute, the one in Strada Brezoianu, across the Cişmigiu park, to the others, the headquarters in the Splaiul Unirii, or to the one in Şerban Vodă, where the Archives and the garage were located. The driver, the austere Mr. Chelu, showed up every morning at No. 7, Strada Dr. Lister and from then on my father would no longer walk me through the Cişmigiu park to school—which was on Strada Christian Tell (whose name jingled for a long time in my head like a tiny bell: cristiantel)—and send my brother to kindergarten by car, but he submitted instead to the grown-up discipline of sullen, motorized efficiency.

When we walked together to school, the amusements that my father invented were not few. These were the years in which we ate maize mush in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Maize mush with jam in the morning. Maize mush with potato stew or cooked beans at noon. Maize mush fried in fat

or maize mush with milk in the evening. The left-over maize mush was wrapped every morning by my grandmother for us. We took it to the beavers and the deer in the Cișmigiu park, not far from the exit towards the Conservatory. The beavers would hardly let themselves be seen, busy as they were with their woodcutting on the small island on the pond. We would throw clumps of dry mush and watch to see how they got them. Where the deer were, there was a sour smell, from the neighbouring foxes. I would stretch out my hand with cold mush, their lips took it from me delicately, my father looking on.

To get to Cișmigiu we would cross the Elefterie bridge, leaving the Dâmbovița river to our right. On the Dâmbovița quay, more precisely on the slope leading to the muddy water, poppy flowers were growing, and we would talk about the probable number of petals; for me every flower had at least five, four said my father, five I would insist with conviction. I remember how I once saw him jump with ease over the metallic fence and run down the slope, he stumbled a little, reaching for a poppy that I could make out round and full and most certainly having lots of petals. He came back triumphantly, there were four, all crumpled on top of each other. That is how I learned that common poppies, unlike the double ones, indeed have only four petals.

We walked on Bulevardul 6 Martie to Piața Kogălniceanu. Entering the park by the rose alley, right after the Lazăr High School, we would look at the statues of writers. Then we went out by the Conservatory exit, where in springtime an elegant little tree blossomed in pink, crêpe-paper tassels. I remember how once, seeing that I was pining for them, my father broke off a twig and offered it to me. It had been a royal gift, he had assumed a serious risk, I thought, by breaking off a branch from a tree that was not ours, and, ever since, each time I pass by that place (where the tree lives on and probably blossoms just as wondrously), I remember the joy and terrified pride I felt one far-gone spring. He had won, in one second, my life-long devotion.

We would then pass an antiquarian bookseller, somewhere towards Calea Victoriei, not far from the Athénée Palace Hotel. At times I stopped still to look at the guards of the Royal Palace, turned into stone, as in the sleeping forest.

Russian language

Because of Russian, after the French school had been closed down, my mother and father decided it was better for me to repeat the year. I had started the French school at six and a half and had "jumped", in the middle of the school year, from first grade into the third, as was usual for the children who did well, so that they did not get bored. Instead of registering me in the fourth grade at St. Elefterie School, my parents thought it better for me to repeat the third year, so as to get used to the new school, to the new teachers and subjects, and to start learning Russian after I had given French some time to settle.

The chests

When he resigned, my father acquired some chests. They were large, made of oak, yellowish-orange, with handles made of thick, braided rope and with a sliding lid. They had served to store census cards and statistics documents when the Institute was evacuated during WWII. In the after-war years the employees still kept old provisions of minuscule soldiers' biscuits in them, of which I ate my share, heartily, each time my father took me with him to his office.

He then put all his "personal" belongings into the chests. Letters, reading notes, photographs, books from his private library, which, too numerous to be kept on our shelves at home, had been gradually taken to the Institute and were now coming back to get squeezed in the study room where my grand-

mother slept and we children took turns doing homework.

Months of careful selection followed. Some of the books would stay upstairs, on the third floor, where we lived. Others would be stored in the basement chamber corresponding to our apartment. My father went up and down the stairs. The chests, their lids slid open, had been placed on top of each other to build deep shelves. Books were thoughtfully and patiently arranged in them.

For a while life went on like this, with my father at home, going downstairs to the basement to read, doing piece-work for the Planning Commission and having, all of a sudden, more time for us.

In the spring of 1949, our basement chamber was assigned to someone else. The chests were to be removed from there urgently. Father, together with a friend, moved books and papers from early morning till late at night. They put them in a locked area in the basement. They took them there in batches, filling box after box, pouring DDT onto each new layer, since the cellar was at risk from mice and cockroaches. The book chests, with their lid closed tight, were piled up on top of one another. At the bottom, which you could not reach without moving everything away—the cellar was tiny and the chests, cubes with one-metre-long sides rising up to the ceiling, were heavy—father had put the chests with the reading notes, works in progress and letters. He nailed their lids shut.

One day father did not come back from the library to which he hurried every morning with writing paper and a slice of dark bread. No one went downstairs to the cellar again; even my father had stopped going to his books a while before his arrest.

Years went by. The chests provided so many reasons for the housing authority to hassle us. "What's in them? Books smell. They attract mice. Basements are not for books." My mother firmly refused to open the door to the storage chests. My brother and I looked sometimes at the chests through the bars, when there were problems with the plumbing and grandmother sent us to fetch water from the basement in a bucket.

One spring the basement was flooded. Together with my father's youngest brother and us, my mother unlocked the door. Climbing up the chests, we removed the lids of the upper ones. We emptied them and moved their contents, layer by layer, until we reached the bottom. We did not open all the chests. The wood, solid and thick, had not allowed the water to seep in. The chests with their lids nailed shut stayed closed. There was a mouldy smell in the cellar. We put the books back into the chests, the chests in the pile; we children took some books that seemed legible to us upstairs. For weeks the apartment smelled of DDT (Although the dictionary definitions speaks of a colourless odourless substance, in my memory DDT stays white and with a definite smell) and we had sore throats. The cellar was unlocked again when, upon my mother's death, the apartment had to be evacuated.

When—together with some friends—I brought the military chests, untouched for almost 20 years, out into the daylight, and started pulling out the nails with a pair of pliers, a neighbor, a retired Securitate officer, stopped to see what we were doing and said: "Be careful, there might be bombs inside". ("Lupta" [The Fight], 15 March 1985)

When they left for work

When he left from home to spend the whole day at the Library of the Academy, my father would take along a hunk of stale dark bread, the kind we bought on ration cards. At the bakery in the Strada St. Elefterie the shop assistant was a former university professor, one whispered he had taught psychology. From time to time his smiling wife came to help. The ration cards were in different colours, made up of small undetachable squares which we would cut gingerly with the scissors in the beginning and which, later, apathetic, we would tear away with bare fingers. My father did not have a ra-

tion card. My grandmother had a dark grey one. The unexplained symbolism of the two exclusions did not escape us. It was echoed by lumps in our throats when we were offered a cake at a cake shop, which my brother and I would swallow hesitatingly, almost with guilt. Our mother or father, who bought them for us, did not eat any. We finished ours quickly, eager to leave that space of unshared pleasures.

Father went down the stairs running, and, once in the courtyard between the two apartment buildings, he would turn as if by reflex towards the building where we lived and, slightly lifting his hat, he would greet whomever was at the windows. Mrs. Vlădescu, a retired physical education teacher, on the first floor to the left; Mrs. or Mr. Fortunescu, rosy and smiling, retired as well, on the second floor, also to the left; on the left ground floor, Dr. Abrudescu's mother, who was then over 80 and whose son managed to procure orange juice for her every single day. From the right side of the building, on the ground floor, Mrs. Plăcințeanu happened to look out into the courtyard from time to time; she was the wife of a unversity professor who would later go into hiding, only to be arrested soon afterwards as well. On the second floor Mrs. Moscos, a Greek, stood always at the window; her husband had also disappeared, they said he had left the country. Father would then walk away briskly, towards books and forgetting.

Mother went to school with fatigue written in bold letters on her face. The telephone conversations have long disappeared from my memory. But I knew about hiring, downsizing, and purging, as I knew about the State Planning Commission, for which my father worked now. I also knew about the Theses on Romanian Literature, which teachers taught while waiting for the new handbooks to come out; my mother read them gloomily while preparing her lesson plans at the unvarnished fir wood table, over 2 meters long. The table filled up the hall, and was alternately covered, on one stretch, with plates and cutlery in the morning, at noon and in the evening, and on the other with mother's copybooks and books, or with those belonging to my brother and to me. Mother left the building without looking right or left. Without looking back, she slowly disappeared around the corner.

Provisions

To get the necessary provisions, my father had gradually developed a genius that sometimes cristallised into small miracles. In those years of poverty, a walk to the lakes outside the city brought us back fish or some crabs, while a walk in the woods brought us snowdrops, transplanted in miniature pots. Friends from all walks of life helped him bring us little surprises or buy us nutritious supplies for winter. From some he bought, in good husbandry, plum jam in large, deep earthenware pots, from others, also in enameled earthenware, pork fat with pieces of meat in it, or sometimes a little barrel with cheese, a little crate of apples, or a bucket of wine. Strings of onions and garlic appeared like decorations in the kitchen, potatoes were stored in the wooden box in the cellar. Once, I do not know how, a huge catfish found its way into our bathtub.

When there was no time for serious shopping, my father managed to discover, in 10-15 minutes, something good to bring home: halva, chestnuts, lemons. He walked fast,

Ștefania Golopenția with her colleagues and students in a classroom filled with propaganda posters and portraits of the Communist leaders

bought what he could, and went afterwards, by car or on foot, slowly or in a hurry, to his everyday work, which needed to be done well and to which he had given full thought while walking or queuing up.

From the Peace Conference in Paris he had come back in 1946 with a bunch of bananas, the first I had ever seen. He watched our reactions with curiosity. I do not know how Dănuț reacted, but as for me, my disappointment was absolute. For me bananas were akin to maize mush.

Sanda Golopenția at the end of the 1940s

Buying petroleum

We used two petroleum lamps to cook. The cast iron stove, with an oven, was used sparingly, since wood was scarce.

I remember my father telling us once, on a dark autumn day, that since petroleum was rationed to only 5 liters per person, we would all three need to go to the warehouse near the A.N.E.F., to get 15.

I carry in my hand a rectangular container tied with rope. The rope presses against the flesh of my hand as hard as the metal handles do. We queue up all three silently. With a sense of conspiracy, I do not look and do not talk either to my father, or to Dănuț. One should not find out we know each other. Otherwise not only would we be refused the petroleum, but we would also be punished in some way, I do not know how. As if not understanding the risk, my father is smiling. We go back home and, only after having crossed the large intersection at the Elefterie Bridge, I calm down and accept to hand over the container of guilt.

The wool blanket

From the Unirii market my father once bought a wool blanket with white and grey stripes. The blanket was not new—it had lost its down and shine, but it was large and carefully folded, and it would serve us well. Father unfolded it happily. From its centre, on the last fold, a hole as large as a soup bowl gaped back at us. He had bought it on trust, he had not checked it. Looking at it now, he was saddened, not by the waste, but by the disappointment. My mother, saddened too, but for other reasons, looked on silently and tired.

At Străulești, Dămăroaia, Cățelu, at Băneasa and Fundeni

In October and November 1949, as I learn from the surveillance notes, we went for a walk with our father every Sunday. Either because we had both grown or because our father had more time for us, we were no longer limited to the park near the Faculty of Law, or to the Botanical Garden, or the Cișmigiu, as in former years. Our walks get longer, more daring and offbeat. Father shows us Bucharest, with its surroundings, trying to get us accustomed to the ways in which the city could be crisscrossed by public transportation, available to all. We usually left directly after lunch and went by tram (sometimes taking the wrong ones), by bus and on foot all the way to the villages of Cățelu, Străulești or Dămăroaia, to the forest at Băneasa, the lake and village of Fundeni, the lakes Pescăruș, Tei, the Freedom Park and the Metropolitan Church, to Mogoșoaia.

We took along a food basket or one in which we could bring back home grapes, some picked by us, others bought to complement a scarce harvest. Father gave us explanations about acorns and flowers, villages and hills, he took us to a vineyard recently harvested, to see what it looked like and if we could still find some grapes.

A.G. mentioned these walks he took with us almost as if he had foreseen we would be orphaned, as he said in a declaration. He wanted to bequeath us memories. By way of the shadowers, the memories left in my mind become keener. As far as the walks were concerned, my father might have wanted to walk for himself as well, too, to clear his thoughts, and forget his grief.

Our Sunday walks cease between 4 December and 15 January 1949. It might have been bitterly cold that winter in Bucharest. My father needs to finish a project for the State Planning Commission and does not readily leave his desk. Or he foresees, he knows even, that he will soon be put under arrest.

Grandmother

The Germans had bombed her house in Bozovici, in which she had lived as its mistress for less than two years. Before that, she had lived there after her divorce, as the daughter of Anton Staschek and the niece of his cousin, with carefully minced rights and endless duties. The marriage to Simion Golopenția, who was a Romanian Railroads employee, had taken her to various towns and places; to Slavonia, then to Cluj and lastly to Timișoara. Grandmother had insisted that Simion study law and take his doctorate; she had embroidered for money to support the household and had studied with him, youtfully, at his side, to give him courage. Once he became a lawyer, the husband ran away with Scumpa (Dearie), in the year of the comet. Grandmother was left with three sons to bring up, feed, and dress, and, in order to make ends meet, she gave room and board to youngsters that came from afar to study in Timișoara's schools. Lodgers and embroidery or macramé were the solution; her parents had not sent her to school, as she had hoped for in her enthusiastic teenage years, and she could not become a teacher, as she had dreamed. The house in Timișoara, of which she was the mistress after the divorce, and the one in Bozovici, after her father's death, hosted the short interludes of freedom in the life of Emma Staschek Golopenția, my grandmother.

After the bombardment of Bozovici, grandmother had come to Bucharest to cram into our tiny apartment with us. She did the cooking and the washing; she would knit us sweaters from my father's old ones, which she endlessly unraveled and whose ply she knotted back together in silence for hours on end. Now and then an irrepressible upsurge of liberty awakened in her, and she would gather her possessions—a china bibelot representing a young lady and a young man, both dressed in golden period costumes; the Bible with a few pictures, as the Catholics have it; her few clothes—and she went to stay with her friends who had also come to live in Bucharest, to the Cloșan family, or to the Itus. She spent a few days there, and then came back to our cramped abode. When my father wanted to bring her joy, he would bring her books—in German or in Hungarian, which marked the secret bond between them, and separated them from us and from the present, by ushering them back to a shared, past space.

On holidays grandmother would take me with her and we would go to mass at St. Joseph's Cathedral. Sometimes she would recount, with humour, how thieves had robbed her and the children of the few things they owned in the house in Timișoara. At other times she remembered how she came back to Bozovici from school, on winter holidays, by horse-drawn sleigh and she would see behind them wolves' eyes, shining in the dark. Or she would cry and tell me to ensure that she was buried in a Catholic cemetery. From us grandmother moved to Bubi's, my father's youngest

brother, who lived in Tei and had, in his turn, children that needed raising and hardships to overcome. And she lived all the time, there as well as with us, with invisible suitcases in her hands, dreaming to go not even she knew where, to be free in a space of her own that she was never granted. There was a Russian song I used to listen to over and over again with my friends in Bucharest in the 1970s, two verses of which stuck in my mind: Kliuci drojit v zamke/ Cemodan v ruke (The key shivers in the lock/ The suitcase in my hand). Every time I heard it – grandmother had died and had been buried by then, as she had wished, in the Catholic section of the Bellu cemetery – I thought of her. By herself on holidays, with an orthodox husband and orthodox children. By herself with her grandchildren, who all wondered at the way she talked (she said hă! for uite!, look!, and șcătulă for cutie, box), she drank her tea (she used a huge cup of half a litre, from Banat, like the one I use for my tea now, here in Providence). An independent woman who had married the villager Simion Golopenția from Pecinișca, braving the opposition of her parents, who were better off, more bourgeois, and with higher expectations. Who had studied law, together with him, encouraging him to get his doctorate. Who had urged her children to study and who had been urged later by her eldest son, my father, and in agreement with her ex-husband, to go back to her parents' home, so that life would get back on track and everyone would be at ease as far as she was concerned. My grandmother who used to set the alarm clock so as to be able to measure her hours of work for pay scrupulously. My forgotten grandmother, with her troubled life, lived with dignity and pride, without joy.

Grandmother could cook food for us out of nothing at all. Potato stew with tomato juice. Lentil soup, black—the blackest of all—or caraway soup, greyish. On holidays, breaded chicken with endives and floating islands. When she managed to make crepes, my brother and I would swallow them without pity, as she was placing them on the plate. The plate would forever be empty and grandmother was pained like a child. Grandmother would wash the dishes and I would dry them. She would never throw away the grease left in the basin for washing dishes, or the leftover sauces. She would mix them with the soil in pots that were more often than not simple cans, and which she used to grow lemon trees or small ungrafted grapefruit trees whose leaves, when rubbed, would give off a refreshing scent.

What upset her was when we came home later than she expected us to, without having let her know in advance. "Dog or kitten, I'll be late", that's all you should have told me, she would say with annoyance, and her strange words did not make us laugh, they expressed not only her worry, but also the suffering at what seemed to her our lack of delicacy, the rudeness of children unable to anticipate the concern of those who love them.

Mother

My mother would leave for school in the morning, come back and do homework with us; she would struggle to obtain for us, besides the food grandmother cooked, some milk, or butter, or ham, or fresh eggs; she would take us for walks in the park near the Faculty of Law, in the one with the statue or in the Botanical Garden, where she always chose the sunny benches near the hot house and the labyrinth. As the one under surveillance was my father, and as they were sharing their tasks, as, furthermore, my mother had to prepare, at home, the lessons she was going to teach and do all the housework, together with grandmother, the agents see her only rarely going out shopping or walking with my father.

She had heaped her books in a bookcase in the bedroom. Not having a desk of her own, she had crammed her field research notebooks and her articles next to the linens, in the wardrobe there. As her cooking ambitions were not especially strong, mother had given

over the kitchen to grandmother. My father had his own study, doubling as bedroom for my grandmother. In the dining room, at the long table, mother wrote and read next to us, while we were drawing, learning to write or read. In a way, my mother was the most devoid of her own space in our house, where no one was in fact enjoying one.

During the first two grades, my mother had followed my progress attentively, with eyes that never missed anything: she would have a look at the assignments I had written, ask me to rewrite them when she was not satisfied, and show me how to draw tubers or butterflies. Now she was doing the same with Dănuț. In those years without radio or television, my mother was, above all, the background voice that called us out at the sea of books, reading to us as only she could do it. Her voice was full and warm—in her youth she had sung unrivalled, the researchers of the Gusti teams had nicknamed her Maria Neichii—and she would select for us vivid texts that would stay in our memory. I fell asleep many times listening to her reading Ispirescu's or Grimm brothers' fairy tales, which at one point I knew by heart. I hear her reading to us poems by Eminescu or Coșbuc, later on from Arghezi. As she was reading to us about the deer dying in the forest of Petrișor, I could not know that, much later, she would likewise die alone one night, our brave and sad mother, strong and fragile.

Twice a year, in spring and autumn, mother took us on our ritual shopping tours. We went to the commercial Strada Lipscani, passing by Șelari.

We bought sandals, shoes or boots, according to the season, or cloth from which the taylor made us coats. We dropped by at the drugstore, where mother composed her eau de Cologne, asking the shop assistant to mix two parts of lavender oil, one of chypre and one of patchouli. I would look intently at the funnel, at the liquid flowing slowly through it. Much later, in Mexico, I saw perfume makers use the same gestures when creating scents to order. Mexican women, though, asked the perfumers to blend for them, as best they could, French

Dan Golopenția at the end of the 1940s

fragrances—Guerlain, Dior—or Italian and German ones, and pour them into vaporizing vials.

Once, when mother took us into town, we saw, near the clock in front of the University, a bear dancing. He stepped on soft paws, to the sound of the tambourine, over the back of the "patient", people lay down for him without fear, mother and we wondered at their coming back to life afterwards, watching them move gingerly to check if the "treatment" had worked.

Once or twice a year my mother brought home a seamstress, who came with her sewing machine and cut out and sewed for a day or two, making us new clothes and mending the old ones like in fairy tales. She sewed us blouses, shirts, school uniforms, and we felt irresistible for several days afterwards.

When I did not know something I would ask mother. She was then, and later, our willing encyclopedia. It was from her that I received, one after the other, the books that she thought were worth having. Alice in Wonderland at some point, Saussure's introduction in linguistics later. With Dănuț and with me, mother took apart for several years the syntax of sentences that she would on purpose make as twisted as could be, getting us used to the

pleasure of rearranging them clearly. It is from her that I learned Romanian, I learned to dream of words from her. Dănuț told me once how he misses, even now, the moments when the word in the book, the voice that utters it, and the ears that listen to it are brought together, with imagination, in the act of living together, and not by pressing a switch on an electronic broadcasting device.

Our mother wanted us to learn foreign languages and enrolled us both at the French kindergarten behind the Biserica Albă. I got to go for two years to the French school in Strada Christian Tell, with public exams which mother never failed to attend. This school, in which my father had not believed, served me well later, as it gave me confidence in my command of French, learned through games and songs at a young age, and through a primer and other textbooks published in France. Later, after my father's death, mother would give private lessons in order to be able to pay for our German lessons with Brother Athanasie from St. Joseph Cathedral, or, for me, Greek lessons with our neighbour a few houses down on Dr. Lister, professor Marin, discouraged and bored in those years – he was the "Submarine" professor character in Cișmigiu et Comp. Always inventing new occupations for us, she would take us to the Club of Employees in Education to learn to play the piano, or Esperanto, and, in my case, to make masks out of paper-mâché. She would take us to the theatre and the opera, buying cheaper tickets through her school, or to the cinema. One summer, after her step-father passed away, my mother unexpectedly inherited a small amount of money. She transformed that summer into a movie festival, and for as long as the money lasted we would go twice or even three times a week to the open-air cinema, watch a movie and then eat grilled sausages or steak. Who else could compare to us, for our mother was coming out of her depression and she had reinvented, towards the middle of the 1950's, joy and playfulness.

About herself, about her childhood, my mother almost never talked. I found out a little something by listening to her poems or reading her letters. A fragment of her poem, Shutter, allows me to imagine bridges between her as a child and us at that time—she had been brought up by a grandmother after her mother had remarried: "You cover me lightly / and you bend / smiling / gently / to read in my eyes / from close by / my melancholy / weighty / not to miss anything. / How lucky / that we have eyelids!" (Ștefania Golopenția, Sporul vieții [Life's Gain], p. 268). Dănuț and I were both like her as a child, and she would look back at us with the same full gaze that had once been directed at her by her grandmother, the hide-and-seek game between those who knew and those who were learning to love had started again.

We never went on holidays with both my mother and father at the same time. Mother took us a few times to Bozovici, to Băile Herculane, to Sinaia (where the Institute for Statistics had a villa for employees), to our godmother in Hodac—a teacher like herself—whom she had made friends with while doing field research. With father we went once to Sebeș, one summer when he gave a course on sociology and statistics for the C.I.S. staff. We ate wild strawberies and cream in our room every evening and I saw purslane flowers for the first time in the Cotoras' garden.

After our father was arrested, mother never came on holiday with us again. For a time she would go, with other colleagues, to take care of other people's children in summer colonies, getting, in exchange, places for us in parallel ones. I remember that we were the first to receive letters when we went to camp. She would take us to the station, go back home and write each of us a letter or a post card so that we would not argue. Then we grew up, and on the rare occasions that we went anywhere during high school or college, our mother would stay home, receiving our letters, or those from friends or colleagues who reported on their summer joys. She bore with difficulty the steaming hot summers which offered her no rest, dreaming at times of a journey to Craiova, the town of her childhood, which she never made.

The wonderful Mr. Negru of our grey childhood

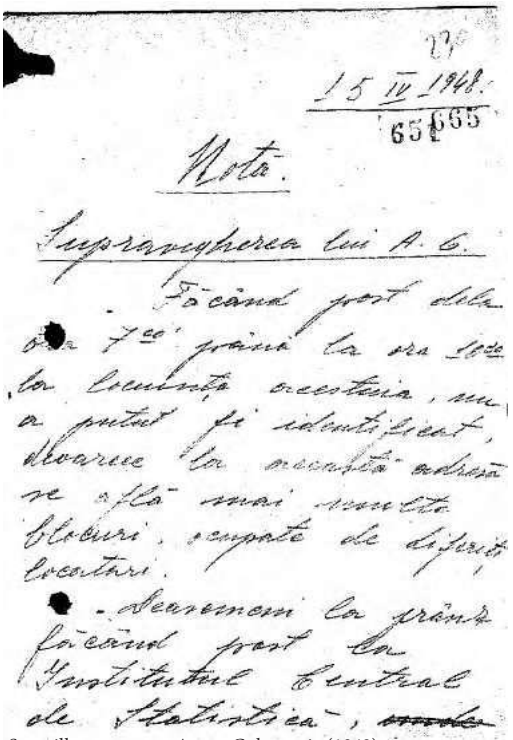
I can barely picture him, I would like to see him clearly, to have his photo. He was not very tall, had a moustache and an aquiline nose, a faint smile about the corners of his lips and grave eyes. Paradoxically, he seldom came to visit while my father was free, but became our never-failing visitor after his arrest and subsequent death. He was the only one who came to see us regularly. There were several other kind-hearted people, Nicolae Economu, Ion Apostol, Iuliu Mălinaș and Alexandru Nistor, who thought of us on every Christmas, all those long years. But Mr. Negru came to see us all the time, he was a part of our lives.

Having become a dental technician with stoicism and a sense of humour (he would only return to the field of the history of statistics in the 1960s), joking about the fact that his first name in the phone directory was Jenică (from his wife Elena's middle name, a confusion that sometimes proved to his advantage), Mr. Negru had something to say to each of us in those dark years. With my grandmother he talked about the Banat. With my mother about school, the new curricula, D. Gusti, his Sociological School and the employees of the former Institute of Statistics, about the trivial or important events in our lives: that I had not been made a pioneer, that we had to go to camps if we were to go on holiday at all. With my brother and me, he would talk about lessons and walks. He took over and on many a Sunday organized outings for us. He might have been the one who took us to the Simu Museum once. He had a nephew, Nini, and the three of us made an eager team whom he lead at a brisk pace to stadiums, museums and parks. I remember that during a walk he talked to us about big transportation containers that could be moved as single units and about the fact that they had been conceived by a Romanian.

Our mother, who had long ago given up on any visits, took us to the one-room apartment on Strada Batiștei, where Mrs. Negru prepared for us a delicate beef salad with chicken breast instead of beef and apples instead of pickles. We would talk at length, as families do, the Negrus were a good, reassuring presence. Mother would smile for a moment, we had friends.

When we were really short of money, in spite of the private lessons my mother gave in order to augment her teacher's income and to be able to support the four of us, mother started to glance more and more often at the bedroom closet that contained all her possessions and at the black wardrobe in the corridor in which some of my father's belongings were still stored. What had not been turned over or unravelled to be refitted for us children was taken out, critically examined and shown to Mr. Negru. Mother's French evening shoes. Father's gold watch. Other objects I do not remember. Mr. Negru came by, evaluated them, established the minimum price below which a sale could not be conceived of, and made plans about when and with whom and with which other objects he would go to the flea market. Flea-market Sundays were always cold and rainy, as if on purpose. As evening came, Mr. Negru, shivering, returned from the flea market with the news, his face grey. Most times he had been unable to sell anything. But he had conversed, around a primus stove on which tea was brewed continuously, with such and such a person, who had come to sell this and that object, and he recounted with humour the latest happenings in town. We all relaxed, the flea market was at least interesting, if not an opportunity to improve our finances. Mr. Negru left, having consoled us indirectly, a few weeks later another sale was in the planning, our problem was that we didn't have much to sell, nor were people able to purchase much.

After a while Mr. Negru started writing. He wrote about the village of his childhood, Toracul Mare, in the Serbian Banat. He would read from his pages with an equal voice, a slightly skeptical expression on his face, waiting to see what my mother and grandmother would say, how we children looked at him. He


15 IV 1948.
65 665
Notă.
Supravegherea lui A. G.
Făcând post de la ora 7.00 prânz la ora 18.00 la locuința acesteia, nu a putut fi identificat, deoarece la această adresă se află mai multe blocuri, ocupate de diferiți locatari.
Seara mai la prânz făcând post la Institutul Central de Statistică,

Surveillance note on Anton Golopenția (1948)

was a gifted storyteller, we listened to him on every occasion, caught in his time and space, forgetting ours. I wonder what happened to those texts; they deserved to be published.

When we grew up, Mr. Negru was part of what happened to us: University admission and graduation, searching for jobs, my wedding, Dănuț's departure for the United States. When the time for the great departure came for me as well, it was to Mr. Negru that I went to say good-bye. Mrs. Negru had died not long before. From a drawer he took out a cross with a little gold chain that had belonged to her, and hung it around my neck, like a father. His eyes were wet; he was thinking, as we did, that it was not right, not natural to leave for ever, as we then thought, the country where you had been born and where you had known your parents and your first friends. I believe he was thinking of my father, of his imprisonment, of my mother, and of disintegrations.

I wonder whether my father had not talked to Mr. Negru about our walks, maybe even about his arrest, which he saw coming. Whether he had not asked him, as I learned much later he had asked our aunt Maria, to watch over us and help when possible. But I believe, I know that Mr. Negru would have come to us even unasked.

When I went back to Romania, after 1989, Mr. Negru was no longer alive.

Meeting Mrs. Negru in Cișmigiu

I cannot leave untold the story of my last meeting with Mrs. Negru. I was walking through Cișmigiu, where the beavers were, without thinking of them, it was towards the end of the 1970s, and I saw her all of a sudden in front of me. She was walking deep in thought. She told me then, with sadness, that she no longer understood any of those dear to her, who were all trying to convince her to have a biopsy, to see what could be done about a cancer she seemed to have. With her large, grave eyes, Mrs. Negru was telling me she thought this was almost indiscreet. She did not want to know what would cause her death and did not want the others to know it either. Sad and lonely, she was thus walking with her illness, accepting her death and wishing for one thing only: that the others accept it too, naturally, with firm delicacy, without fuss. This stayed in my mind as a lesson.

The Simu museum, the Antipa museum

I remember the sculptures at the Simu Museum in a space full of light that does not resemble in the least the images of the halls I see on the Internet. It could be that the first visit we paid there with my father got overlaid in memory by a later one, in which I still see father next to us, but could Mr. Negru have taken us there instead? I remember I went to the Simu museum shortly before it was demolished, it was already isolated from the city, shrouded by fences, and people came to see it once more, to say good-bye.

On the other hand, some time before, whether long or short I do not know, I see the visit to the Antipa Museum, the amazement in front of the whale-turned-house, inside of which I vaguely imagine a possible life that I cannot find words for yet. And my father next to me, who does not break the spell, but keeps silent and seems to smile, vaguely.

Going up

We lived on the third floor and we often walked together as if joined at the hip, my mother, my brother and I. A Siamese family. We went together to Lipscani to shop wisely, as each season required. We went to the private pastry shops offering kataifi on Bulevardul 6 Martie or to open air movies. To a conference or to an esperanto lesson at the teacher's club near Piața Kogălniceanu. To bookstores, the botanical garden, or to the theatre. Sometimes we would pay a visit to friends. Every time we came back, while climbing purposefully the numerous steps, before reaching the second floor, mother would suddenly stop. She stood still, speechless, her left shoulder slightly lowered. We did not overtake her. We kept silent too. Sometimes we would hear the clear buzz of a bee around us, or a tired fly hitting against the window pane, the clatter of cutlery and faucets from the open windows of the kitchens in the opposite building. Moving from that place seemed after a while quite impossible.

Frozen on the step I wondered, almost breathlessly, what would happen if this time mother could not climb all the way up. If we were to be discovered on the staircase in our grave statue game by our neighbours. Those long minutes passed slowly. We guessed at and shared our benumbed tiredness. Then, without a word, or even a sigh, just as unexpectedly, my mother pulled herself together and, light as a feather, started climbing up the stairs again.

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Title: "The Parallel Bucharest of the 1980s. The Memoirs of a Memoirs' Keeper"

Author: Zoltán Rostás

How to cite this article: Rostás, Zoltán. 2012. "The Parallel Bucharest of the 1980s. The Memoirs of a Memoirs' Keeper". *Martor* 17: 207-218.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

The Parallel Bucharest of the 1980s. The Memoirs of a Memoirs' Keeper

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts through a self-reflective process to present the author's own research conducted in the field of oral history during the 1980s. The result is a coherent mosaic of the everyday experiences of the subjects interviewed together with that of the author.

KEYWORDS

Oral history, multicultural Bucharest, demolition, marginality, food shortages, survival strategies

I have often been invited/ summoned by younger colleagues to provide a detailed written account of how I used to conduct oral history in Bucharest during the 1980s. Some of these invitations also insinuated comments about the difficulties caused by the regime, the risks associated with the activity of conducting interviews and the fear of being investigated, etc. This is not the time and place to describe this experiences of a quarter of a century ago, but I acknowledge: my younger colleagues' interest is justifies, given how the discourse of fervently anti-communist historians and journalists has created a homogeneous image of the communist regime, as if al those 50-55 years represented a penitentiary regime, or, at best, one of continuous house arrest. Yet, this regime was extremely differentiated taking under consideration the periods, the social, professional, ethnic and religious, etc. status of the groups involved. Beyond the established, visible power relations, the 1980s also featured a relationship of probing, of silent negotiation even, between the formal (official) and informal sphere. Without admitting it, the authorities applied a differentiated tactic of approval, toleration and interdiction towards the activities of different social groups.

In the circumstances that changed during the final decade of socialism there was no question of there being a sustained program of oral history. It was an extremely new method, thus it was neither promoted nor forbidden – in fact, it was virtually unknown. Few people from the academia world were aware it had been validated by the International Congress of History, held in Bucharest in 1980, which had a strong section dedicated to it. I was fully aware that all scientific research had to be approved by the party structures, especially those involving interaction with a large numbers of people. But since I was not even a collaborator of any research institute I was unable to apply for any kind of sanction.

As a mere editor for a cultural magazine functioning in Casa Scânteii, I thought it best to talk to friends and colleagues about my intention to experiment, in my own free time, with this new interview technique, rather than work in secret. Furthermore, I tried to convince sociologists and historians of my generation to embrace the method. I convinced no one. However, Septimiu Chelcea, who was putting together a book on sociological methodology and a great fan of social biography, appreciated my enthusiasm and included my study entitled "Social Documents and Oral History" (Chelcea, 1985, 61-77), the first study in Romania on this subject. In circumstances I fail to recall, I was also invited to the Nicolae Iorga Institute, where, in the winter of 1985, in a large, unheated room, I gave a talk on oral history. The majority of those present agreed with what I had to say, but none would take seriously the cassette recorder as a research tool. Aware of the importance of conducting an oral

Photo@Vlad Columbeanu

history of the Bucharest Sociological School, I even spoke with the person in charge of sociology at the Academy of Social and Political Sciences (ASSP). While not explicitly turning me down, he told me they worked according to the UNESCO model, which approaches the history of sociology from the perspective of the sociology of science. I did not mind the refusal; I just wanted them to be aware of my intentions.

With this "cover" ensured, I could get on with my project in peace. My strategy had worked perfectly. No one envied me, oral history not being considered to have any future in 1980s Romania. It was also a very demanding technique, provided you adhered strictly to the methodology: recording without intervention the subject's life story, transcribing the conversation word for word, and then producing the necessary explanatory notes... Not to mention the fact that all researchers knew the stories of the "has-beens" were out of season. A colleague once told me frankly that he only wrote books which are likely to be published. It is actually what he did.

Despite my deliberately amateurish air, I tried to respect to the letter all of the methodological and deontological rules specific to oral history. Aware that its success depended on mutual trust between the parties involved, in each case I would approach a subject via a relative or common acquaintance, who would vouch for me. I never mentioned any institution and I would always emphasize that my interest in his or her history was of a personal nature. When, at the beginning of the 1980s, I undertook my first research project, which I called "Multicultural Bucharest" (i.e. I identified subjects according to different ethnic and group cultures), I didn't seek out "a German" or "an aristocrat," but a friend or close acquaintance from among the Germans or aristocrats. As for the research on the Bucharest Sociological School (which I will not discuss in this article), my long standing connections to the professors Mihai Pop and H. H. Stahl afforded me access to the subjects I was to interview.

My interest in the daily lives of the people of Bucharest was motivated by two factors: a)

being from Transylvania, I, involuntarily, considered myself as being "in the field" while in the capital; and b) I was interested in the stories of daily life told to me by older people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, these conversations were, in fact, part of my daily life; to be more explicit, part of my free time, given that my work as an editor for a weekly publication (A Hét) had very little to do with oral history.

And this interest was strongly influenced by the manner in which I conducted oral history interviews. I neither used questionnaires, nor did I tell the subjects what it was interested in. Rather, after becoming comfortable with each other, I would ask them to tell me their life stories, saying that I would interrupt them only if I did not understand particular decisions, events, or if I wanted a more detailed narrative of some facts recounted too briefly.

Conducting these interviews in my free time rendered me under no financial or editorial pressure; my search for new contacts and my interviews became a kind of everyday hobby. On my days off and during holidays I would record the memoirs of people from Bucharest in their 80s and 90s, ordinary people and sociologists who had been almost or even entirely forgotten. It was truly enjoyable to conduct oral history in the 1980s, as the life stories shared with me really transported me away from the daily routine of the crumbling capital city. It was harder during the winter, due to the catastrophic standard of public transportation and the unheated rooms. But perhaps the hardest task fell on my wife, who transcribed the recordings according to the strict methodological rules. Without her patience and help, my books – and therefore this article, too – would have never been published. Oral history was a "family business".

Coffee and Russian Paska

One of the most frequently cited shortages of the 1980s was food. I cannot say I starved, but it involved some effort to access to the informal economy and develop connections so as to procure food. Foodstuff was a common subject of discussion, because "getting hold" of something was considered even a matter of pride.

I interviewed the poet and lawyer Anastase Nasta because he was an Aromanian, who was born in Greece, and settled, together with his family, in Romania. Before beginning to share his life story with me, he mentioned his "daily coffee."

– […] How you get hold of coffee: Here, up on the 5th floor, there lived a Mrs. Șendal, who moved away afterwards. Two years ago, when you couldn't find real coffee, my neighbor told me: "Mrs. Șendal has some. You should give her a call. I called her and went up to her flat – she moved away because her husband was at the British Embassy and she'd moved there. I got coffee from her a couple of times [...] I didn't call her now, as I got hold of this instant coffee, there's a man who gets it for me here, at a food store. The day before yesterday, I was at the local medical plant shop and I see this nice young, sporty-looking women, carrying this large bag in front of her. And she takes something out of the bag and shows it to the shop assistant – who's actually more like a pharmacist. "Do you want some?" she asks. "Do you understand?" And she shows her an empty coffee wrapper. It says Arabic coffee in French and German. "No, no, I don't need it," says the shop assistant. I have a look: "What's that? 200 g for 120 lei. How come?" "I take 250 g... 150 g," I say, just for making conversation. She does her sums and I take it straight away: 600 lei a kilo.

- It's not expensive.

- No, it's not.

- Especially if it's roasted...

- Yes, it's roasted and very good. And I say to myself, I'll take some. I had 20 lei on me. "I have it," says the shop assistant. "Look, go get it and I'll be back." And I got this coffee. "And it's true that it tastes better than South American coffee. It's not hot anymore, 'cause my wife made it before she left. So it's not very hot; but you're supposed to drink coffee while it's hot and it has

cream." (Rostás 2002, 344).

Maria Roth was a retired physical education teacher and, despite her German name, came from a family of high-ranking tsarist army officers. She was born in Russia wherefrom her family fled by ship to France, and later settled in Romania. She told me about celebrations in the family, when I asked her an innocent question?

- *What's Russian Paska like?*

- Ah, Russian Paska is unique in its own way. It's made only of best quality cheese, best quality butter, eggs, cream, vanilla, and this kind of conserved fruit. It's prepared in a special way so that they all melt together... You put it in trays that have been blessed – ours came from Mount Athos – and which are in a pyramidal shape, the four sides are decorated with three tulips, a Christian cross, a dove, and something else, I'm not sure what it is, that has a hole in it like a flowerpot. You wrap the cheese in some cloth, so that any extra juice drips out. And then you get this yellow pyramid – with an amazing taste! I stopped making it, as you can't find cheese anymore. You need ten packs of cheese, and they only give you one. If you can get hold of some cheese before Easter, you are my guest, for I myself miss it... (Rostás 2002, 363).

The Party

For the generations that reached maturity after December 1989, the communist party probably represents the ultimate evil. The rhetoric of the communist press about the unity of the party continued in the post-communist period through the condemnation en masse of all party members. In these circumstances it is almost impossible for young people not to view membership to the communist party in black and white terms.

I met Eduard Korn through the Lutheran church. Son of Austrian immigrants who came to Romania during the time of Carol I, he was a member of the German Evangelical community in Bucharest and worked his entire life in insurance.

[…] when I held these top union positions, and they asked me – always a Hungar-

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ian, his name escapes me, who was head of the cadres – why I hadn't become a party member. I said "Mister, no one told me. No one told me! When I wanted to join the party, our application disappeared. I mean the secretary took them, put them in a drawer and forgot about them." My wife was a party member. Yes. And she... she worked well there. So when that secretary was appointed head of one of the insurance companies, they opened the drawer and found our applications there. But it was too late, the party did not accept the applications and so I never became a member. But I was still vetted by the party. I was always being vetted by the party! Because I held important positions, because they needed me, and... In fact I was even summoned before the president of the Trade Unions Organization, who said to me: "Comrade Cornea, you hand out hundreds of rest and recuperation packages, but I never see your own name on the list." I say: "They're not for me, they're for the others. I've never been, not even once, I say: when I'm on holiday, our office has a rest house in Predeal, and I go there." "No, time you're going," he said. Of course, he had his own reasons. "You are sick, send me doctor so-and-so... Doctor, write a recommendation for Comrade Cornea according to which he suffers from rheumatism." I don't remember his name, I only remember he had one leg... "I'm not sick, I say...", "Yes, you are, and you're going to Băile Felix.

- *And did you finally go?*

- Yes, I went to Băile Felix. But what was behind it all... They wanted to check up on the attitude of the doctors and people working there. And they were right, they didn't care a bit, things still weren't as they are now." (Rostás 2002, 151-152).

A more generalised form of daily activity was party education.

I met Leonida Merlaub, who worked as a low-ranking clerk at the Cinematographic Centre and later at the Federation of Jewish Communities of the People's Republic of Romania, at one of the Community's homes for the elderly. Cheerful, a good observer and narrator of details of everyday life, he gave me a comprehensive account of the distance between the local, ethnic society and the communist regime.

Well, the years drifted by and here I am today in the current regime. Because I was a full time employee, I was sent on party courses. I

wasn't a party member, but all full time workers were obliged to attend these courses, I forget how they were called at the beginning, it was back in '45... I still went to church. I remember one basic course called 'Current political affairs', where we'd read Scânteia every morning. At work. Even if one wasted an hour there, the party came first. Later, after I finished my first courses, I was sent on more and more until I reached the Party Learning Centre, where they gave more advanced courses on dialectic materialism. And I spent a year or two there, as long as it took, and I studied, I learned all the subjects, I could answer the exam questions. But nothing out of all of these courses caused me to lose my belief that the church is the house of God and that the priest at the altar is God's representative; and I still hold this belief. And sir, even after taking part in all those political meetings, and after all the 1st May, 23rd August and 7th November celebrations, when we marched and shouted slogans, as we all did, nothing shook my faith in God and the priest as his representative on earth." (Rostás 2002, 203).

During the 1980s "party life", "ideological education," and "political information" existed more in regulations and official declarations than in reality. In most of the newsrooms from Casa Scânteii, for example, party meetings were rare and ideological education courses rarer still. However, the archive of the local party branch was maintained religiously. On the eve of submitting the archive to the Party Committee, the secretaries of the local branches would invent reports and minutes of meetings that were never held.

Collectivisation

Given the substantial number of Szeckler women working as servants in Bucharest both before and after the war, I also sought out an interviewee from this group.

Vilma Kovács' life seems typical to me. An orphan, she came to Bucharest to work as a servant in the 1930s, and married a construction worker. Together they saved enough to buy a house and a few acres of land in the village of Atid in Odorhei county. After the death of her husband she was left alone to raise their child. As for many others, the real nightmare began during the 1950s.

[...] That's when the collectivization started. What happened then? Do you remember?

- Of course. I was the last one from the village to join. They took everything... They made me sleep in the council building.

- That was '62, or was it earlier?

- My older brother, Lali, had died... it was around that time it happened... I'm not sure... We'd just planted the trefoil... around '59, or was it '69?... What year was the collectivization? [...] Actually, the reason they detained me then was because I'd helped the kulaks... I had a lot of grain on my property; it wasn't all mine, though I had my share, too, but other people... from the village... would store theirs with me... Then that man came, what's his name, to ask whose it was; he said it belonged to the kulaks. Then he found a tub full of wheat in the cellar – I'd bought that separately, I didn't mix it with the new harvest. He said that also belonged to the kulaks. They took it all and scattered it over the field of freshly harvested potatoes. I told him, "Look, in the newspaper they say we should gather every last grain of wheat, and you throw everything I have to the wind? They came with 14 carts and took away all the wheat. And then they took me there... and that man, with his sour face, was walking around with a stick in his hand... and he kept on asking me: "So, are you joining or not? I told him: "Go and feed the cows, I didn't have time, you took everything. I managed to get away to feed the cows and then came back..." They told me to sign up! I refused to sign up... I was the last one to join..." [...]

- So how long did you work on the collective farm in the end?

- Not long... I couldn't stand the sloppy work and the underhand dealings that went on there. I helped with the harvest, I worked hard, I bound the sheaths, but then when it came to the weighing, nothing added up. I also hoed the fields, I got a lot done, but I never counted how

much I'd done. In the end I left and went to Sovata, to look after the teacher's children..." (Rostás 2002, 189-190).

Demolition

I heard about the retired factory technician Alexandru Săsăreanu from a colleague for whom he had repaired some taps.

Alexandru Săsăreanu worked his whole life at Malaxa, later known as the 23rd August factory. In his old age he moved in an apartment block at Obor, in Bucharest, and supplemented his pension by doing repairs for people in the block or nearby. His life story was centered around his dream of having a house and the subsequent loss of this house.

- Yes, I first built a small house. I had 180 square meters available, and opposite me my sister had a large garden and a large house. My sister lived in Bucharest, at Vergiliu, and she built her house as somewhere to retire to, but she never got to live there in her old age. The house was meant to be big from the beginning, and it took a lot of money to finish it. She made it all red, I mean from bricks. And the garden was big, too, and right opposite from me. I'd look at it from my yard: it just stood there empty, deserted. And other people had their eye on it, especially after the war – the children's nursery and others. To stop them laying their hands on it, I said to myself I'd plant some trees and make a nice garden out of it. And that's what I did. I didn't mind the extra work, I'd come home from my job and do a bit of gardening, and it went on like that for a few years. But the house was never finished. I sold my little place and bought the apartment on the upper floor from her. But then came the demolition. I didn't get a penny, not a single penny. They came with their system, they started at the end of Line 14; I don't know if you know where it is, just, before the 23rd August factory, at the end of the Pantelimon road. That's where the villages of Pantelimon, Brăneşti and Călăraş start. That's where it began. I thought they'd start from Iancului, meaning I'd have time to work something out before they got halfway. But that didn't happen, they started right there. And they didn't even evaluate the house, what with it having new

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bricks and woodwork, too, top materials had gone into it, glass partitions and all. But it's true, there was nothing on the lower floor. So, they didn't give me anything; "We need the land," they said, "Who gave you the idea to build a house?," "I built it, I said, that's the way we do things, isn't it?" […]

- Where did you move to after they demolished your house?

- Yes, they demolished my house. Demolished it, demolished it. My wife was ill.

- In what year was it demolished?

- In February 1973. Demolition day was approaching, but what to do? I never knew until that day, Mr. Zoltán, where my heart really was. I just didn't know. I was completely overcome, I didn't know what hit me or where I was. And I knew this guy at the 23rd August factory, which used to be Malaxa, heaven knows where he is now, I can't even remember his name. I am sorry. And he sent for me. Everyone was leaving, they were being moved to Drumul Taberei or Berceni, who knows where. And my wife kept saying "I'm not moving, I'm not moving. If I don't move somewhere close by, they can shoot me, but I'm not moving." "Well, I say, but then if everyone's moving out then you might as well move, too. Let's see what comes of it. "I'm not going," she says, "they can shoot me and that's that." She was very – how can I describe it – attached to the place, if you spend your whole life in the same place you get very attached to that place or the country or... Then, one day, after many of the others had already moved out, there were just a few of us left in the neighborhood. Well, they came after us with special warrants. But as I was saying, I can't remember that man's name, I think he's with the Central Committee today. He was at Malaxa, the 23rd August factory, working in the armature section, at the pumps; he was a smart guy, an engineer. And he told me to come and see him. I found him walking around in front of the yard, where I had a high iron fence that I'd bought when they demolished the royal palace – my brother-in-law was an artist at the Romanian Opera in Cluj and he knew people, and I don't know how but he managed to buy part of the fence from the back of the palace. I don't know whether you remember, but it was a nice fence, with square

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bars, and he got 20 meters of it. He put it up in front of the house; it had two large gates and one small one. Everyone would look at it. Anyway, every time this guy in charge of demolitions passed by, whoever he was, I forget his name, he asked who lives there. "Mr Săsăreanu." "And why hasn't he moved out?" "He's still waiting." "What's he waiting for?" "He says he wants to sell." That's how it was back then, if you hadn't paid for an assessment of the value of the house – 100 %, 50 %, 30 %, 20 % – then they just gave you a percentage. Let him have his house and I'll take the land. And for the land I'll give 50 bani. But I didn't even get that much. After a while I saw that everyone was selling and selling, the peasants, demolishing, buying, so I sold what I could, and the fence was sold last. And he was back again, asking around, wanting to know if I'd sold the fence. I told him I had. "What did you get for it?" "Around 15 thousand lei," I tell him. It was a bargain as the fence was worth 60 thousand." And it wasn't my money, it was my sister's, my brother-in-law's money. "You got a good price," he says. "That's the best offer I got," I say. And he left. And let me tell you that they left a real mess after the first demolition. Later they introduced a system. They did assessments, you might have a terracotta stove, for example, or whatever. But for us it wasn't like that.

- And when did you receive your flat?

- In 1973, I came straight from there to here.

- And did you buy the flat?

- No, I didn't buy it, because I no longer needed a home, Mr. Zoltán. I put my heart into that place, I grew tomatoes like that ashtray there. Tomatoes. I grew them myself. I did the digging, the planting, I collected the seeds. So I no longer need a garden, I no longer need… It discouraged me, it, disheartened me, completely demoralized me. I no longer needed anything. Age probably has something to do with it, too, but I was really demoralized.

- I can't have been the age, you can go on working until...

- Isn't that true? I just was totally demoralized. And then there was no point anymore. Let me tell you why. Because here I've got eight different stairwells. Eight. When I got here they were looking for a mechanic and they found me right away. And me, since I missed my work and I didn't want to forget my trade, as that's an important thing in life, isn't it Mr. Zoltán?

- Yes, of course.

- I'll tell you the truth, I get up at six in the morning and I go to bed at nine or ten at night. And I sleep an hour or half an hour at noon, but at least I know I'm alive. When you retire... you'll see, you're still young... when you retire, just going to bed, waking up, going out for a walk... that's no life. It's no life, I tell you. In life you have to work in moderation. In life you have to live in moderation, to drink in moderation, and every kind of life, just like the life of Christ, everything in moderation, if you want to have a good life. Sitting on a bench in Cișmigiu park – that's no life.

- When did you retire?

- In '71.

- So, you found this work within two years?

- Yes. I spent a year back there, doing gardening, and a year and a half later they hired me. And I said, as a pensioner – for I had real difficulties here; all kinds of big administrators came and said "You have a pension and you want a wage too? What do you do with your money, keep it under the mattress?" To which I say "And what about you? Do you have kids? You do. Do you help them? You do. So what do you do with your money? And if I save it, what's wrong with that? What do you want me to do, burn it?" And I say "I'm proud not to have to worry about tomorrow. But don't worry, I won't be taking it with me to the grave! As you're able to work..." For example, I used to get 600 lei, but I can also work for 300 lei. 300 lei! Later they issued some regulations for tenants' associations. A janitor, a cleaning woman, etc. etc. Something had to be done, I tell you, I know that's not what we were talking, but something had to be done. There's this apartment block and let's say you move in there. Then the snow comes, and God knows what else, and you go outside and start digging and sorting things out, and then the people look down on you from

above and start laughing. That's not right. You have to have a janitor or a cleaning woman, you simply have to. As an old man once said: it's been that way since the world came about. There's always been someone to help the captain take off his boots. It'll always be like that, there's no other way. It's the same with the apartment block. Everyone is entitled to their own view, but I think there's no other way. Some things need to be done. An apartment block or house will fall apart if you don't look after it. If you don't take care of it, it'll end up filthy and who knows what else! For example, in my profession... if there's a tap leaking you're going to waste an awful lot of water. If a pipe bursts, the damage is horrific. Not to mention what it can do to someone's home. So some things just have to be done. ICRAL does what it can but it can't keep up. We still haven't developed a system where when a pipe bursts or something is broken you just go to a specific place and report the problem. This doesn't exist. They turn up a week later. Am I supposed to let the water run for a whole week? It's not right. There are certain things I see that need organizing. And so for the last ten years, since I moved here, I've been helping with the apartment block. Maybe I wasn't paid properly for it, but then it's kept me alive, it kept me healthy. If I'd been sick, I wouldn't have been able to do anything. And if I was healthy, but only sat around doing nothing, then I'd be dead by now" (Rostás 2002, 325-328).

Society ladies

During one of my frequent visits to Mihai Pop's home, either to solve editorial issues or simply for the pleasure of spending time with this special family, I spoke about my Multicultural Bucharest project. The professor was enthusiastic about the project, while the inimitable Mrs. Pop, who frequently took part in our discussions, offered to introduce me to Mrs. Elisabeta Goga, née Odobescu.

We met in a double attic that you reached via a dark, narrow and steep staircase. I wondered how Mrs. Goga, 93 at the time, managed to climb and descend those stairs. If you read Secolul Coanei Lizica you will know that my visits to Bunătatea Samariteană Street did not take place out of any sense of obligation, neither on my part, nor on Mrs. Goga's. We began talking, as usual, about her parents and her childhood. She spoke a lot about her family, but even more about the lives of the young ladies she knew in her youth. As a digression from the main topic of conversation, however, she also told me about her daily constant and imperturbable occupation during the socialist period, an occupation that did not change throughout the period of Stalinist terror, the subsequent relative relaxation or the new restrictions that followed.

[…] For 30 years I earned a living. 30 years of giving lessons. It was something I enjoyed. I gave French and English lessons.

- When did you begin?

- When they took everything from me. When I was left like this. I didn't want to have to depend on anyone, so I started teaching in '49. I worked until '79. Then I stopped. I really used to enjoy giving lessons, I'd teach a lot of doctors from the Cantacuzino Institute. There was one doctor who was passionate about genetics who worked in the morgue, I forget his name. There were so many. Then there were the final year students. I should mention that I much preferred boys to girls. The girls were so incredibly prosaic, while the boys were interested in all sorts of other things beside their studies. They were into literature and music; they were eclectic.

- In the '50s, western languages were not fashionable...

- Not so, English was extremely popular. Extremely popular! Every doctor wanted to learn English!

- Even back then?

- Yes. Absolutely. I think I had over 30 from the Cantacuzino Institute. I remember one group had a teacher, a proper teacher, who taught them like you'd teach a class of children. I, as someone who can't stand grammar, I wouldn't teach them any grammar, I'd teach

them the language and vocabulary instead.... The verbs were the only bits of grammar I taught them. And after two months one of these doctors came to me, and I told him to bring some articles he was interested in and we'd read them together.

- They were learning English so they could read the medical literature?

- Yes, and that's what that woman didn't understand. He brought me an article. He was over the moon. Naturally, he didn't understand everything, but it helped him a lot. If he didn't know a word, he'd write it down. Slowly, more and more of them from that group would come to me. And I sent a message to their teacher that she should have them read more medical literature.

- Where did you do your teaching?

- I'd go to them. I'd go to Grozăvești, for example, where I had a few students. But generally I divided them up into neighborhoods; otherwise there was no way I could get from Grozăvești to Dudești. That was the difficult part, all the traveling. I'd give 8 or even 9 lessons a day. I earned well, but I never paid taxes. It was all under the table, it was clandestine work. [laughs].

- So you did clandestine work for 30 years?!

- I think they turned a blind eye. That's what I think. Anyway, sometimes I'd take the tram or the bus, other times I'd go by foot. I had about 4 pupils nearby, on Tunari, and about another 5 on Polonă, so I could combine them.

- So was this all your idea...?

- Yes, but it was probably my calling, as I really enjoyed teaching. And it also allowed me to learn new things I knew absolutely nothing about.

- The other society ladies of your generation, what did they do?

- Most of them went to work in hospitals as nurses. But many of them also taught. That is, apart from my cousin, Marie Florescu [laughs], who was a kind of messenger for some society. She'd even clean the floors, and she'd make all her deliveries by bicycle until she was nearly 80 years old. She was known and liked by all the policemen in the street. One day she was talking to a policeman and a lady came up to her and said: "Are you by any chance the famous Madame Mița the Cyclist? [laughs]. She was something... always caught up in adventure.

- That's impressive.

R.G. : *Yes, there were people who did absolutely anything.*

- And many became nurses. Dina Balș was a nurse, Geta Brăiloiu was a nurse, Mrs. Crăiniceanu, too; there were many. They carried on what they had been doing for the Red Cross. Ileana Cerchez, Mrs. Pop's sister, was also a nurse. And a good one, too. But others taught, a lot of them taught, French and English, like me. German was less in demand, English was the most sought-after. Because they all wanted to go to America, I think that was the reason. So I had a lot of pupils from the Cantacuzino Institute and from the Pasteur Institute, too.

- Wasn't there any question of leaving the country after the Second World War?

- Oh yes, I think the entire country would have left if they could. But many said, if they allowed us to travel, without all these restrictions, it wouldn't even have crossed our minds to leave. My nephew told me that if he had had a decent place to live he would have not left. Many left on these grounds.

R.G.: *There were people who were judged as criminals or who were arrested for some absurd reason.*

- Yes, absurd. For example, if you read Maciu (?) you'd get a few years in prison. There was Lisette Bălteanu. She was sent to prison. There was this man, I don't know his name, who gave philosophical talks at her place. About Plato, and others. And some of those attending the talks were put in prison, including Miss Lisette Bălteanu, who [laughs] read the reason for her imprisonment on her sentence: "For tea with Plato!" She had tea with Plato! You can imagine [laughs] how she laughed! And then there was my nephew's grandmother and another lady of a similar age, and others too, they were also handed six-month prison sentences for visiting the British Library. They were sent to the Danube Canal, to clean potatoes, what with

their being 70-80 year old women.

- My Goodness, even women of that age?

- Yes, they picked them up just as they were leaving... But it was an official library, it wasn't something clandestine. If it had been clandestine... but it was open to the public. And my son-in-law was also sent to the Canal for three weeks for the same thing. But, probably because he never went there, I used to go there to get him architecture journals, so when they saw his name wasn't on the register, then they let him go. He was also sent to the Canal, like those ladies. Many died there. Many peasants, priests, soldiers, lots of them. And even important people were locked away for a few years for listening to Radio Free Europe or other things like that. And then, when the Hungarian revolution happened, for example, people were ready to show their support. At that time lots of students were sent to prison. Here as well as in Cluj. Lots of people." (Rostás 2004, 109-111)

This world was not unfamiliar to me. As a high school pupil in Târgu Mureș I used to visit a countess of Scottish origin, who used to give English lessons. I used to enjoy those lessons, but most of all I enjoyed the stories told by the count, who had been a respected writer and, in particular, a patron of Hungarian literature and theatre in Transylvania. His stories were like short essays, told with humor and with no reference to the situation of his family. I realized sometime later that the people of this class were mostly allocated dwellings in attics or basements. It was in Bucharest as in Târgu Mureș.

From the accounts above it would seem the everyday lives of my interlocutors (subjects of older generations as well as my own) were afflicted by general shortages, lack of heating at home and at work and horrendous public transport system. For me, however, oral history has never represented a means to take refuge in the past, but only a modern and interesting form of research. My older subjects did not see these conversations as something out of the ordinary, either, for the telling of life stories is a social practice. In the 1980s, the communist regime had become so formalized that society would self-regulate without colliding with the authorities. The latter were by then no longer interested in performing witch-hunts, their main concern being to protect public space from "alternative manifestations." Although I knew there was no chance of publishing oral history, I nonetheless tested the vigilance of the cultural authorities, inquiring as to the chances of publishing a book entitled Youth of Yesteryear? I received a prompt and unequivocal answer: Comrade Rostás should better write a book about the youth of today, the builders of multilaterally developed socialism!

And yet, how good it was in the 1980s!

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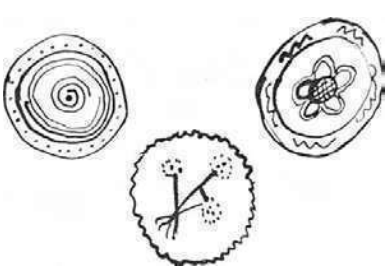

MARTOR

Title: "The Relevance of Memory and the Role of the Witness. A Case Study"

Author: Mirel Bănică

How to cite this article: Bănică, Mirel. 2012. "The Relevance of Memory and the Role of the Witness. A Case Study". *Martor* 17: 219-230.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

The Relevance of Memory and the Role of the Witness. A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to recall, from the standpoint of the witness, the latter stages of Romanian communism, more precisely "agricultural training", the generic term for the voluntary labour provided by thousands of pupils and students during the busiest period of the autumn agricultural season. It was not my intention to perform a socio-political analysis of this phenomenon itself, but rather to revisit the physical practices, the types of sociability, the type of food consumed, etc., while on "agricultural training".

KEYWORDS

Voluntary work, memory of communism, educational system, food, body.

Justification

I composed the text below in 1999, while a master's student at the University of Geneva in Switzerland. It was meant to be part of a more comprehensive personal study, an unrealistic and overly ambitious project to which I gave the provisional French title of Le Dictionnaire amoureux des années tardives du communisme. I wrote only three entries, as a kind of trial run: the ARO off-road vehicle, the Anticipația sci-fi annual and agricultural training. At the time of writing these lines (12 years later, in December 2011) the news stands outside are selling ARO models (miniature cars) that are made in China, the initiative of an Italian multinational media player; the Antici-

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pația annual has become a rare collector's item, and agricultural training is nothing more than a memory.

Without fully realising it at the time, I was only reproducing on an individual level the tendency of the generation to which I belong, those aged between 16 and 26 in December 1989, to talk about what happened in the final years of communism from the standpoint of the witness. On another level, through my more or less organised endeavours, I was recreating a kind of map of the memorial sites of communism, material and immaterial, a de facto confirmation of Pierre Nora's (1984) statement that memory has never known more than two forms of legitimacy: historical and literary. In the absence of any "scientific" undertaking to study communism (which only came much later, partially and incompletely, in the form of the famous 2006 Tismăneanu Report) and of a museum of communism (still not in existence today), my generation undertook a travail de mémoire in the guise of books like *Anii 80 și Bucureștenii* ("The 1980s in Bucharest"), *O lume dispărută,* ("A lost world"), *Născut în URSS* ("Born in the USSR") and *Cartea roz a comunismului* ("The Pink Book of Communism") or international award winning films based on tales from the communist era, such as "12:08 East of Bucharest, "Comrades, Life is Beautiful" and "4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days". These books and films brought the witness and generational memory to the fore as a form of complex legitimisation with a high degree of flexibility vis-à-vis the past, albeit with less clear contours.

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For my part, I assumed the role of the witness in the below text, a text, I repeat, written 10 years after the fall of communism, at a time when I was still to be "contaminated" (in inverted commas, of course) by what I would later read intensively for professional reasons on the sociology of memory. The innocent witness I was at that time had permitted himself to speak openly about what he had "really" lived through, thus allowing himself to avoid the professional strictures to which the historian or sociologist of memory is subject. He thus stands in opposition to the ranks of experts, those who proved unable to predict the fall of communism in 1989, but were later to feast on its remains through their books, colloquiums and seminars. Rereading this stowed away text, a multitude of elements from the past, from fetish objects to sounds, smells and tastes, all long since forgotten today, sprang back to life again, confirming, if confirmation were still needed, Maurice Halbwachs' observation on the witness: his activity is eminently memorial in nature and occurs within a framework of exceptional points of reference, which survive the passing of time.

So, if we accept that memory is a gateway to history, then what type of memory does the witness provide? This is an open question to which this text attempts to provide a partial answer.

Agricultural training

My first contact with "agricultural training" came during childhood. More precisely, one sunny morning in May our lessons were cancelled and Years 1-4 – an expression that, in the language of the day, implied the entire population of pupils aged between seven and ten – were sent out with no explanation to eliminate the rapeseed growing wildly among the corn from seeds left over from previous years.

The memory of my first day of agricultural training is still fresh in my mind, despite the intervening years: the green cheek of the cornfield pockmarked by yellow patches of rapeseed flowers, the oppressive heat of that late spring (we were all extremely thirsty), and the thorns and blistered hands at the end of the working day. I try to imagine today a group of 20 ten-year-old children from the West, or even rural Romania, where hard physical labour still exists, being forced to perform this ridiculous and pointless task, their palms full of splinters from the dry stems of the plants. Impossible.

To date no one has written a serious history of what for decades the Romanians called agricultural training, an expression which entered the vocabulary of millions of people. And I doubt this will ever happen, mainly on account of the inherent difficulties related to this kind of subject: the destruction or burning of the CAP (Agricultural Production Cooperative) archives in December 1989, lack of interest, a desire to forget as quickly as possible, indifference towards a past deemed to be of no interest, etc. – the common symptoms associated with memory in Romania. Nonetheless, the phenomenon in itself existed and cannot be denied. These lines are nothing but a modest attempt to counter this general disinterest, a message in a bottle adrift on the sea of forgetting. I know what I say may come across as slightly emotional, but any means by which we remember certain traumatising events in our lives requires emotion to trigger the process of remembering. This is hard to explain in words.

The ideological and theoretical roots of agricultural training are relatively easy to identify in the discourse of any regime of a totalitarian hue in terms of building an ideal, "new man", educating him through labour in a climate of supposed general, constructive enthusiasm. The communist regime in Romania was only recycling the traditions of the 1930s in respect of the labour camps of the Legionnaire Movement, followed by Carol II's scout camps and not to mention the wholesale import of Soviet ideology during the 1950s, when the two extreme ideologies of the century combined to give rise to monstrous national hybrids.

Later, at the beginning of the 1980s, all ideological justifications were almost entirely cast aside in favour of the recourse to abundant and, in particular, free labour. Otherwise, what possible ideological or propagandistic explanation could have existed for the infamous hunger trains, as they were called by passengers, in reality train carriages requisitioned to transport the staff of entire factories to their temporary place of work in the fields of the Fatherland? How strange this expression sounds today! Firmly rooted in the "wooden language" of those years (Thousands of pupils and students on the fields of the Fatherland, in big letters, exclaimed the headlines of the newspapers at the time), it retains its power of fascination, that of a lexical "symbol" of a bygone era.

My personal experience is too limited to be able to describe the agricultural training system in all its complexity. I think it worth mentioning that I had the dubious privilege of spending my first school years in Brăila, a county which excelled in its use (or "exploitation", which perhaps better describes the phenomenon) of the free labour of school children in its immense agricultural areas, in particular the famous Great Island of Brăila, a former lacustrine paradise, a natural wonder destroyed by the absurd plans of systematisation and transformed into a symbol of socialist agriculture. Another important aspect was

that each county, via its local overlord, the First Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, had the power to decide the duration of the agricultural training, the number of people taking part, the difficulty of the work to be performed, etc. The arrival of the First-Secretary, Comrade A. L. in this case, inspired fear and awe: an ARO off-road vehicle with silver hub caps was his usual means of transport. When they spotted him on the horizon, the people in the field would start acting strangely: they sprung into action, shouting and yelling, hastening to fulfil their daily quotas. The fear of random punishment and the ruthless exercise of power was overwhelming. Comrade A. L. would never flinch from committing physical violence or throwing people into prison when a sack of corn went missing. Later, after a period of relative obscurity post 1990, he became the mayor of the city of Brăila on the banks of the Danube, during the final years of his life donating generously to the building of new churches and monasteries.

I still recall how, during the famous "National Olympiads" for different subjects that were held around the same time (a form of free intellectual competition during communism, highly competitive and of a high level intellectually, as were the high school and university entrance exams), one of the favourite subjects of discussion among pupils who made it to the final stages at national level was agricultural training itself. Those of us from Brăila county always held the record in terms of the amount of time spent outside the school grounds, i.e. in the fields; it was estimated that between the ages of 10 and 14 (Years 5 to 8), during four years of secondary education we in effect lost an entire school year to the autumn winds and rain. An entire year! This stands to reason, what with the school year beginning around 10th November instead of 15th September, as it should have. How I both envied and loathed the children from Bucharest, Cluj and Brașov, who, with the "confidence" and arrogance of city dwellers, would say to us: "We don't do agricultural training!" We do, we told ourselves, pondering the "equality of opportunity" between the village and the city constantly touted in the socialist Romanian press in those times.

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The "normal" working day began at 7 am,

when we gathered in the school yard and were divided into groups according to classes and subject areas (mathematics/physics, chemistry/biology and mechanics in the case of our school). In exceptional cases – for example, a visit by the President Nicolae Ceaușescu to the Great Island of Brăila – the working day would start even earlier: at 6 am we would meet directly at the docks on the banks of the Danube, from where an antique ferry would transport us to the island in the middle of the river surrounded by gigantic dykes made of earth.

After the teacher in charge of each class (the form teacher) took the register, a general announcement, delivered in a military tone, would sometimes be made to communicate to us the "order of the day", reprimands (e.g. "Pupils X and Y, who damaged the water installation at Cioara farm, had their heads shaved and their marks for good behaviour slashed to a 5") or, only very rarely, praise from the "White House", the local communist party headquarters (e.g. "Class 10A has harvested 12 tonnes of tomatoes in 8 hours, a new county record", etc.). Nothing scared us, nothing motivated us; we were almost perfectly adapted to a system in which individual survival depended primarily on detachment and a minimum of interaction with the party-state.

Later, I realised we had been adopting the behaviour of a zek, a prisoner from the Soviet Gulag, whose only objective was survival, which he achieved by rationing his physical and mental resources. We were applying the tactics described by Varlam Shalamov in "The Kolyma Tales", albeit without having read them at that time. The image that still haunts me is that of some shabby looking adolescents in their "training" clothes (clothes that were constantly passed around within the family); they were skinny and their faces drawn on account of lack of food or time spent studying by the light of a gas lamp or 6V bulb rigged up to a car battery, the consequences of the rationing of electricity. They were all gathered on the concrete platform in the school yard, the place of assembly where registers were taken, an essential element of aggregation in any totalitarian system in which the individual as such ceased to exist, his individuality being cancelled out by the masses of which he was part.

Our outfits all shared something in common: most of us had long, dark green shoulder bags. In the mid-1980s, the working people were given gas masks for use in a guerrilla war, the war of the entire nation against an enemy never clearly defined in the official propaganda. The bags in which the gas masks came were extremely practical and functional, and it was these we used for school: the compartment meant for the activated charcoal filter was the perfect place for that all important "bottle of water"; the durable, wide jute strap left no marks on your shoulder; and it was easy to clean from the dust and dirt accumulated from a day's work in the fields. It should be noted that plastic bottles were still unheard of in Romania at the time. The first time I saw a plastic bottle was in the autumn of 1990 – brought back from Turkey, filled with an orange, very sweet liquid. I mention this because finding the right water bottle – not too large, not too small, not too heavy, not too light – was a formidable challenge and our survival in the heat of the sun depended directly on this diminutive object.

After the register was taken, the class would split into two unequal groups. The first of these, containing approximately two thirds of the class, sometimes more, was boarded onto busses –another expression I recall now vividly, after having forgotten it for many years, and which almost writes itself. The other group was made up of the medical exemptees. I envied them terribly, for the "exemptees" got special treatment that was far more lenient than that of the majority: they would sort seeds for AGROSEM or pretend to clean the school yard or laboratories. They would be home by around 2 pm, leaving them plenty of time to revise their maths and physics courses, the two main subjects that came up in the difficult university entrance exam and which took up most of our time. Theoretically, the status of "exemptee" meant

the pupil in question was suffering from a serious physical condition that stopped him or her from performing heavy physical work. Only that this rule was always abused, a common practice in Romania. The "exemptees" were mainly made up of the children of the party secretaries and the managers of local food stores, shoe and clothing warehouses, and – interestingly, for we read a great deal in those days – book shops. Reading books was a form of breathing freely, an act committed against the surrounding system, pervaded as it was with the cult of personality of Nicolae Ceauşescu.

The buses that took us to the fields surrounding the city, some 25-30 km from the centre, were in most cases "requisitioned" from the city's public transport system. Dirty, the windows covered by layer upon layer of dry mud and fitted with badly tuned engines, they spat out clouds of thick, oily and sticky smoke that lent a bluish-purple colour to the morning air of our adolescent years, during which we would go without sufficient sleep whenever we were summoned to serve our country through our labour. One special type of bus had two enormous metal cylinders containing liquefied gas on the roof (you'd be forgiven for mistaking them for two cruise missiles), a prototype that was not long in service owing to the high risk of explosion, genuine bombs on wheels! Later, when I saw Rosselini's neo-realist film "Germany Year Zero", I spotted similar buses, with gas cylinders on the roof, the same as in Romania in the 1980s, on the streets of a Berlin destroyed by bombs in 1846-47. In a private conversation, a driver working on the Bucharest to Geneva coach route told me that when he first started working as a driver he also drove that hybrid type of bus. The gas system was badly designed and mounted. Often the drivers would take the buses to the edge of the city, where they were safe and far from any open flames. There they would open the valve on the cylinders and let the hissing gas escape. This allowed them to report back that the gas had been consumed efficiently and that the innovation was of "great value". Last year, on a short trip to Brăila, I encountered one of the last survivors of that "golden era" still in use: dilapidated and with chipped paint but covered in garish advertisements for second-hand Turkish double glazing, this old communist termite was still transporting passengers along route no. 4, which crosses Brăila from one end to the other. The gas cylinders had long since been dismantled but on the roof you could still see the remnants of the U-shaped fixture that held them precariously in place, just like the system for which they had become a symbol.

There were also occasions when we were driven further afield in the famous "Carpați" trucks belonging to the army. I will never forget one of the more dangerous practical jokes the driver played on us, albeit this was nothing compared with what awaited us later while on obligatory military service. A brave young driver from the Romanian army took the decision to cross an enormous potato field transversally and at great speed, instead of along the furrows, as would have been normal. There were around 20 of us in the back: we tried to hold on to the sides of the truck, but in vain. Our precious gas mask bags were scattered about the field and our faces left bruised from the violent impacts with the truck's shuttering. At the end of the journey, the people who had played this joke on us, the army driver and his superior, treated us to the imbecilic and impersonal laughter of all men in uniform, while we could only cry out of fear and pain. Perhaps, without our knowing it, we had been put through a special kind of initiation rite. We were 15 at the time; all born in socialist Romania.

Another vivid memory takes me back to 1987, when we were taken by ferry to the Great Island of Brăila, Romania's infamous agricultural region, one Sunday in the month of November in order to load barges with mountains of maize that had already begun to rot in the cold rain of autumn. That morning there was an extremely dense fog hanging over the river, very little light and the cold and sharp air ripped mercilessly through our

skimpy, unsuitable clothing. The sound of the horn from the boat overloaded with human beings and trucks ripped its way through the tender flesh of the fog: booh, booh... Suddenly, out of the primal soup of fog and Danubian waters, there appeared the prow of an immense tow boat towing a convoy of barges that was heading straight for us. But for the presence of mind of the captain of the ferry (who immediately changed course) and an incredible dose of luck, a new catastrophe would have occurred. At the infamous Cotul Pisicii, just two months earlier, a collision between a Bulgarian tow boat and a passenger ship had caused 215 fatalities in what was the largest ever shipping disaster on this river, something carefully covered up by the authorities at the time.

What did the work we did involve? Mostly we picked vegetables and fruit meant for "export" to the European Community and the Soviet Union. Over a period of four years, we harvested tonnes of peppers, carrots, tomatoes, strawberries, apricots and... water melons. Yes, water melons, too, for socialist Romania at the time was a great exporter of water melon seeds [sic]. One of the more fun and popular tasks we had was the "bursting of the melons": into a primitive grinding machine, which made a terrible noise as if it were in desperate need of oiling (much later I was to hear the same metallic scraping sound in Fribourg, in a museum about Jean Tinguely and his modern art installations), we would throw giant melons (10-12 kg) to extract the mass of shiny black seeds. I also recall line after line of school children, excited at the sight of the refreshing golden red flesh of the melons stored in the shade of a barn, seated at long rough wooden tables, each awaiting the giant portion of melon he or she was entitled to. This was totally free, of course, for our task was only to separate out, by eating, the precious black seeds that would remain on the table at the end. A human machine for separating seeds, a living machine, an Orwellian metaphor for the entire society at that time. The most "ecological" of production techniques, even if we knew

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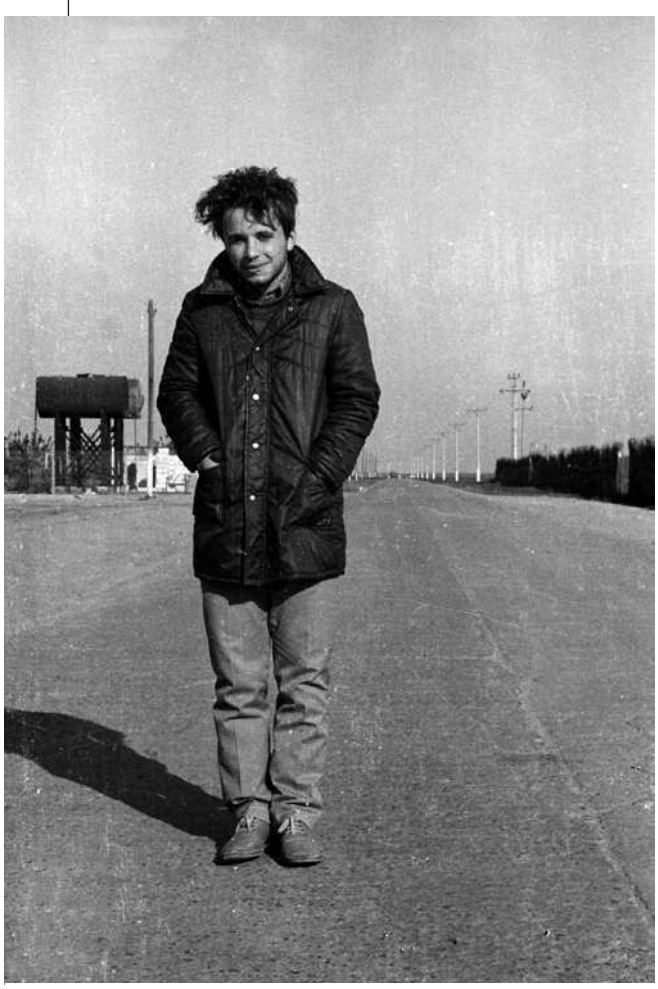
nothing of such notions in those days. The rest of the time it seemed we were performing only ridiculous and futile work, work that never seemed to end, just like the open fields before our eyes.

I hated picking tomatoes. Tonnes, tens of tonnes of tomatoes. My class was the holder of an unwanted record: 30 children had managed to pick 12 tonnes of tomatoes in one day, a record which later would be the cause of much unpleasantness, in that we would be mentioned during the order of the day as "production leaders", something which was met with ironic gazes from the other children. The sharp juice of squashed tomatoes dripped out from all over – from the buckets, trucks and

trailers, aggravating our skin already sore from the work of picking. Years later I find it hard not to wonder as to where all these huge quantities of vegetables were shipped to, given their almost total absence from the domestic market. What's more, when I buy tomatoes in supermarkets in the West, nicely wrapped in plastic like giant medicines and professionally lit by halogen spotlights mounted above the shelves, I search desperately for products that are "Made in Spain" or "Made in Marocco", and not in Holland, where they ripen under the artificial light of neon bulbs. I frantically seek out something with an iota of taste to it, a ray of sunlight absorbed within it, something that resembles the tomatoes from the fields of my adolescence. In vain. A vacuum of taste, forms with no substance – what a horrible sensation!



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I do not mean here to attempt an act of historical recovery or to praise "socialist agriculture". I am only trying to say that I am convinced I will never again eat fruit and vegetables like in those times, even if this country is still able to produce them. Judging by Western standards today, these were "bio" crops, cultivated in the midst of nature, without artificial light or the excessive use of chemical substances. None of this survives. Today, the former state-owned farms boast only a handful of miserable corn fields, dried out by drought and wind, traversed by carts pulled by skeletal horses. Even if Romania joins the EU, the old model of agriculture will not be reinstalled, for the model proposed by a unified Europe is based on quantity, uniformisation and maximum profits – not to mention the madness of genetic engineering in recent years that is being imposed on poor countries.

The lunch break was a precious moment of the working day. The difficulties faced by families in acquiring basic food stuffs was also visible in what the children ate: there was a predominance of zacuscă (a Romanian vegetable spread), fried fish caught in lakes and the Danube, canned food (rarely meat, which was hard to come by), boiled eggs, earth-coloured biscuits... all accompanied by the vegetables and fruit we found in the fields in abundance. I recall with great pleasure how we would roast potatoes in the hot ashes left over from the burning of the giant heaps of weeds removed from the potato crops. The pleasant heat the roast potatoes gave off when we held them in our freezing hands, their wonderful taste and the conviviality of a shared lunch are still fresh in my memory and perhaps constitute the most pleasant moments from those times. Occasionally, when working for a wealthier agricultural cooperative, if the president were nice he would send us our "lunch" by horse and cart. One such occasion remains imprinted in my memory: enormous loaves of bread made of pure wheat, two kilos each, plus jars of sweet-smelling apricot jam made on site. Drinking water was also brought to us by

cart, in large aluminium recipients or wooden barrels swelling from all the humidity. Most of the time we avoided drinking this water, using instead to wash ourselves, but when there was a heat wave we would easily forget our fear of germs and bacteria and drink every last drop.

Pen knives or other fancier knives handmade in factories by acquaintances or parents, bizarre looking recipients, special vessels made of steel or aluminium for transporting food, and even a bottle or two of Pepsi or Coca Cola (the most luxurious thing we could ever dream of in terms of food logistics) would make us an object of envy at lunch time. Much later I would discover the explanation for our desire to collect and display these symbols of capitalist consumerism, which at the time we couldn't possibly comprehend. Sociologists have invented a brutal, scientific term to describe this bizarre behaviour: "poor man's commodity fetishism". Yet for us it was not a matter of fetish objects, but something useful and pleasant. Also much sought-after were the tall jars with metal lids used to sell Greek olives that were perfect for storing zacuscă. The OBJECT itself still retained its main functional value and was naturally recycled like in any traditional society still untouched by consumerism. Not to mention our innocence in matters of advertising messages – we were extremely sensitive to the attractive red of a Coca Cola bottle, purchased with hard currency in a special shop in Constanța, a mythical drink to which we attributed miraculous powers. I wonder what role this "breuvage miraculeux" played in the fall of communism?

I never knew who the beneficiaries of our labour were. One of the paradoxes of the Romanian system was that its agricultural sector produced enormous quantities of food stuffs but these were only found in extremely small proportions on the local market. We could always tell immediately if a batch of fruit or vegetables was intended for export from the special care taken over the quality of the packaging, the way in which the goods were transported and the strict selection of the produce, even in the field. Every pepper was carefully selected and wiped clean by us, high school students, with a soft cloth. A further stage of quality control followed, and the vegetables were cleaned again before being carefully placed in cardboard boxes with special protective compartments to prevent the goods from

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suffering even the slightest of knocks during transport.

There were many stories as to the destinations of these pampered products, including that Romania was using its agricultural produce to pay for the acquisition of The Dolphin, a worn out submarine purchased from the Soviet navy at the beginning of the 1980s. Another urban legend of the time, one which helped us feel better about all the hard work we were putting in, had it that a Romanian long-distance lorry driver or sailor, on reaching the Federal Republic of Germany (in Romanian shortened to RFG; another forgotten label from those times) spotted a queue of dozens of people outside a grocer's shop, a symbol of abundance in our image of the West. On closer inspection, what does he see? They were selling apples straight out of boxes on which it said "Made in Romania". The naivety of those days! Today I am convinced that these motivational stories were dreamt up in the psychology labs of the former Securitate. According to other such rumours, spread by whisper, young high school pupils who wrote their addresses with a pen on the inside of the boxes would later receive in the post the much-coveted signed photographs of top footballers from Germany, France and Holland, the countries our products were believed to be exported to.

The working day would normally come to an end around four thirty in the afternoon. It was not uncommon for us to be simply forgotten, left on our own in the fields, an oversight on behalf of those in charge of our transport, but also because of the enormous numbers of children engaged in mandatory work. When this happened we would wait patiently beneath the trees lining the road for the arrival of a bus or truck. In most cases it was evening before we got home. By then the electricity would have been cut off for rationing purposes. The same was true of running water. The members of our families would return from the fields dirty, hungry and ill-tempered. Later I would try to find the best image to describe the totalitarian regime I lived under. The best way to describe it is in terms of the atmosphere of those autumn evenings when night fell quickly on the heavy exhaust fumes of the buses, on the swarms of dirty human beings, all dressed the same, confused and disillusioned. Not to mention the sound of the sirens from the "Progresul" excavator factory, punctuating the evenings with their tired gasps. A Romania of tired sirens – this is my picture of the final years of communism.

In the afternoons we had obligatory supplementary maths, physics, chemistry and biology lessons, depending on which career you wanted to follow (doctor or engineer, there wasn't much choice), haunted by the spectre of failure, which for us meant failing the university entrance exam. The electricity was restored late in the evening, pointlessly, around ten or ten thirty, when we were already in bed, ready for another day's agricultural work, but not before we had prepared our meagre lunches and placed them in our precious gas mask bags.

What does the memory retain of those eight years of agricultural training? This is a hard question to answer. In my case, I continue to wonder at the behaviour of adolescents from the West: superficial, irresponsible, extremely free – in both the good and bad sense of the word. Some time ago I saw some high school pupils in Geneva protesting in the city centre against "the exploitation of children from the entire world", without themselves having ever done a day's work in their lives. Nostalgia, too, great nostalgia. "Tomorrow is never as good as yesterday", the Romans would say. I still need to identify the object of this nostalgia – but that is something I am unable to do. However, I am able to identify things I do not regret, the first being the lack of hope in those days, despite our living in a system borne of the hope that one fine day the world would be a better and equitable place.

The political police, those two hours of television per day, the intimacy borne of the lack of electricity and the books purchased with great difficulty from bookshops – all contributed to the development of an inner life, a

special feeling of camaraderie that today no longer exists, a fragile micro-climate in which basic human values were better protected than today. And one more thing, in lieu of a conclusion, nothing compares to potatoes roasted in hot ashes, eaten with salt in the damp chill of an early November's day on the banks of the Danube laboriously carrying the unwanted waters of Europe downstream before gently depositing them in the Black Sea. The rest is to be found in the archives.

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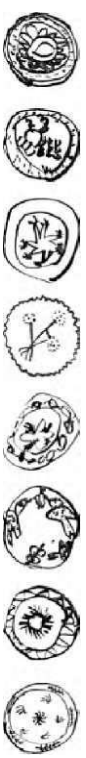
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: This paper is supported by the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development (SOP HRD) and financed by the European Social Fund and the Romanian Government under contract no. POSDRU/89/1.5/S/56815.



MARTOR

Title: "Autoportrait d'un héros"

Author: Mirela Florian

How to cite this article: Florian, Mirela. 2012. "Autoportrait d'un héros". *Martor* 17: 231-240.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/

Autoportrait d'un héros

Mirela Florian

Mirela Florian, chercheuse au Musée National du Paysan Roumain

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article contient des fragments de l'entretien effectué avec Neculai Burlui lors d'une collecte de données dans la commune de Bîrseşti, département de Vrancea (dans le cadre de la recherche Vie de famille sous le communisme, effectuée entre 2009 et 2012, à laquelle ont participé Maria Mateoniu, Vlad Columbeanu, George Turliu, Mihai Gheorghiu, Ana Pascu, Dan Turcu, Irina Ornea, Oana Mateescu. Le témoignage de Neculai Burlui parle de la confiscation des terres, de la révolte des paysans de Vrancea contre les nationalisations, des représailles qui ont suivies, de la vie dans les prisons politiques, de l'absence des liens avec la famille, de la participation à la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale sur les deux fronts.

MOTS-CLEFS

Révolte, prison, famille, guerre, trahison, liberté, mémoire

Neculai Burlui est un héros, dans le sens classique du terme. Une personne qui a survécu non seulement à la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, mais aussi aux prisons communistes. Il a, donc, beaucoup à raconter, car il a été le sujet ou le témoin de nombreux événements ; il possède, de plus, une mémoire remarquable, il relate ainsi avec exactitude et précision les circonstances, le lieu, le moment et la manière dont se sont déroulés les faits. Sa vie, qu'il a résumée en seulement une heure et vingt minutes, en parlant surtout des moments essentiels, a été profondément marquée par le passage du régime politique démocrate (la monarchie parlementaire) au régime prolétaire, en 1947. L'entretien a été enregistré en octobre 2010, dans la cour de sa résidence de Bîrseşti, dans le département de Vrancea, quand il avait 92 ans.

Neculai Burlui a commencé à raconter, d'une manière assez abrupte, la plus importante période de son existence. En 1950, il a participé à une des révoltes de paysans contre la collectivisation, peu de temps après la confiscation, par le régime communiste, des monts Vrancea, de ses vastes forêts et pâturages, qui étaient la propriété commune des villageois sous la forme d'associations conjointes déjà à l'époque d'Etienne le Grand [XVème siècle, NDT]. Les paysans de plusieurs villages de Vrancea, dont Bîrseşti, Paltinu, Nereju, Soveja, ont organisé un renversement des autorités communistes de la région pour la nuit du 23 au 24 juillet. Les représailles ont été sans pitié , d'abord contre leurs familles, puis contre ceux qui ont participé à l'opération et ont réussi à se cacher pendant peu de temps.

- Cela s'est passé comme ça, parce qu'en 1948 les communistes ont lancé la nationalisation et ont pris nos montagnes. Là-bas nous avions des animaux, des moutons, des vaches, c'est là-bas que nous les gardions, c'est avec ça qu'on vivait. Pas seulement chez nous au village, mais dans toute cette région de la Vrancea. Donc, on a parlé, parce qu'on n'a pas trouvé où mettre les animaux et qu'est-ce qu'on pouvait faire, nous sommes allés à Focşani, aux autorités départementales, pour qu'ils nous rendent les montagnes. Inutile. Ils ne nous ont rien donné. Nous avons commencé à mettre les moutons autre part, à en vendre une partie. Personne n'en voulait. Alors on a décidé, tous ceux-là de Vrancea, sept, huit ou dix communes, le nombre qu'on était, de leur demander de nous rendre les montagnes, parce qu'elles étaient à nous. En 1504, après la bataille de Războieni, Etienne le Grand était

venu ici chez nous, à Dumbravă, il avait été défait par les Turcs, et Baba Vrîncioaia lui avait donné ses fils et tous leurs amis, parce qu'il y avait encore des bergers dans les montagnes. Ensuite, Etienne le Grand nous a donné ces montagnes.

La Securitate [la police politique, NDT] en a eu vent. C'est-à-dire que nous nous disions qu'il fallait y aller, mais la Securitate l'a appris. Elle arrêtait une personne après l'autre, elle la gardait une semaine ou un mois emprisonnée, puis elle la délivrait, elle lui faisait de fausses promesses et comme ça elle a appris à peu près qui étaient les chefs et ce qu'ils préparaient. De nombreuses personnes ont été arrêtées et ont donné des informations. Puis, en 1950, le soir du 23 juillet, nous avons pensé aller les voir, parce qu'où pouvait-on aller ? On a commencé et on a arrêté les communistes d'ici. On les a pris et on les a mis dans une cave.

- Les communistes étaient nombreux ?

- C'étaient ceux qui avaient des postes à responsabilité. Nous sommes allés à la police. J'y suis allé, j'ai été désigné, et nous avons arrêté le chef de poste, le président de la coopérative et quelques personnes importantes, ceux à qui il fallait que tu donnes le quota, que tu donnes... telle ou telle chose. Puis on les a regroupés dans une cave. L'un d'eux a menti que nos hommes étaient en relation avec l'aviation de Tecuci, mais ce n'était pas vrai. Il a dit que dans la nuit du 23 l'aviation viendrait et nous sauverait. Elle n'est pas venue. Nous, les villages de Paltinu, de Nereju, on les a arrêtés. Ensuite on a téléphoné à Vidra, au secteur , comme on disait à l'époque, pour voir ce qui se passait là-bas. Il y avait des gens qui devaient faire la même chose que nous, mais ils n'ont rien fait, ils ont été lâches. Quelqu'un a répondu : ici la Securitate. Quand on a entendu que c'était la Securitate, on n'a plus rien fait, il commençait à faire jour et on a fuit dans les montagnes, on s'est replié, car on avait encore des moutons, des bergeries là-bas. Nous sommes restés le temps qu'on a pu, quelques jours, une semaine. Le Securitate est venue le lendemain matin, elle a cueilli les parents, les jeunes, les femmes de la famille.

- Vous étiez marié ?

- Oui, j'étais marié et j'avais un enfant. Ils les ont battus, torturés, mais eux ils ne savaient pas où nous étions.

- Votre épouse a souffert ?

- Evidemment ! Mais ils ne l'ont pas battue à ce moment-là, ils l'appelaient, ils la gardaient une demie journée, parce qu'elle était enceinte du deuxième enfant, au huitième mois et elle devait accoucher, ils ne l'ont pas battue à ce moment-là, mais ils l'ont battue après, au bout de trois, quatre, cinq ans. Elle a été enfermée dans la cave quand l'un de nous s'est évadé d'ici. A un moment donné la Securitate de Braşov est venue. Ils sont arrivés brusquement. Ils ont pris quelques-uns d'entre nous, deux se sont enfuis et ils ont tiré avec les pistolets, ils les ont blessés et ils les ont pris. Il y avait une femme qui a été blessée, elle est vivante et elle pourrait vous dire comment elle a été prise.

- Des femmes ont fuit aussi avec vous dans les montagnes ?

- Il y avait un vieux qui avait une fille et un garçon. Il a fuit lui aussi dans les montagnes et il a emmené la grand-mère et la femme avec lui. La femme a aussi emmené sa fille. Le garçon avait déjà fuit avec son père. Et ils l'ont trouvée là-bas à la bergerie. Ils ont entouré la bergerie. Ils l'ont blessée. Les autres les ont entendu plus tôt et ils sont partis dans la forêt, mais elle est restée en arrière, ils ont tiré et ils l'ont blessée à la jambe, elle est tombée ; ensuite sa mère est revenue et ils l'ont arrêtée. Plus haut, ils ont blessé une autre personne de cette famille. Ils les ont pris, ils les ont emmenés à Braşov et ils les ont enfermés deux ou trois mois jusqu'à ce que nous nous rendions compte qu'ils ne les laissaient pas sortir, qu'ils continuaient à les battre, alors nous sommes venus et nous nous sommes rendus.

- C'était quand, au bout de combien de temps dans les montagnes ?

- Au bout de quelques mois. Parce qu'on n'avait nulle part où aller. Plus loin [de l'autre côté de la montagne, NDT] il y avait Braşov, l'armée et la Securitate contrôlaient, par où aller ? On n'avait nulle part où aller. Il a fallu nous rendre. Le 23 juillet on a fuit dans les montagne et on est restés là-bas jusqu'en septembre.

- Et vous viviez de quoi là-bas ? Comment faisiez-vous ?

- Nous allions à une bergerie, il y en avait encore par là-bas, on prenait un peu de nourriture [des bergers, NDT], parfois ils nous en donnaient, parfois on en prenait comme ça. Et au bout d'un moment ils sont partis eux aussi et on est restés seuls. On n'avait plus de nourriture.

- Les gens du village ne venaient pas vous en apporter ?

- Une personne de la Securitate est venue. Le 5 septembre ils m'ont pris d'ici, de chez moi, c'était une autre maison, toujours ici. Maintenant c'est cette maison, mais avant il y en avait une autre. Trois personnes de la Securitate sont venues, ils m'ont emmené à la mairie, et ils m'ont demandé avec qui j'étais, qui avait organisé, et pourquoi j'avais fait ça ? Leurs enquêtes. J'ai dit ce que je savais, ce que j'avais planifié, ce que j'avais fait. Parce que certains qui avaient fait des choses ont été battus. Et j'ai gardé la même déclaration. Ils m'ont gardé un an à Galați, pour faire des recherches sur mon cas, à la Securitate et au pénitencier. Le pénitencier de Galați était leur dépôt, parce qu'ils avaient réuni 600 familles de Vrancea qui s'étaient soulevées à l'époque. Il y avait environ 70-80 familles d'ici, du village. Et ils nous ont gardés un an pour faire des recherches. En 1952, ils nous ont jugés. Ils nous ont fait les papiers. Ils sont venus et ils nous ont donné la condamnation. Nous sommes seulement restés en cellule. Ils nous ont donné la sentence le lendemain du procès. Ils en ont condamné cinq à mort : Costică Manaliu, Victor Manaliu, Vasile Cojocaru, le colonel Strîmbei, l'ex commandant du régiment Rîmnic et un étudiant de Soveja, Gheorghiță Bălan, de notre groupe. Ils les ont emmenés. Quand ils sont venus leur donner la sentence, ils ont amené les tziganes avec des marteaux, avec des chaînes, ils les ont enchaînés séparément et ils les ont mis en cellule séparément. Puis ils leur ont dit de faire une demande à la Cour Suprême, à Bucarest. Et c'est ce qu'ils ont fait. Et ils les ont gardés comme ça, avec la demande en suspens, la réponse n'est pas venue immédiatement, mais au bout de six mois, et j'ai compris qu'ils auraient été exécutés en 1952-1953. Où, ça je ne l'ai pas appris. On disait qu'à Jilava, on disait que là-bas, où ils pouvaient être, je ne me souviens plus. Nous, ils nous ont emmenés à l'usine.

- Vous quelles condamnations vous avez reçue ?

- J'ai été condamné à vingt-deux ans de travaux forcés, dix ans d'interdiction de droits civils et dix ans d'interdiction. Ils n'ont pas confisqué mes biens parce que je n'avais pas eu de rôle, j'étais marié alors, mais je n'avais pas de terres à mon nom, elles étaient au nom de mes parents et ils n'avaient rien à me prendre. Et j'ai tiré quatorze ans, du 5 septembre 1950 au 16-17 septembre 1964, quand Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej a fait passer le décret et qu'il nous a libérés.

- Votre épouse a pu vous rendre visite ?

- On n'avait le droit à rien, même pas au parloir. En 1955, ils nous ont emmenés à la mine, j'ai travaillé à la mine de plomb de Baia Sprie. Le 22 mai un rocher est tombé. On s'est retrouvés avec un rocher tombé, parce qu'on travaillait à cinq cents mètres sous terre.

- Et le garçon qui est né, vous avez réussi à le voir, avant ou après ?

- Non. Je ne l'ai pas vu du tout. Il a vécu un an et demi, il est tombé malade, ils ne leur ont pas donné de médicament, rien, et il est mort à un an et demi. Et je n'ai retrouvé que le grand, qui avait trois ans quand j'ai été arrêté. En 1964, au moment du décret, ils nous ont libérés. On nous a ramenés le 16 avril de Botoșani, où on nous avait gardés quatre ans, de 1960 à 1964. On nous a dit de ne pas dire où nous avions été, ce qu'on avait fait, rien.

- Même pas à votre épouse ?

- Même pas. A personne.

- Vous n'aviez aucune nouvelle de votre épouse, des lettres ?

- En 1955, ils nous ont retirés de la mine, du travail, quatre-vingts personnes, ils nous ont enchaînés deux par deux et ils nous ont emmenés à Oradea Mare. Et ils ont aussi amenés des personnes d'autres endroits pour compléter. Ils ont dit qu'ils regroupaient les

sympathisants des partis paysan et libéral qui avaient fait de la politique. Ils te demandaient quelle politique. J'étais jeune, je ne faisais pas de politique. Ils nous ont amenés de partout et ils ont regroupé environ quatre ou cinq cents détenus jusqu'à remplir la prison d'Oradea Mare. On a fait la grève, j'avais fait aussi la grève à Baia Sprie, J'ai demandé à entrer en contact avec ma famille, laissez-moi communiquer avec ma famille. Là-bas nous travaillions, ils nous donnaient une carte, selon le travail qu'on abattait. Le pénitencier prenait quatre-vingts pour cent, parce qu'il avait fait un contrat avec la mine, c'est-à-dire avec le Ministère des mines et ça se payait, quand on travaillait. Tu devais faire la norme de travail,

d'une tonne de minerai qui devait être extrait et sorti de la mine par chaque détenu qui travaillait dans la mine, on est arrivés à cinq tonnes. Nous étions huit cents dans la mine, quatre cents travaillaient de jour, quatre cents de nuit.

Et ils nous ont prévenus en 1964, quand ils nous ont libérés, de ne dire à personne où nous avions été, avec qui, ce qu'on avait vu, etc. De 1964 à 1989, la Securitate nous a appelé au bout de deux semaines, d'un mois, de cinq mois. Quelqu'un venait le soir pour nous annoncer demain matin tu prends ta carte d'identité et à six heures tu es au poste de police. Ici un ou deux officiers de police venaient. En fait il n'était jamais seul. Il nous demandait avec qui tu as parlé ce mois-ci, où tu as travaillé cet été... Pendant toute cette période. Quand ça leur venait, alors ils nous appelaient. La dernière fois la milice m'a appelé ici en 1989, avant novembre, vers octobre comme ça. Et ils nous ont appelés ici à la Securitate. Nous étions quatre. J'ai vu qu'une voiture venait. Nous on y est allés à six heures, vers sept heures une voiture est venue. Un civil et un lieutenant de la Securitate sont descendus, comment tu t'appelles, comment tu t'appelles, nous étions quatre, toi tu restes là, toi tu restes là-bas. Ils sont entrés au poste de la milice. Là-bas, dedans, ils ont amené des sacoches qu'ils tenaient à la main ; ils les ont amenées à la dame de la cuisine, ils sont sortis et ils nous ont demandés à chacun : tu es allé où cet été, tu as travaillé où, tu as parlé avec qui ? Et cet été-là moi j'étais à Ivănceşti, au pâturage avec les moutons. Et une personne qui était mon camarade, camarade mon cul ! Il m'a dénoncé : il rencontrait en soirée untel, untel, des gens biens. Et ils m'ont demandé : de quoi tu as discuté avec Nicuşor, avec Dima, avec untel ? Je répondais que je ne savais pas, que je n'avais pas discuté, que non rien, et ils prenaient l'autre personne, ils me mettaient de côté. Et ils m'ont gardé toute la journée.

Avant ça, j'en avais vu un dont le père avait été arrêté avec moi et condamné à dix-huit ans. Il est mort à Gherla, à Jilava, où ils ont pu l'emmener, je ne sais pas, mais je l'ai laissé à Gherla. Et lui il habitait à côté de la milice, La milice ici et lui avait sa maison derrière. Quand ils sont venus, ceux-là sont descendus de la voiture, le civil est passé devant le poste de gendarmerie, où est la mairie maintenant, et il est sorti lui aussi de sa maison qui était à côté de la milice. Il a serré la main du civil. Je suis allé à côté d'eux après, j'étais plus près, c'était aussi mon cousin : hé cousin, ils nous ont appelé ici, pourquoi ils nous ont appelé ? Mais pourquoi ils nous avaient appelé ici : des ouvriers d'une usine de Braşov avaient fait un mouvement. Il y a eu quelque chose en 1987, mais il y a eu aussi quelque chose en 1989, avant la Révolution. Le civil est descendu et il a pris près de la rue et il a rencontré mon cousin. Ils ont discuté, je ne sais pas de quoi. Mon cousin est ensuite venu, il est entré dans sa cour, le civil est venu. Je dis : Eh, qu'est-ce qu'il disait ? Je voyais qu'il n'était pas chauffeur, je le voyais comme ça, depuis longtemps, j'étais moi aussi un expert en... Il dit : Eh, il est copain avec mon fils, c'est leur chauffeur. C'est tout. Je n'ai seulement pas pu discuter plus que ça. Et ils m'ont gardé toute la journée là-bas et le soir ils ont aussi appelé le maire, c'était le maire de Ne-

grileni. Ils lui ont posé des questions et le maire a dit cela me concernant : il s'est bien comporté, il est allé où il a été appelé avec la charrette, il a payé ses impôts depuis qu'il est revenu, je ne l'ai pas entendu parler. Le maire a bien parlé. Le soir, le dernier [homme de la Securitate, NDT], il m'a fait écrire une déclaration que si je parle encore, s'il arrive que je fasse quelque chose, que je parle encore et je que ne leur dise pas... Puis il m'a donné un pot à encre et de l'encre, je mettais la plume dans le pot, l'encre coulait et la feuille de papier se remplissait d'encre. J'en ai gâché une, deux, trois et il me faisait écrire ce qu'il disait. Le chauffeur, dont ils disaient qu'il était chauffeur, il restait au bureau là-bas, il y avait une vitre et il restait le dos à la vitre et il regardait. Moi j'écrivais une ligne et de nouveau je trempais la feuille, je gâchais la feuille, ce n'est pas bon, prends en une autre, j'en ai gâché environ deux, trois, peut-être quatre. Le chauffeur ne bougeait plus de là-bas, de la vitre, puis il vient et il dit à l'autre, à l'officier, car il était lieutenant de la Securitate : eh, il a dit, ne me retiens pas toute la nuit ici, lui il était chauffeur et maintenant il parlait : eh, ne me retiens pas ici, tu ne vois pas qu'il ne peut pas y arriver, il tremble, de peur, de faim, fais un geste et écris. Alors je me suis rendu compte que mon cousin était en relation avec lui, son fils n'était pas un ami.

- Et vous croyez que votre cousin savait que l'autre était dans la Securitate ?

- Bah bien sûr qu'il savait s'il était leur agent.

- Et vous n'êtes pas allé, par la suite, discuter et questionner votre cousin ?

- On a discuté.

- Et qu'a-t-il dit ?

- Il a fait la grimace, qu'il ne le connaissait pas. C'était une balance, comme on dit, un informateur à eux.

Il a écrit ce qu'il y avait à écrire et il m'a fait comprendre que, si je restais encore une fois à discuter et que je cachais encore quelque chose, quand ils m'appelleraient : tu fais tes adieux, tu emmènes de chez toi tout ce dont tu as besoin car après tu ne reviens pas, on t'emmène et tu ne reviens plus. Et grâce à Dieu ça n'a pas duré longtemps, environ un mois est passé, puis il y a eu le truc avec la Révolution et j'ai été débarrassé d'eux. Jusque là...

- Ça a été pour vous un grand soulagement, non ? Vous étiez heureux, comment ça s'est passé?

- Comment ne pas être content s'ils nous ont laissé en paix ! Avant, quand tu entendais quelque chose à la porte ou quand tu voyais un milicien, un de la Securitate, ton cœur tremblait.

- Quand vous êtes revenu de prison, qu'est-ce que vous avez trouvé à la maison ? Que faisait votre épouse ?

- J'ai trouvé mon épouse, elle m'a fait cette maison, c'est elle qui l'a faite, ensuite c'est moi qui a fait le toit. Nous avions une vieille maison avant. J'ai trouvé mon enfant, je l'avais laissé quand il avait trois ans et dix mois, je l'ai retrouvé âgé de dix-huit ans. Quand je suis arrivé il travaillait sur un chantier, il travaillait lui aussi pour gagner un peu d'argent.

- Donc votre épouse ne s'est pas remariée ?

- Non. Elle a attendu, ici je l'avais laissée, ici je l'ai retrouvée.

- Et puis, d'entre nous tous là, c'est arrivé qu'ils nous ont emmenés à la mine, là-bas à Baia Sprie. De Baia Sprie, au bout de six mois, ils ont ouvert encore deux mines, à Cavnic et à Valea Nistrului. Ils ont pris des détenus d'ici et ils les ont emmenés là-bas, parce que ceux-là connaissaient le travail dans la mine, ils étaient perforateurs. Et ils ont complété avec d'autres personnes. Il y avait des officiers du génie civil, des pontonniers. Puis ils ont pensé à s'évader. Ils ont contacté les officiers, les anciens officiers : le fils du général Pantaze, le général Ciocîltău. Et eux ils ont dit : eh, préparons une évasion. Et des relations se sont formées entre les trois mines. Mais qui les faisaient, parce que personne n'était au courant ?! Bon, il y a eu un ingénieur qui a proposé ça, un aviateur, Vasile Boaru, et lui il s'est présenté clairement en tant qu'ingénieur à la mine, il faisait partie des civils. Maintenant je vous raconte, mais alors on ne pouvait pas raconter, parce qu'on se savait pas, j'ai appris ça par

la suite, moi je ne savais pas ces choses-là. Et lui, l'ingénieur civil, il venait et il amenait du TNT, de la neutralite, des choses qu'on mettait quand on perforait dans la mine, pour faire exploser, pour faire tomber le minerai. Nous on l'éclatait, on le faisait rouler et on l'amenait aux wagonnets. Lui il a fait le lien entre les trois mines, cet ingénieur. A la même heure, à la même date, ils se sont évadés de Nistru et de Cavnic. Chez nous, à Baia Sprie, certains étaient moins courageux et ils ont pensé : par où on sort ? Ceux-là ont fait ça, comment dire, des tuyaux avec du TNT et de la neutralite pour les explosions, et ils ont mis une mèche. Il y avait cinq cent mètres jusqu'à la surface. La sortie était en haut. Ils ont fait les tubes dans la mine et ils les ont chargés, ils ont mis une mèche. Quand le wagon est sorti en haut, la mèche n'était pas assez longue. Le TNT a explosé, la tourelle est partie avec la sentinelle et l'autre wagon est sorti avec eux et ils sont partis. Et c'est comme ça qu'ils se sont évadés le même jour . Chez nous ils ont dit qu'ils sortent par le puits d'aération, il y avait cinq cents mètres, mais il y avait un courant d'air si fort que ça n'a pas été possible... Ils ont renoncé. Mais dans les deux autres mines ça a marché.

- *Et ils se sont échappés ? Ils ont réussi à fuir?*

- Deux d'ici sont arrivés jusqu'à la maison. Un de Tulnici, Brînzaru, et un autre, Cojocaru, qui avait un frère, ils étaient trois frère de la famille Cojocaru dans la prison, il a été condamné à mort et exécuté. Qu'ont dit les officiers-là : bon, nous on part, mais ici il y a des montagnes, parce que la mines était dans les montagnes, prenons des gens de Vrancea, car eux ils connaissent la marche dans la montagne, et ils ont emmené aussi des gens de Vrancea. Ils ont pris quatre personnes de chez nous, les frères Brînzaru, Ion et Gheorghe, Vasile Cojocaru et Simion Cojocaru. Puis ils sont sortis de la mine. L'alarme a été donnée, et comme ils avaient détruit la sortie là-bas, ils ont fuit. Ils ont marché tant qu'ils ont pu ensemble, qui est tombé, qui a fait ceci ou cela, je ne me souviens plus, mais certains sont arrivés à la maison. Six mois après, ils sont arrivés à la maison. Brînzaru est allé chez lui, il avait encore une cousine. Sa femme avait aussi été emmenée. Et son père. Quand il est arrivé, six mois après, le temps que la route a duré, d'où il venait jusqu'à ce qu'il se présente chez sa cousine, et sa cousine a dit à son frère [que Brînzaru était arrivé, NDT]. Et son frère, qu'est-ce qu'il a dit, il est parti, il a parlé avec lui, bienvenue, il a dit, à partir de maintenant je prends soin de toi, je vais à la maison, il a dit, je viens, je t'amène à manger. Il est allé à la Securitate car la Securitate était ici au village. Le soir il l'a remis [à la Securitate]. Il l'a donné. L'autre, Cojocaru, sa femme l'a caché deux ans et quatre mois.

- *Où est-ce qu'elle l'a caché ?*

- Dans la maison. Elle a fait une cave, elle a creusé en dessous d'une pièce, elle l'a caché là-bas. Elle a beaucoup creusé, comme une cave. Elle a transporté [la terre, NDT] sur son dos, je ne sais pas comment elle a fait, mais elle avait une cachette là-bas. Et elle l'a caché deux ans et quatre mois. La Securitate venait, elle posait des questions, elle cherchait. Ils n'ont pas pensé à regarder là-bas. Maintenant, excusez-moi de dire ça, mais des brutes venaient aussi la violer et lui il était en dessous. Elle a souffert deux ans et quatre mois. Des bâtards de chez nous. Mais elle ne pouvait rien faire. Au bout de deux ans et quatre mois la femme : bon Ionică, je n'en peux plus ! Ils me battent sans arrêt ! Et il a dit : je pars et il est parti. Il s'est rendu au bout de deux ans et quatre mois.

- *Après être rentré, après ce que vous avez vécu, qu'est-ce que vous avez fait pour survivre, pour vivre ?*

- Quand je suis revenu à la maison, ma femme avait encore une vache et un veau. On a vendu ce veau, on a emprunté de l'argent à un de mes frères et on a acheté un cheval. Un voisin utilisait la vache avec la charrue. Et mon frère avait une bonne situation, il avait des moutons, une centaine de moutons, il avait une bergerie à Ivănceşti, où il pouvait rester, parce qu'ils ne leur avaient pas donné le droit d'aller dans la montagne, et il m'a donné lui aussi de l'argent et j'ai encore acheté un cheval. J'ai récupéré une vieille charrette, j'ai travaillé chez un forgeron, je l'ai arrangée et j'ai fait une charrette à deux chevaux. Je cueillais des fruits

à l'automne, parce que Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej avais émis un décret pour que les producteurs de céréales, de fruits, puissent les transporter à dos d'homme, avec une charrette, avec une voiture, avec n'importe quoi. Et chez nous il y avait beaucoup de fruits, on faisait sécher les prunes, on avait des pommes et on remplissait une charrette et on allait à Berteşti, en aval de Brăila et à Brăila, une semaine en charrette, on vendait les fruits et on ramenait du maïs. On a vécu comme ça jusqu'à un moment donné.

Ensuite, j'ai eu moi aussi quelques moutons et j'ai construit une bergerie. Un frère à moi est mort et je l'ai remplacé à Ivănceşti. J'ai travaillé là-bas environ quatre ou cinq ans. Je rassemblais les moutons du village là-bas, je mettais mes bergers au travail, je les payais, et avec les moutons et la bergerie on a vécu jusqu'en 1989. A partir de 1989 je n'avais plus rien à faire à la bergerie, je n'en ai plus eu besoin. Je pouvais, si je donnais les quotas à l'état, puis le président était venu et il avait dit : allez, m'sieur Burlui, tu viens, tu donnes cent kilos de laine, cinquante agneaux, deux cochons, des veaux, et maintenant tu construis une bergerie, parce que personne ne t'empêche plus ! Je n'y suis pas allé, j'aurais voulu y aller, mais au bout de quelques années mon épouse est morte, je suis resté seul et je n'y suis pas allé. Depuis je vis seul.

- *Vous touchez la retraite ?*

- Oui. Je touche une pension de vétéran parce que j'ai été décoré, et je touche une pension parce que pendant les quatorze ans de prison on m'a donné six mois par an et ça m'a fait vingt ans, un mois et dix jours au même poste.

- Votre enfant habite ici ?

- Non. Cette maison neuve appartient à un de ses enfants, mon petit-fils. Je l'ai aidé moi aussi et il est parti trois ans en Italie. Maintenant il est reparti. Mon fils habite plus haut, à Bîrseşti, il a un fille et un fils. La fille est mariée, elle aussi elle a deux filles, et le fils vient de se marier, à l'automne, et il est parti en Italie il y a deux ou trois semaines. Il a dit qu'il restait encore environ un an là-bas puis il viendra à la maison voir où il pourra travailler. Il a dit qu'il allait emmener sa femme, pour qu'elle voie l'Italie, parce qu'elle est beaucoup plus jeune que lui. Il a promis que s'il y a quelque chose plus difficile... qu'il viendra à Noël. Maintenant, quand il va venir, seul Dieu le sait. Ça s'est passé comme ça...

- *Et votre fils vous a aidé pour les travaux à la maison ? Il est allé à l'école ?*

- Non. Rien. Je l'ai trouvé à la maison. Il est resté avec moi jusqu'à ce qu'il se marie. Il n'a pas eu le droit d'aller à l'école plus de quatre ans. Mon fils n'a fait que quatre ans d'école. Les enfants de ceux qui ont été arrêtés on ne les a pas appelés à l'école. Ça s'est passé comme ça.

Un autre moment important de la vie de Neculai Burlui est sa participation à la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, des deux côtés du front.

- De ce côté-ci, on m'a appelé en 1941, au printemps, on m'a incorporé le 15 février et le 21 juin on m'a mis sur le front. On a fait environ trois ou quatre mois de formation et ils nous ont envoyés au front. On était sur le front est. On est partis d'une commune d'ici, du sud, de Moldavie, on a traversé le Prut à Lipiceni, environ cinq jours après le début de la guerre en 1941, on a suivi l'armée russe deux semaines jusqu'à Moghilău. On a traversé le Nistre à Moghilău, une partie a pris vers le nord, de là-bas on est revenus et on est allés à Odessa. On est restés à Odessa environ deux mois. Le front s'est avancé, mais là-bas, à Odessa, les Russes ont résisté et ils ont tenu jusqu'au 16 octobre 1941. Ce soir-là Odessa est tombée. Il y a eu de grandes batailles. Des milliers, des dizaines de milliers de Roumains sont morts. C'était un massacre quand on est revenus. Le 16 octobre, quand on est entrés dans Odessa, l'armée allemande nous a stoppés. Ils nous ont stoppés et eux sont entrés. Ceux-là n'y étaient plus. Les Russes étaient partis. Et nous on est venus à pied d'Odessa, avec tout l'équipement sur le dos, jusqu'à Focşani. Quatre cents kilomètres, à l'automne.

- *En combien de temps vous avez parcouru les quatre cents kilomètres ?*

- Je crois qu'en un mois, un mois et demi de marche à pied. De jour on allait d'ici, par

exemple, jusqu'à Vidra [une vingtaine de kilomètres, NDT]. On restait sur place une nuit, on repartait, comme ça pendant plus d'un mois. On est revenus au pays et s'ils nous ont ramenés au pays, on a dit qu'on allait récupérer. Mais nous on n'a pas su, on s'est dit que c'était bon, qu'on avait terminé la guerre. Peu de personnes avaient survécu. Quand on était partis, au début de la guerre, dans une compagnie de deux cent vingt soldats, on nous avait donné vingt-cinq recrues qui avaient été incorporées à ce moment-là, les autres étaient des anciens, des gens plus âgés. D'entre ceux-là, on est revenus deux, un blessé et l'autre indemne. On est allés à Bacău, on a fait l'école de cadre, parce qu'il y avait des Allemands ici au printemps, en 1942 on a reçu un nouveau contingent, car on avait deux contingents, on les a formés et en août on est partis sur le front.

- *Vous êtes devenus officier ?*

- Non. Je suis parti caporal, je suis revenu caporal. Il y avait un manque d'officiers et les gradés nous y ont mis à la place. Ils n'ont plus fait une division avec trois bataillons, ils l'ont faite avec seulement deux bataillons, avec un effectif plus petit. On est partis en août de Focşani. On a pris le train, on est passés en Moldavie, en Pologne et on est arrivés en Russie le 1er septembre. Du 1er août, on a fait un mois en train jusqu'à Stalingrad. Là-bas ils nous ont mis sur le front dès le soir. L'armée italienne y était et elle s'était retirée. Le froid est arrivé et l'armée s'est repliée, les Italiens n'ont plus voulu combattre. Ils nous y ont amenés et nous ont mis là-bas. Et on est restés là-bas en défense. Le fleuve Don venait comme ça, il décrit un grand coude, vous pouvez le voir sur la carte, dans l'autre direction, dans ce cercle c'est la ville de Stalingrad. Et Stalingrad était tombé aux mains des troupes roumaines et allemandes. Les Russes ont franchi le front sur les côtés gauche et droit et, en novembre, ils nous ont faits prisonniers. Tout ce qui s'est passé à Stalingrad. Et ils nous ont emmenés à des dizaines, des centaines de kilomètres jusqu'en Oural, dans des monastères, comme dans des camps, à pied, l'hiver. Le convoi faisait la même distance que d'ici à Focşani, peut-être plus. Au printemps ils nous ont pris de là-bas, on a passé l'hiver comme on a pu. On avait des poux ! Il gelait, on sortait dehors et on se comptait et le temps qu'on restait dehors, les manteaux devenaient blancs immédiatement. Encore maintenant je frissonne, j'avais des blessures ici, je frottais avec ma main comme ça, c'était comme ça, pas seulement pour moi... Puis, au bout d'une ou deux semaines ils sont venus, ils ont mis nos vêtements dans une étuve et au printemps ils nous on emmenés en Sibérie, dans la forêt du plateau Baïkal, Camp 101. Je suis resté là-bas jusqu'en automne. Dans ce camp. En octobre 1943 est venu un ordre : qui veut s'inscrire dans une nouvelle armée roumaine, pour lutter aux côtés de l'armée rouge, il peut s'inscrire.

- *C'était la division Tudor Vladimirescu ?*

- Oui. Ainsi s'est formée la division Tudor Vladimirescu. Je me suis inscrit car je n'avais pas d'autre choix. Je suis revenu, j'ai lutté ici, on a pris la ville de Sfîntul Gheorghe. On les a pris à revers. Les Allemands et les Hongrois avaient un centre important là-bas, à Tîrgu Secuiesc. On a pris la ville de Sfîntul Gheorghe, puis Tîrgul Secuiesc, jusqu'à Vrescu. Quand ça s'est passé, deux mille soldats sont morts dans cette ville en un jour et une nuit. Et ensuite on a suivi les Allemands jusqu'au monts Tatras. Là-bas j'ai été blessé le 22 décembre 1944. [...]

- *Comment avez-vous été blessé ?*

- Une grenade est tombée près de moi, à une dizaine de centimètres. Notre lieutenant était un instituteur : va sur la crête, va sur la crête ! J'avais la mitrailleuse, je suis allé sur la crête et j'ai tiré. Les Allemands se repliaient de l'autre côté et ils restaient en embuscade là-bas, où est le sapin-là. On est arrivés à la colline. J'ai tiré environ dix, quinze, vingt cartouches. La mitrailleuse s'est enrayée, le chargeur, je ne pouvais plus rien faire et je me suis vite allongé par terre. Quand je me suis allongé par terre, j'ai enlevé le chargeur et j'ai entendu « fiiiiiiiiiiii » et la grenade est tombée à vingt, trente centimètres de moi. Elle a explosé. J'ai pensé que je n'avais plus de tête, car je l'avais sentie quand elle venait, j'avais mis ma tête dans la terre. J'avais du sang qui coulait du nez, des oreilles et ça a fait une mare. J'ai éternué. Quand j'ai éternué, je me suis rendu compte que ma

tête était entière. Immédiatement je me suis traîné un peu, parce que j'étais en haut, juste sur la crête, je me suis traîné et j'ai roulé. Le lieutenant et le commandant de compagnie ont envoyé deux sergents et ils m'ont emmené au premier poste de secours. On a marché tant qu'on a pu, on a rencontré une compagnie d'Allemands, avec des Hongrois, restés à l'arrière qui passaient à côté de nous. Ils nous ont regardés, parce qu'ils étaient poursuivis, ils m'ont regardé et ils sont partis. On est arrivés au bout du village et on a trouvé un puits avec un seau d'eau. Un seau d'eau plein. J'ai bu tout ce que j'ai pu. Le sang avait beaucoup coulé. Je suis resté pour récupérer mon souffle de toute cette eau fraîche et je n'ai pas pu me relever. J'ai un éclat dans la rotule, de la taille d'un grain de blé, et un autre dans la jambe. J'ai fait une radio et on m'a dit : eh garçon, l'éclat a la taille d'un grain de blé, nous on ne peut pas le sortir, il est dans la rotule, il faut enlever l'os et sortir l'éclat, mais alors tu restes avec la jambe handicapée. Si c'est du fer de bonne qualité, tu le gardes toute ta vie sans problème. Et je l'ai jusqu'à aujourd'hui.

- *Quel âge avez-vous ?*

- J'ai 92 ans. Quand la guerre s'est terminée, en 1945, en mai, je suis revenu à la maison. En octobre 1945 je me suis marié et j'ai eu mon premier enfant, qui est vivant, le père du garçon-là, et le deuxième enfant en 1950, quand ils m'ont arrêté, il n'a vécu qu'un an et demi. [...] J'ai oublié de vous expliquer que là-bas en Russie, une inspection anglo-américaine est venue pour visiter les prisonniers et ils nous ont dit : messieurs, vous travaillez, nous aussi nous travaillons et, quel que soit le gagnant de la guerre, vous rentrerez chez vous, soyez sûrs de cela, parce que c'est une loi internationale, que nous gagnions ou que vous gagniez la guerre, vous repartirez chez vous. Ils nous ont donné des lettres en 1943. Je me suis marié en 1945, en octobre, et toujours en octobre, j'ai reçu la lettre de Russie envoyée par la Croix Rouge. Deux ans et quelques pour arriver. En vérité, ils nous ont dit qu'ils nous donnaient des lettres et, en effet, après la fin de la guerre, ils ont libéré tous les prisonniers qui étaient en Russie. Ils en ont gardé certains plus longtemps, certains ont fait deux ou trois ans en plus. Et maintenant, après 1989, ils leur ont donné un an, deux, trois ans, selon le temps qu'ils sont restés prisonniers à partir de 1944, ils les ont payés, ils leur ont donné six mois par an et ils ont aussi une pension de prisonniers politiques. Il y a quelques personnes de chez nous qui sont dans ce cas-là. C'est ce dont je me souviens.

- *Vous avez une très bonne mémoire.*

- Ce sont des moments qui sont gravés dans ma mémoire. Maintenant, je vais en haut pour chercher quelque chose, un bol, une cuillère, quelque chose, j'arrive là-bas et je me demande, eh, qu'est-ce que je suis venu chercher?

Maintenant, après 1989, ils nous ont appelés, nous les anciens prisonniers politiques, à Focşani. Il y avait un instituteur de Tulnici, Teodor Buşilă. D'abord il a été instituteur ici, à Bîrseşti, ensuite à Tulnici, c'est là-bas qu'il s'est marié. Et il était avec nous, il a été condamné à 15 ans, il est mort en 1958, à la prison de Galați. J'étais là-bas. Et maintenant un de ses frères est venu, avec une de ses belles-filles, pour demander si quelqu'un sait ; nous étions à une réunion à Focşani, il est mort où ? Une personne a dit : il est mort à Gherla, il avait entendu dire qu'il était mort. Un autre a dit : il est mort à Aiud et cinq ou six personnes ont parlé. Certains disaient blanc, d'autres noir, qu'il est mort battu. Je les ai laissé parler et seulement ensuite je leur ai dit : mesdames et messieurs, celui qui veut savoir où il est mort et où on peut trouver la tombe, qu'il note - en 1958, le dimanche 14 juin, Toader Buşilă est mort à Galați. Je me souvenais que j'avais fait une grève avec lui à Oradea Mare et j'étais resté une semaine enchaîné avec lui. Et toujours, j'ai demandé à pouvoir recevoir des colis et des lettres. Et à partir de ce moment-là je ne l'ai plus vu. Ils nous amenés à Galați et là-bas, le 14 juin 1958, des personnes passaient dans la salle, nous on était au rez-de-chaussée, et c'est lui qu'ils emmenaient, parce que la morgue était juste au fond du cellulaire, comme c'est organisé à la prison de Galați. Et ils l'ont mis par terre là-bas, ils l'emmenaient dans une couverture et nous on était en cellule et on écoutait, on ne voyait rien : eh, dit-il, il est

lourd, l'enculé, ça c'est un riche. Lui il était mort. Et c'est resté gravé dans ma mémoire. Et son frère, qui était ingénieur, il est allé à Galați, il a vérifié, il a demandé des informations et il les a obtenues ; ils n'ont pas trouvé pour le 14, ils l'ont trouvé pour le 15. Je savais que le dimanche était le 14, mais lundi était le 15, parce qu'ils ont déclaré sa mort le lundi. Juste un jour de décalage. Il est venu, parce qu'il passe régulièrement pour aller à Galați, il passe toujours chez moi et c'est lui qui m'a amené ce livre-là. Le frère de monsieur Bușilă. Il y a certaines choses qui sont gravées dans ma mémoire, mais je veux qu'elles soient vérifiées, car je ne les dis pas si elles ne sont pas vérifiées.

Le récit de Neculai Burlui reconstitue une biographie profondément marquée par les années du régime communiste. A partir du destin d'un paysan de Vrancea qui paraissait répéter exactement le modèle de ses ancêtres, il s'est retrouvé projeté dans un tourbillon de l'histoire auquel il n'a pas pu s'opposer. La confrontation directe avec le système récemment installé, ou plus justement dit, l'opposition à celui-ci (la mise au point de „l'arrestation" des autorités communistes de Bîrseşti, Vrancea, en 1950) a eu comme résultat une suite de souffrances qui ne se terminera qu'avec l'effondrement du régime.

Le témoignage de Neculai Burlui contient des accents ponctués par le changement de ton, qui devient grave, par la répétition du thème, ou par l'ajout de détails au récit. L'absence de contact avec sa famille pendant ces quatorze ans de détention a été dure à supporter : „on n'avait même pas le droit au parloir", même si „on a fait grève, on a fait aussi la grève à Baia Sprie. J'ai demandé à entrer en contact avec ma famille. Laissez-moi communiquer avec ma famille !" (il a souligné) ou „je suis resté une semaine enchaîné [...] et toujours, j'ai demandé à pouvoir recevoir des colis et des lettres".

L'organisation et la réussite de l'évasion dans deux des trois mines, le même jour à la même heure, sont largement racontées par Neculai Burlui parce qu'elles représentent une victoire précieuse sur le système, qui était passé à l'extermination de ceux qui s'y opposaient, même si le dénouement est triste pour les quelques évadés. Certains se sont perdus en route, mais deux ont réussi à arriver dans leur village, six mois après. L'un d'entre eux a été livré à la Securitate dès le début par des membres de sa propre famille, qui n'étaient pas en prison, et l'autre a été caché par son épouse pendant deux ans et quatre mois, puis il s'est rendu.

La trahison et la loyauté sont des thèmes sur lesquels Neculai Burlui revient plusieurs fois dans son témoignage. Il a été le témoin direct de certains événements, comme la trahison du 23 juillet 1950, quand dans plusieurs villages était organisé le renversement des autorités communistes, mais que celles-ci ont été „arrêtées" seulement à Bîrseşti, comme la trahison d'un cousin qui s'est révélé être une „balance", ou la trahison d'un camarade avec qui il avait habité à la bergerie.

Neculai Burlui se souvient précisément des dates et des lieux importants de sa vie et, parfois, ceux-ci correspondent à des moments significatifs de l'Histoire où du lieu où il est né : „il y a certaines choses qui sont gravées dans ma mémoire, mais je veux qu'elles soient vérifiées, car je ne les dis pas si elles ne sont pas vérifiées". Son bouleversant témoignage, comme seuls les paysans savent les raconter, factuel, neutre, presque vide d'appréciations et de jugements de valeur, recompose, à partir de fragments, le tableau et l'atmosphère définitoires de l'installation du régime prolétaire, de la force de l'appareil répressif et des méthodes mises en oeuvre.